

EARLY HISTORY
OF
TARBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

ALSO

COLLATED COLONIAL PUBLIC CLAIMS OF
EDGECOMBE COUNTY, AND EASTER
SUNDAY IN SAVANNAH, GA.

BY

GASTON LICHTENSTEIN.

RICHMOND:

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EARLY TARBORO HISTORY.

A native of Edgecombe, writing almost a century ago, makes the statement that the site of Tarboro was settled at an early period.

Although the General Assembly did not, until the fall of 1760, pass an "Act for Establishing a Town on the Land of Joseph Howell on Tar River," there seems to be evidence to prove that a village existed for considerable time prior to its incorporation.

Otherwise, what is the explanation of the following petition found in the colonial records for the year 1759? In spite of bad spelling and certain peculiarities, the document imparts interesting information, to-wit:

"North Carolina Edgecombe County. To His Excellency Arthur Dobbs, Esq Capt General Governor and Commander in Cheafe in and over Province afsd; and To His Majestys Honorable Council: Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen of the house of Burgises.

"The petition of the Inspectors and Marchants of the town of Tarr Burrow (how is that for an example in phonetics?) in the county afsd whose names are underwritten Humbly Sheweth that the Salary that is by law allowed to each Inspector is not a Suffient Sum for thar troble and featage as they are at and thare Fore We Humbly Pray that the Salary may be Inlarged so as to Put us on an Equality with the Inspectors at the town of Halifax and We your petitioners as in Duty Bound shall ever pray etc.

THOS. SPELL,
AQUILA SUGG,
PETER MITCHELL,
JOHN WATSON,
JAS. ANDERSON,
EDW. TELFAIR,
ROBERT BIGNALL.

As the "early period" referred to above applies to the pioneer settlement in Edgecombe County, inference is readily deducible that "palefaces" located on the site of Tarboro several decades before its population attained such size as to entitle the community to be vested with municipal powers.

In 1733 Governor Burrington found it necessary to erect a new precinct from Bertie (not Craven as historians erroneously assert, in spite of the authority of the colonial records to the contrary, which most authentic source they have probably never taken the trouble to consult) by the name of Edgecombe on account of the great increase of inhabitants in the district.

Whatever may be the exact date of Tarboro's birth, it continued to grow, and, according to a manuscript in possession of the Virginia State Library, Tarburg (evidently Tarboro because the context tells of its being located along Tar River), inconsiderable in size, that is, in reference to Philadelphia, whence the writer journeyed in the year 1783 to Charleston, S. C., imported and sold annually from 7,000 to 8,000 pounds sterling in English goods before the Revolutionary War.

In 1772 an effort was made to give Tarboro representation in the Legislature, but Henry Irwin, the applicant, was not allowed to take his seat because the assembly alleged, among other things, that the town did not have sixty families resident therein. (Col. Rec., Vol. VI., Prefatory Notes, page xxvii.)

Rev. Francis Asbury (1745-1816), Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who spent forty-five years in visiting the cities, villages and wildernesses of North America, has left a journal of his ministerial activities, from which several extracts have been noted for the present article.

Friday, December 9, 1796: "We came to Tarborough. They had made a fire in the small apartment of the courthouse, and I thought it was for preaching, but it was for dancing, and the violin lay on the table. Mr. Clement was kind enough to stop the scene, and we had a serious congregation to hear, to whom I preached on Hebr. viii., 9-11. There were two or three houses

open to me in town, but I lodged three miles out at Brother Toole's."

Dancing and like expressions of worldliness may have been unpardonable sins to this good man, but he should be given credit for conscientiousness and for exemplary unselfishness.

A digression will be made at this point to quote from the Journal Rev. Asbury's tribute to Washington, written in South Carolina on Saturday, January 4, 1800.

"Slow moved the northern post on the eve of new years' day, and brought the heart distressing information of the death of Washington, who departed this life Dec. 14, 1799. Washington, the calm, intrepid chief, the disinterested friend, first father, and temporal saviour of his country under divine protection and direction. A universal cloud sat upon the faces of the citizens of Charleston; the pulpits cloathed in black—the bells muffled—the paraded soldiery—a public oration decreed to be delivered on Friday 14th of this month—a marble statue to be placed in some proper situation. These were the expressions of sorrow and these the marks of respect paid by his feeling fellow citizens to the memory of this great man. I am disposed to lose sight of all, but Washington: matchless man! At all times he acknowledged the Providence of God, and never was he ashamed of His Redeemer; we believe he died, not fearing death. In his will he ordered the manumission of his slaves—a true son of liberty in all points."

