According to Ralph Lane's chronicles of Sir Richard Grenville's expedition and John White's map of 1585, the English, with the support of Portuguese navigator Simon Ferdinando, fished in Onslow County waters on their way to establish a colony on Roanoke Island. Before John White arrived at Roanoke Island in 1587 to search for what today is known as the "Lost Colony," he probably stopped on Onslow County's barrier islands. From White's last visit to the North Carolina coast in 1590 to the beginning of the 18th century (a period of extensive exploration) Europeans may have visited or settled the Onslow County area, though they left no documentary evidence.

The first documented settlement in Onslow County did not occur until around 1713. English, Scots, Africans, Welsh and French settlers immigrated to the area from New England, Maryland, Virginia and the northeastern section of North Carolina. Agriculture and naval stores production soon formed the basis of the county's economy. The New and White Oak rivers became the centers of early settlement, much like other rivers up and down the eastern seaboard. More than likely vessels were built in Onslow County before its formal organization. The concentration of people along water routes made it inevitable that small craft; rowboats, canoes, perriaguas and small sailing vessels would be built for local transportation. Dug-out cypress canoes commonly called "cunners" were probably the first small vessels built in the area.

The area that encompasses modern Swansboro was purchased from Ebenezer Harker on 7 April 1730, by two brothers, Isaac and Jonathan Green Sr., of Falmouth Massachusetts. That deed was for "a certain plantation and tract of land containing by estimation 441 acres, situate lying and being in ye precint of Carterett in ye county and province of aforsaid being ye west side of ye mouth off White Oak River" (Carteret County, Record of Deeds, D.32, 7 April 1730). As early as 1726, a shipwright by the name of Thomas Harding had purchased 540 acres of land in Onslow County. There is no direct evidence that he built vessels in Onslow but he may well have (Still 1983).

Due to increasing activity along the White Oak River, Theophilus Weeks was appointed inspector of exports for Bogue Inlet in 1757. Weeks also operated an "ordinary," a combination inn and boarding house. Around 1770, Weeks decided to start a town on his plantation. He laid out six streets and 48 lots, each 60 feet by 200 feet. In 1771, the first public sale of lots occurred in the fledgling town. Weeks became the "founder of Swansboro," which at that time was the only town on the coast between Wilmington and Beaufort (Littleton 1983b). Curiously, Mouzon's 1775 map of North Carolina shows Bogue Inlet, the White Oak River and Dudley, but indicates no other settlement in the area. Evidently, Weeks lots were not immediately subject to a rush of speculators.

Onslow County's economy during the Colonial period was based primarily on agriculture, forest products and fishing. Agriculture was characterized by small farms producing a wide variety of crops; the region's sandy soils and shallow inlets and rivers inhibited the development of a plantation system. Corn and peas constituted the principal consumables, while rice, indigo, flax, cotton, hemp and other fruits and vegetables were harvested on a smaller but still significant

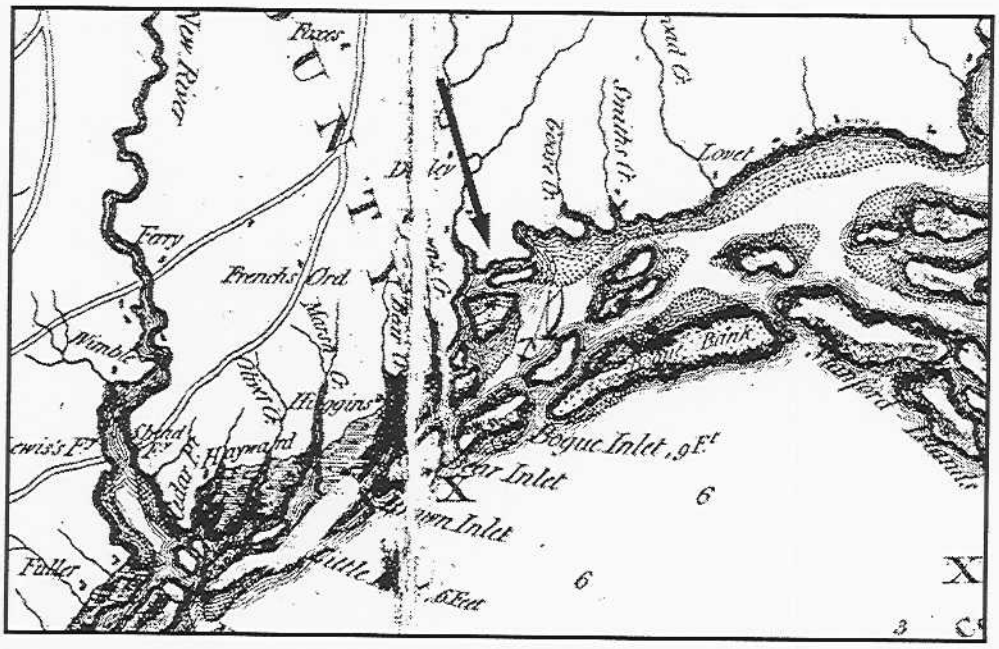

Figure 2. 1775 Mouzon Map depicting anchorage area within Bogue Inlet.

scale (Louis Berger Group 2002:8). Due to the lack of adequate roads, the principal arteries of trade for the area were Bogue and Bear Inlets; with New River Inlet playing a subordinate role (Angley 1984:1).

Early maps of North Carolina show that the position of Bogue Inlet remained relatively constant throughout the Colonial period. The Moseley Map of 1733 listed Bogue Inlet as one of several inlets suitable for navigation by small sloops but warned of shifting shoals. The Wimble map of 1738 showed a prominent anchorage point just outside Bogue Inlet, probably indicating that lighters were used to transport the goods from larger ships to shore. A similar anchorage appears on the Mouzon Map of 1775 (Figure 2; Angley 1984:2).

Swansboro, formerly known as Bogue, Week's Point, The Wharf and New Town, was officially designated on 6 May 1783, by the North Carolina General Assembly. The enactment stated that "the said village of New Town shall and is hereby into a town by the name of Swannsborough" (Brown 1960:1, 346-347; Littleton 1983a:1; Sharpe 1954:2) In 1877, the village was incorporated with the present spelling, Swansboro.

During the American Revolution, a warehouse was established at the mouth of the White Oak River to supply Continental forces. Beef and pork were salted there. A British blockade of the coast greatly reduced the importation of salt, making that product critically important. Therefore, several salt works were established in the Swansboro area to produce salt from sea water. Jeremiah Hote operated a works on Deer Island during these years. Throughout the war, vessels from the port of Swansboro engaged in privateering and a military company from the town patrolled the neighboring coast.