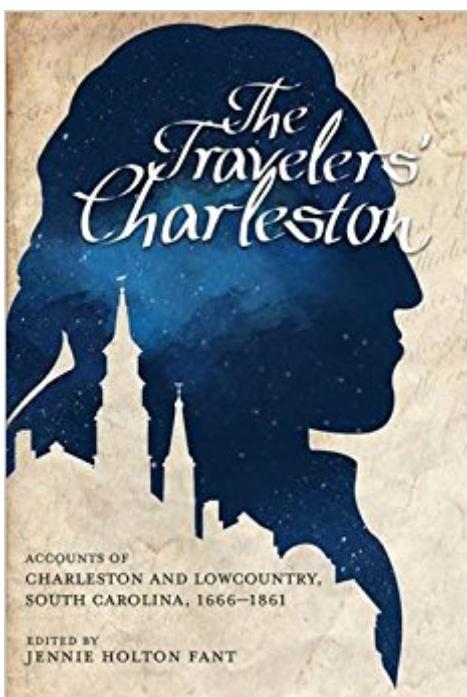


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The Traveler's Charleston: Accounts Of Charleston And Lowcountry, South Carolina, 1666–1861



Synopsis

The Travelers' Charleston is an innovative collection of firsthand narratives that document the history of the South Carolina lowcountry region, specifically that of Charleston, from 1666 until the start of the Civil War. Jennie Holton Fant has compiled and edited a rich and comprehensive history as seen through the eyes of writers from outside the South. She provides a selection of unique texts that include the travelogues, travel narratives, letters, and memoirs of a diverse array of travelers who described the region over time. Further, Fant has mined her material not only for validity but to identify any characters her travelers encounter or events they describe. She augments her resources with copious annotations and provides a wealth of information that enhances the significance of the texts. The Travelers' Charleston begins with explorer Joseph Woory's account of the Carolina coast four years before the founding of Charles Town, and it concludes as Anna Brackett, a Charleston schoolteacher from Boston, witnesses the start of the Civil War. The volume includes Josiah Quincy Jr.'s original 1773 journal; the previously unpublished letters of Samuel F. B. Morse, a portrait artist in Charleston between 1818 and 1820; the original letters of Scottish aristocrat and traveler Margaret Hunter Hall (1824); and a compilation of the letters of William Makepeace Thackeray written in Charleston during his famous lecture tours in the 1850s. Using these sources, combined with excepts from carefully chosen travel accounts, Fant provides an unusual and authoritative documentary record of Charleston and the lowcountry, which allows the reader to step back in time and observe a bygone society, culture, and politics to note key characters and hear them talk and to witness firsthand the history of one of the country's most distinctive regions.

Book Information

Hardcover: 367 pages

Publisher: University of South Carolina Press (January 31, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1611175844

ISBN-13: 978-1611175844

Product Dimensions: 9.1 x 6.1 x 1.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,593,975 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #73 in Books > Travel > United States > South Carolina > Charleston #33773 in Books > History > Americas > United

Customer Reviews

"Jennie Holton Fant has given us an illuminating selection of visitors' accounts of Charleston and the Lowcountry. Seen by many as a place of curiosity, these writings reveal outsiders' impressions of slavery, architecture, politics, and daily life, revealing a complex portrait of an often contradictory city: simultaneously beautiful and ugly, elegant and coarse, charming and menacing."--Maurie McInnis, vice provost for Academic Affairs, University of Virginia"Visitors see what residents no longer notice. In Jennie Holton Fant's collection, *The Travelers' Charleston*, we encounter scenes of life in the metropolis of slavery completely absent in the reportage of Charlestonians. Indeed in John Benwell's account (that includes a visit to a free black organizing a school for slaves) we see the mechanisms used to repress views sympathetic to African Americans and opinions critical of the slave system. Yet politics is not the whole matter here. The fabric of the city, the contents of kitchen gardens, the diversions of Charlestonians of every caste, the architecture, the street hucksters (including drawings of peanut vendors), the conversations of the elite tables and street corner--they're all here. While some of the sources--John Lawson, Josiah Quincy Jr., Harriet Martineau--are familiar to students of southern history, others are not, and the eloquence of John Davis, the acid of Margaret Hunter Hall, and the dispassionate acuity of John Stuart make these pages as pleasurable as they are informative."--David S. Shields, Carolina Distinguished Professor, University of South Carolina

Jennie Holton Fant is a South Carolina native, writer, and librarian who served for a decade on the staff of Duke University Libraries. She has published articles in *Charleston Magazine*, *View*, *Charleston Place*, *Sporting Classics*, *Preservation Progress*, *Duke Library Magazine*, and the *State and Post* and *Courier* newspapers, and she has served on a variety of editorial staffs. She lives in Pawleys Island, South Carolina.