Returning to Edgecombe and Tarboro, the next extract is dated Thursday, March 12, 1801. "A dreary ride of 30 miles without food for man or beast, brought us to Joseph Pippin's; here we were kindly entertained: Our friend Pippin hath been settled in the Connecta Swamps for twenty years: he hath six children, and about fifty slaves, and never has had a death in his family:—mercy and miracle!—may they praise the Lord!

"Friday 13. At Toole's meeting-house, near Tarborough, brother Whatcoat addressed the congregation upon Zachariah ix., 12. My choice was Isaiah i., 9. I spoke with great heat

and rapidity about half an hour; my text was well chosen, if the comment was not well executed. We lodged at Mr. Toole's."

Friday, February 5, 1802. "At Tarborough we held our meeting in the neat new chapel: N. Snethen spoke upon 'This day is salvation come to this house;' the ground-work of my discourse was 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.' I said but few words. We dined with Mr. Guion, and lodged with Mr. Bellamy. We rejoiced in hope that Tarborough and Halifax will yet hear and receive the Gospel; H. Bradford hath been preaching in the latter and brother Bellamy in the former with some success."

The extract, now to be reproduced, should be read closely, as several details of purely secular value are contained therein.

Wednesday, February 23, 1803. "On Wednesday we rode through a very warm, weather-breeding day, twenty-two miles to Tarborough, and came in about half-past two o'clock. Many came to the new church, and were attentive to hear, whilst N. Snethen preached upon 2 Cor. v. 18-20. I had strength to sit still today. We dined at Mr. Ryley's, and were kindly invited to lodge at the widow Toole's, the first which was opened to me in Tarborough. There are in this place about thirty-three families; the people have more trade than religion—more wealth than grace. We have about thirty Africans in fellowship; but no whites. I may notice the bridge; it is 540 feet long, and about thirty feet above the water."

Sunday, February 2, 1812. "At Tarborough I preached to a serious, attentive congregation. I preached in the afternoon also at brother Hall's. Monday I breakfasted with Mr. Austin, an English Baptist; his wife with us; my business with him was to charge him most solemnly to hold a perpetual prayer-meeting every Wednesday evening in his house. The lowlands about Tarborough bridge are under water." (There was a freshet at the time, one of many that often seriously impeded travelers.)

During February, 1815, Bishop Asbury paid his last visit

to Tarboro. "Wednesday, 1st. We came twenty-two miles; I was nearly done. Had we followed our first plan, and gone by Norfolk, it would have probably cost me my life. It was time to lower our sails and drop anchor at Edward Hall's, near Tarborough: it is paradise regained for a few days. The weather has been excessively cold, and keenly felt by an old man of seventy, deeply wounded in the limbs, breast, and lungs."

Sunday, 5th. "I spoke to a gathering of serious people in Edward Hall's large dining room; the speaker was led to some awful truths. I am occupied in reading, writing, and patching and propping up the old clay house as well as I may: God be gracious to us still!"

Monday, 6th. "We breakfasted with Mrs. Austin. Oh! the look expressive of the workings of her soul she gave, when in the trying hour she said, 'pray for me.' Shall a Methodist conference assemble, a society be gathered, and a chapel be built in Tarborough? Dined with Exum Lewis and wife; this favored pair have been renewed and quickened. The house of their father was amongst the first in former days to receive the Methodists, and the children now open their house, and hearts, and hands to them; may the Lord convert, and own, and bless their children's children to the latest generations! Amen! Amen!"

Dr. Jeremiah Battle's account of Tarboro in the year 1810 has been selected as a fitting close to this contribution.

"Tarboro, the only town in the county, is handsomely situated on the south-west (?) bank of Tar river, just above the mouth of Hendrick's Creek, in lat. 35 deg. 45 min. It is forty-eight miles west by north from Washington, thirty-six south of Halifax, eighty-three northwest of Newbern, and sixty-eight east of Raleigh. It was laid off into lots in the year 1760. The streets are seventy-two feet wide, and cross each other at right angles, leaving squares of two acres each. These squares being divided into half acre lots, makes every lot front or face two streets.

