Early Social Life in Edgecombe,

ALSO

EARLY HISTORY OF EDGECOMBE, AND A TARBOREAN'S EXPERIENCE ABROAD.

THREE ARTICLES

BY

GASTON LICHTENSTEIN.

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Early Social Life in Edgecombe.

Physical Prowess the Standard of Greatness One Hundred and Fifty Years Ago.

Socially and religiously the early inhabitants of Edgecombe were in a deplorable condition.

Dr. Battle says: "The first settlers in this county lived in a state of society not far better than the Indians. If we may divide the state of society into the savage, the barbarous and the civilized, we might place them in the second class. So late as fifty years ago (circa 1762) there were only a few neighborhoods on the water courses that enjoyed the blessings of a social life. Plantations were few and small, and men would go seven or eight miles to assist each other in heaping logs. These log-heapings were viewed as mere frolics, where the robust and athletic could meet together and show their manhood. This labor was then performed without the assistance of negroes. A perfect state of equality can well be imagined pervaded the community. Almost the only distinction known or sought after consisted in corporeal exertion. This circumstance led to many a fight between men who had no enmity toward each other. Some champions would travel many miles to meet with a combatant who had been celebrated as a fighter. Their mode of warfare was called 'fist and skull,' but was too frequently accompanied with a biting and a gouging, and we are still reproached by foreigners for retaining, as they erroneously suppose, this barbarous practise."

Throughout the Colony matters came to the pass that on Thursday, April 2, 1752, a message from the Governor was read to both Houses of Assembly, to-wit: "Gentlemen, I must recommend to you in particular to take the most effectual measures for promoting Religion and Virtue and suppressing Vice and Immorality, which are come to such a dreadful height in this Province. I desire you in a special manner to take into your consideration the barbarous and inhuman Manner of Boxing which so much prevails among the lower sort of People; this Practice is attended with circumstances of Cruelty and

Horror, and is really shocking to human nature; and I have been informed of no less than four persons who, within these two years, have come to a violent Death by this atrocious Custom. I am afraid the Laws now in Being are defective in this affair, and so you are the Guardian of the Lives and Properties of his Majesty's Subjects, it is in my opinion, your Duty, by a Particular Law, to put a stop to such bloody and horrid Quarrels."

Rev. James Moir, who spent some time among these people doing missionary work, has the following to say:

Edgecombe Co., Nov. 22, 1748.

Rev. Sir (To the Secretary):

When I was preparing to leave this Province in the Spring, many of our communion told me they thought it my duty to continue, not only because they were pleased with my labours, but more especially because a great number in the county had turned Baptists for want of a clergyman, and for encouragement they assured me that next Easter Monday a Vestry was to be chosen that would do me justice; they performed their promise; for ye new Vestry called the Tax gatherers to account and paid my Salary faithfully, and withal gave me to know that they would slip no opportunity of purchasing a Glebe and making conveniences for me, and that in acting thus, they did nothing but was very agreeable to the body of the People. They also allowed me more time to officiate in remote places than the former Vestry had done. These considerations prevailed with me to agree for another year. By riding through the upper parts I plainly see they require three missionaries, one to the South near ye Branches of Pedee river, another upon the Neuse 120 miles above Newbern and the third in the North towards Virginia. The people seem much inclined to encourage Missionaries and often complain of their being pestered with sermons of Baptist Teachers, whom I have always found to be as grossly ignorant as those they pretend to teach. I should be under no doubt of a Missionarys doing very well in those parts had not the rulers of this Province passed a Law last April for issuing paper Bills to the value of £23,000 Proclamation money—when I was at Cape Fear, the beginning of this month, I had some of my Salaries paid in these new Bills, and

offered them at 10 per cent. Discount for cash but can get nothing for them.

I cannot give a particular account of the persons I have baptized since Michaelmas, 1747, it frequently happening that I am not so well acquainted as to desire any to take the number. Several spectators have told me I baptized above a hundred in one day. Two white adults I baptized by dipping. Last Whitsunday I had 95 communicants. I received your favour of February 4th, 1747, and purpose to draw in Bills till the Venerable Society sees fit to appoint me their Missionary for the Northern District in the upper parts. If I can obtain leave of the Parish I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you next Summer and am in the meantime Reverend Sir,

Your most, etc.,

JAMES MOIR.

Before reproducing a second letter from the able writer I shall quote from Rev. Clement Hall, another missionary of the Church of England, who informs his superiors: "Our church at Edenton is yet unfinished, but one is lately built in Edgecombe county where Mr. Moir resides." Extract written in year 1749.

My object in quoting freely is to bring the readers directly, as it were, in contact with the lives and times of those whom we are seeking to know better, their religion, customs, laws, etc.