*The Traveler's Charleston: Accounts of Charleston and Lowcountry, South Carolina, 1666-1861*As an occasional reader of non-fiction I was looking forward to reading J.H. Fant's book on a subject that I have had an interest in since childhood. The interest I have comes from hearing about the old south Charleston and studying in school the official versions of the people and society that made up the mystery and awe of the mansions on the Battery and the plantations of the Lowcountry. A child listening to the older generation's elders with their own perspectives openly believes and rarely

questions the history told and taught. But I'm not a child anymore and as I read accounts of Charleston through the eyes of visitors from outside the Holy City I was given knowledge of the how things were for the various peoples and classes that created the dynamism that was Charleston before the War. Ms. Fant's accounts that she collected provides a wide and interesting array of persons traversing through the area. From artists to esteemed society the various letters and articles show readers a personalized portrait of the citizens high and low. I found myself wanting to ask the players "why do you think that?" or "why would you treat someone like that?". Its difficult for 21st Century minds to sometimes place ourselves in the past and accept it just as it was. Ms. Fant has taken no particular position letting the authors speak for themselves in sincere composition. The meticulous detail of the notes and expanded information makes *The Traveler's Charleston* an exceptional read. Anyone looking for an example of research and presentation that aids a novice history buff like myself in understanding the depth that non-fiction requires should look to this book. I look forward to more from J.H. Fant at this level of detail and interest.

This thrilling book, not a typical non-fiction read, is crafted using the writings of persons traveling in the area, visiting and living in Charleston, SC. Each writer's words, their perspectives, and beliefs open new vision into what the city really was like. For anyone familiar with Charleston, many names and streets will be familiar, yet each account has something insightful that the familiar and the new will appreciate. An early account tells about paddling up rivers meeting Indians and even exchanging an English sailor for an Indian so each could learn the other's language, all with the hearty happiness of the chief. The inventor of Morse code painted portraits and wrote wonderful letters to his wife and several in one day to a lady who wouldn't pay him his fee. We read the letters and marvel at their words in this age of vocabulary destructing Twitter. The hospitality displayed by Charlestonians is recounted frequently as is the beauty of the city. Most describe the South's adherence to slavery. These are visitors from not the South, but the North and Europe, so their words are especially interesting. Some are explicit, others more circumspect. Yet it was a different age, therefore their words less kind as in ours. All in all, their writing is so wonderful, you forgive, yet it is an education not to be missed. Which leads me to the last account, written by a teacher brought from the North, Anna Brackett, to be an educator fulfilling the needs set by a commission expressly formed for this reason. Her writing is extraordinary to read. I was transported among the electrified crowd in Charleston, hearing the guns and seeing smoke and flames of Fort Sumter, the initial aggression of the Civil War. Miss Fant masterfully created this work in a way that it reads easily, informs and uses the eyes of travelers to reveal an important era in our country. *The Traveler's*

Charleston: Accounts of Charleston and Lowcountry, South Carolina, 1666-1861

The Travelers' Accounts of Charleston: Accounts of Charleston and Lowcountry, South Carolina, 1666-1861 ed. by Jennie Holton Fant (review) Nathan Saunders From: *Journal of Southern History* Volume 83, Number 1, February 2017 pp. 146-147 | 10.1353/soh.2017.0007

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content: Reviewed by Nathan Saunders

The Travelers' Accounts of Charleston: Accounts of Charleston and Lowcountry, South Carolina, 1666-1861. Edited by Jennie Holton Fant. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016. Pp. xviii, 367. \$49.95, ISBN 978-1-61117-584-4.)

Jennie Holton Fant has performed a great service for students and scholars with this chronologically arranged compilation of sixteen travel narratives focused on Charleston and the South Carolina Lowcountry from 1666 to 1861. Charleston and its hinterland constitute one of the most important American cultural hearths, and travelers' accounts include mundane, but interesting, observations on topics such as weather and diet, as well as extensive commentary on complex social and cultural phenomena such as slavery and regionalism. Many of these accounts appear in published form elsewhere, and instructors in undergraduate courses will most likely not assign the work as a whole but will instead mine the volume for individual reading assignments.

Readers who follow the volume straight through, however, can trace the region's history from English exploration until the Civil War. Fant for the most part allows readers to construct their own "reasonable and cumulative history" from the "impressions" found in each account (p. xv). Those familiar with the general narrative arc of South Carolina's Lowcountry will find in these travel accounts lively anecdotes and seemingly banal details that will flesh out what might have become an all-too-familiar story. The holistic effect is therefore greater than the sum of the accounts' individual contributions. Although readers will most likely be familiar with some who traveled through Charleston, such as Samuel F. B. Morse, Fredrika Bremer, and William Makepeace Thackeray, others, such as the German physician Johann David Schoepf and the Scottish banker and railroad director William Ferguson, are more obscure. Fant's thorough but succinct biographical prefaces to each narrative are therefore quite helpful and are highlights of the work. Fant again displays her excellent skills as a researcher with her extensive annotations within each travel account. These notes not only provide the necessary context for understanding a particular traveler's observations, but also give depth to the principal actors in each narrative, thereby rendering the volume both informative and enjoyable. This

already fine work might have been even more useful for instructors and scholars had Fant included non-English accounts from before 1666. Spanish and French explorations along the South Carolina coast predated Joseph Woory's 1666 travels by at least a century. Even though the city of Charleston did not yet exist, the South Carolina Lowcountry was an intriguing land of opportunity that invited numerous visits and reports. These accounts would also have helped readers better understand Charleston as not just an [End Page 146] American or a southern city but also a city of the Atlantic world, one with cultural and economic ties to continental Europe and the Caribbean. These travel accounts would have necessarily appeared in translation, however, and the level of documentary editing and textual criticism required for their inclusion might have required another work altogether. Although these pre-1666 accounts might have improved the work, their absence does not detract from the excellent scholarship and enjoyable narrative that Fant has provided. Her careful transcription and diligent research make this edited primary source volume an excellent resource for those interested in southern history before the Civil War. Nathan

Saunders
University of South Carolina
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