“There are about fifty private houses in it; and generally from fifteen to twenty stores, a church, a jail, two warehouses, and a large Court House, which in the year 1785 was used for the sitting of the State Legislature. There are several good springs adjacent to the town, but for culinary purposes almost every person or family has a well; and some of these wells afford good water the greater part of the year. This place affords good encouragement to all industrious persons, particularly merchants of almost every description. Sixty or seventy merchants have had full employment here at one time. But such of them as have emigrated to this place have too soon found themselves in prosperous situations, and have betaken themselves to idleness and dissipation.

“Merchants generally do well here, and there has scarcely been an instance of failing in the place. There are a few well built private houses, some of which have lately been finished. The style of building is as it is in the county, generally plain and cheap. The jail and one of the store houses are of brick.

“Adjacent to the town is the county seat of General Thomas Blount, where he has lately built a very good house, the best that is in the county. This is a beautiful eminence overlooking the town. An extensive green surrounds the house, back of which is a tract of twenty or thirty acres of rich swamp land, well ditched and drained, and is in a high state of cultivation.”

MORE COUNTY HISTORY.

ISOLATED FRAGMENTS COLLATED AND GROUPED SO AS TO
MAKE CONTINUOUS HISTORY.

In collecting material for the writing of history the seemingly unimportant to the casual reader often supply gaps in a narration, the continuity of which would be broken but for the presence of these details secured from sources entirely separate and distinct.

Vases, tablets, coins, and so forth tell us in their small way by the inscriptions thereon the history of Oriental nations long since passed away, and when in the future the extensive excavations, now going on in Southwestern Asia will have been completed, it may be that we shall have a continuous account of ancient Assyria and Babylon throughout their long existence during unexplored centuries of civilized human activity.

Our knowledge of these nations, comparatively fragmentary to-day, will be added to by succeeding generations, and the whole will gradually become systematized.

But this immense amount of labor will mean, in the first place, the collection into an individual mass all the details bearing on a particular subject, and, in the second place, the orderly arrangement of the same.

Pioneers, in seeking knowledge of this kind, read all inscriptions found on the articles designated in the second paragraph, and, when least expecting it, a thousand and one times come across the name of a king or some great event they have been trying to discover, or attempting to verify, as the case may be.

Enough has been said, by way of introduction, to approach directly a consideration of the early history of Edgecombe, which should be subjected to the process just mentioned in order to bring forth a detailed and worthy account of the lives and times of our forefathers.

As an illustration, I have selected several "Reports of the Committee of Public Claims," and have taken the trouble to find all public claims therein contained relating to our county.

On the 28th day of November, 1758, in the report presented at Edenton, it is stated that Abraham Jones, Sheriff of Edgecombe County, was allowed Twelve pounds, nine Shillings, Proclamation Money for Victualizing Samuel Picket and William Sikes, who was Committed to the Public Goal of the said County for Felony and afterwards broke Goal and made their escape so Appears by Account Lodged in your Committee and by Oaths of Hugh Hardy, Goaler, the said Fellows having no Estate.

(Frequently mistakes in spelling occur in the original, some of which I correct, others I reproduce, and especial care is taken to preserve the capitalizations.)

Critical examination of the inscription (?) discloses several facts regarding Edgecombe county, that Abraham Jones was sheriff, that Hugh Hardy was keeper of the jail, etc., either during or immediately preceding the year 1758, perhaps both.

On Monday, December 4th, 1758, William Mace, Senior, was allowed his claim of Fifty pounds proclamation Money for a Negro man who was run away and Shot in apprehending which said Negro was valued to fifty pounds as aforesaid by the Court of Edgecombe County, as by Certificate Lodged with your Committee doth appear.

A little thought will bring forth many inferences from this second extract, viz.: that negro slaves were worked in Edgecombe during, and we presume, several years prior to 1758 on account of the nature of the evidence which permits the inference that negroes had run away from their masters before or this particular instance would not have been treated as an ordinary event; then, again, we learn that the Court of Edgecombe County existed as such in 1758, etc.

Another extract from the same list states that "John Pope, Late Sheriff of Edgecombe County, Produced a Claim into your Committee for Guarding Imprisoning and Executing one William Liles for Murder he having no Estate (as the Sheriff pretends) thirteen pounds fifteen Shillings and eight pence of which claim your Committee is of Opinion is reasonable your Committee refers it to the House whether this Claim be allowed or not. Disallowed it appeared to the House that the said Liles at the time of his Conviction had Real and personal estate sufficient to pay the fees due to the officers."

Tuesday, December 12, 1758: The executors of Joseph Lane, former Sheriff of Edgecombe County, was allowed Sixteen pounds and his Salary for the years 1751 and 1752, he having fully Accounted with Mr. Haywood, former Treasurer, and,

paid all the Taxes for those years, as also forty Shillings, for Summoning a Court for Tryal of a Negro for Felony and Executing said Negroe etc., as by account Lodged with your Committee." Two former sheriffs, John Pope and Joseph Lane, are expressly mentioned in two preceding paragraphs and the latter's term of office evidently included the years 1751 and 1752.

Mr. Haywood, whose first name I have learned from another source to be John, and who was the father of William Haywood, one of Edgecombe's representatives in the Colonial General Assembly, held the position of County Treasurer either contemporaneously with the shrievalty of Mr. Joseph Lane, or between the years 1752 and 1758.

In April, 1762, William Haywood was certified, together with Joseph Howell, to represent his county, a fact I incidentally incorporated into my article on Tarboro several weeks ago. The month, April, was not stated, only the year. Tuesday, December 19th: "James Johnson was allowed forty Shillings for taking up a Deserter belonging to Captain Baylie's Company in pursuance of the Governors proclamation which Deserter was Committed to Edgecombe County Goal By Thomas Hall Esq. as by Certificate Lodged with your Committee."

Readers should remember that these were stirring times, for from 1756 to 1763 the Seven Years' War in Europe was in progress, and its influence was felt on this side of the Atlantic under the name of the French and Indian War, which began before 1756, the defeat of Braddock in 1755 being readily recalled.

North Carolina, called upon to furnish her quota in the struggle against the French and their Indian allies, responded nobly, but, as has happened from time immemorial, a small percentage from one cause or another will desert.

Whether Captain Baylie's company participated in any hostile encounters I have been unable to discover, but I do know that in 1754 Edgecombe's military establishment consisted of

fourteen companies (think of it!), according to the report of Colonel John Haywood, of our county, who, in addition to indicating the number of companies, says: "Number of men, including officers, 1317, 5 captains removed, laid down or dead. No Indians in the county, no arms in store. The number of militia upon a new muster may be about 200 more. It is desired that more companies be added and these more equally divided."

In the report from no other county do I see a number anywhere near so large as 1317, which proves that Edgecombe in pre-Revolutionary days was one of the foremost counties in the colony, surely in matters military, according to the records.

Friday, December 7, 1759: "Mr. John Pope, former Sheriff of Edgecombe county, was allowed his claim of twenty-four pounds proclamation Money as his salary for the years 1753, 1754 and 1755 he having fully accounted with the Treasurer and paid all the Taxes for those years."

From the paragraph immediately preceding taken in connection with a former extract we learn that John Pope's term of office began at the close of Joseph Lane's, and, therefore, have I proven that from purely fragmentary evidence can a chronological document be evolved, because the years 1753, 1754 and 1755 follow in regular order 1751 and 1752, the years during which Joseph Lane exercised the powers of sheriff.

To the average newspaper reader a column of historical matter appears to be the result of little labor on the part of the writer who in truth sometimes has to "wade through" thousands of pages of extraneous facts.

Between two extracts quoted in this article over five hundred pages intervened, and from twenty-five hundred to three thousand pages were "gone over" before I felt justified to classify some of my "finds" under the individual heading of "Public Accounts."

EASTER SUNDAY IN SAVANNAH.

Having so thoroughly enjoyed my stay of two days in Savannah, I cannot refrain from writing you a letter in order that the people of Edgecombe may share the information I have lately acquired.

The warm rays of old Sol and the decorations of re-awakened nature give positive testimony that spring is at hand. No more opportune time can there be for reviewing the Forest City of the South, where a semi-tropical climate makes it possible to blend the flora and fauna of the North Temperate and Torrid Zones. Savannah, to my mind, is one of the most beautiful cities I have ever seen in the United States. Other cities have more costly buildings and larger parks, but the general effect as evidenced by symmetry in building and in the "laying-off" of parks and streets is hardly surpassed. Situated only fifteen miles from the ocean, it offers its population of 60,000 souls the advantages of a seaport, namely, excellent steamship facilities, in that boats, drawing from twenty-five to thirty feet of water, are daily seen at the city wharves; and also seaside resorts, the most noted being Tybee Island, where a garrison of United States soldiers is stationed.

Of the many parks in Savannah one particularly will make a lasting impression upon a stranger on account of its picturesque appearance and uniqueness. The large square was formerly a burying-ground, but now is the scene of childish sports, love-making and gossip. Late in the afternoon when the heat of the sun begins to lessen, sounds of youthful glee can be heard in and out the old headstones, around which run children entirely oblivious to the fact that beneath them lie the mouldering bones of their ancestors, who went to life eternal one century ago. Upon a supine old-fashioned gravestone may be seen a young couple, almost hidden from view by a large

bush, and at intervals along the paths are benches upon which, we may imagine, seated grandfathers and grandmothers talking of the time when they were young. The four streets bounding this park are lined with a double row of palmettoes, between which runs the sidewalk. These palmetto trees, uniform in size, present a tropical spectacular effect and make one feel, for the moment, that he is in Mexico or Central America.

South Georgia coastal swamp land affords the traveler an opportunity to witness the unusual sight of pine and palmetto growing side by side. My first observation of this phenomenon took place from the car window of a Seaboard Air Line train on my way from Savannah to Brunswick. While casting casual glances at the panoramic change of landscape, I was suddenly surprised to see a small palmetto, a succession of pines, then another palmetto, and so on, the proportion approaching equality as the Florida boundary was neared. But I am digressing.

Easter Sunday in Savannah was an ideal day for displaying the latest fashions, the principal thoroughfares being crowded with tastily dressed pedestrians and handsome equipages of the elite. Refinement and culture, for which the fair Southland is famous, were here manifested to such a degree as would put even proud Boston to shame.

Cardinal Sebastiano Martinelli, apostolic delegate to the United States, and with the exception of Cardinal James Gibbons, of Baltimore, being the only one in this country to hold that high rank of the Roman Catholic Church, was magnetic influence sufficient to draw a large concourse of people to Cathedral of St. John the Baptist at forenoon mass. His eminence held the position of celebrant at this service, and was assisted by a number of priests, who waited upon him after the manner of royalty.

Although the hour of mass was set for 10:30, long before that time a crowd had gathered in front of the cathedral waiting for the doors to be thrown open. Being one of them myself,

I had a few minutes in which to inspect the exterior of the edifice, and learned that the corner-stone was placed in 1873. Access to the building had, by this time, been obtained, causing me to rush forward in order to look for a good seat. A ribbon across the aisle separated those favored from the others, but having secured a place immediately behind it, I was seated where nothing could escape my notice.

Elaborate decorations in the interior of all cathedrals first claim a stranger's attention. The gospel story of the crucifixion of Christ is reproduced on the walls by a series of scenes in relief. Passing all the other adornments, too numerous to mention, my eyes rested upon the altar of white and gold covered with ascending and descending rows of candlesticks and bedecked for the occasion with green shrubbery.

After the candlesticks had been lighted by three men clad in sacred vestments, the organ pealed forth as a prelude Wagner's immortal "Pilgrim's Chorus" from Tannhauser, then the large choir began a glorious anthem, "Hail, All Hail," which brought the entire congregation to their feet, as the Cardinal and his assistants were now marching in solemn array to take their places before the altar. Dressing the cardinal was the next ceremony, and this important function of changing and adding numerous articles of the high dignitary's attire having been accomplished, the priestly procession proceeded to fill the altar with the smoke of incense. "Gloria in Excelsis," a magnificent musical production, was rendered by the choir after a short chant by one of the priests. A clear, simple and pleasing sermon on gratitude followed, the speaker showing many instances of this gracious feeling, mentioning incidentally how every patriotic American approaches the tomb of Washington with reverence and bared head, the result of gratitude for his unselfish devotion as Father of his Country, and finally, towering above all was the Roman Catholic celebration of Easter in gratitude for the resurrection of their Saviour.

“Ave Maria,” set to the music of the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, came next. Then followed the regular service, after which I returned to my hotel and prepared for my trip to Brunswick.

Cordele, Ga., April 4, 1902.

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