Now we come to the second letter of James Moir, written in Edgecombe county, May 2, 1749: "This vestry met yesterday and notwithstanding I promised, if they gave me leave to go to London this Summer, to return with all convenient speed, they would not agree to it for the reasons mentioned in my letter of the 22nd November. I then considered how forward they were to get things in order for the publick worship. The church is almost finished (completed before Sept., 1749, according to Clement Hall), and perceiving my absence might discourage them, I dropt my resolution of going to Sea this Summer, upon which they instantly laid a tax for building two new chapels. After all I am apprehensive the new paper Bills emitted last year, will frustrate all attempts to settle Missionaries among even the upper inhabitants. I can get nothing for the Bills in which they paid my Salaries at Cape Fear, and if such payments are made here (which this vestry hitherto

presented as much as ever they could) I must leave the Province; Because creditors in Time of War are paid in commodities that cannot be sold, and in time of peace in paper Bills of no real value."

Section 17, Dr. Battle's article on Edgecombe reads thus: "The only religious denominations in the county are the Methodist and Baptist. The former are not numerous, but they have several places of worship in the county, and frequently hold meetings in town. The number of their communicants is not ascertained.

The Baptist had eight meeting houses in the year 1810 and about five hundred and twenty communicants, since which there have been about two hundred and fifty added (anno domini 1812), and another meeting house is building near the place called Shell-Banks, and is to bear its name under this head. The following biographical sketch is added, as a tribute to the memory of a deceased ancestor.

Elisha Battle was born in Nansemond county, Virginia, the 9th of January, 1723. In the year 1748 he moved to Tar river, Edgecombe county, North Carolina. About the year 1764 he joined the Baptist church at the Falls of Tar river, and continued in full fellowship until his death. He was chosen Deacon of the church, and served in that office about twenty-eight years. He usually attended the associations, at which he sometimes acted as moderator, and was well suited to the first office. It is well known he was a remarkably pious, zealous member of the society, and was always plain and candid in censuring and reproving vice or folly in all their shapes, etc."

From another source I am enabled to give the history of the second Baptist settlement in North Carolina. The first company arrived in the Colony too early to be connected with Edgecombe history, but there is an immediate bond of union between the second company and the present native Baptists.

"About the year 1742, one Wm. Sojourner, who is said to have been a most excellent man and useful minister, removed, with many of his brethren, from Berkley, in Virginia, and settled on Kehukee Creek, in the county of Halifax (then part of Edgecombe), about one hundred and twenty miles Northeast of Newbern, and the same year planted a church in that place, which continues to the present day. This church has

seen prosperous days, and has been a mother to many others, the number and names of which I am not able to give."

Most of the Baptists in North Carolina are said to have emigrated from the church of Burley, in Virginia, but by the labours of Palmer (founder of the first church about the year 1727, at a place called Perquimans, on Chowan river), Parker, and Sojourner, and other preachers who were raised up in the parts, so many were brought to embrace their sentiments that they, by about the year 1752, had increased to sixteen churches.

These churches had an annual interview, or yearly meeting, in which they inspected or regulated the general concern of their community. These people were all General Baptists, and those of them who emigrated from England came out from that community there.

Although this people maintained a strict adherence to Baptist principles, so far as baptism was concerned, yet in process of time they fell into a loose and neglectful manner as to their rules of church discipline, and so continued until more orthodox opinions and a more rigid economy in their ecclesiastical affairs were introduced among them, etc."

Rev. John Gano was sent into the Southern States, in the year 1754, by the Philadelphia Association, to instruct and reform the people who had fallen into the undesirable condition mentioned above. There were other gentlemen who assisted him, but I here intend to refer only to one particular occasion.

On Mr. Gano's arrival he sent to the ministers, requesting an interview with them, which they declined, and appointed a meeting among themselves to consult what to do. Mr. Gano, hearing of it, went to their meeting, and addressed them in words to this effect: 'I have desired a visit from you, which, as a brother and a stranger, I had a right to expect, but as ye have refused, I give up my claim and come to pay you a visit.' With that, he ascended into the pulpit and read for his text the following words: 'Jesus, I know, and Paul, I know, but who are ye?' This text he managed in such a manner as to make some afraid of him, and others ashamed of their shyness. Many were convinced of errors touching faith and conversion, and submitted to examination, etc.

By the labors of Mr. Gano and others a great work was

effected among this people, which consisted not merely in the important business of reforming their creed and purifying their churches, but also in reviving the power of Godliness amongst the erroneous and lukewarm professors, and in the conviction and conversion of others.

The Kehukee Association, which bears the date of 1765, was organized at Kehukee Creek and from there spread over the country. The churches of which this Association was first composed, according to Burket and Read, who wrote its history in 1803, were, besides the one from which it was named, those called Toisnot, Falls of Tar River, Fishing Creek, Reedy Creek, Sandy Run, and Camden. For many years this was a very efficient and prosperous community; a considerable number of its ministers were among the most able and active in North Carolina, and its bounds were so greatly enlarged that in twenty-five years it had increased to sixty-one churches, and upward of 5,000 members. The churches were situated in the counties of Halifax, Edgecombe, Martin, Washington, Pitt, Beaufort, Carteret, Hyde, Tyrrell, Currituck, Camden, etc., according to the Minutes of this ancient body which bears the date of 1842.

Very few Presbyterians lived in Edgecombe during the early days and the evidences I have on this point are parts of the Journal, or diary, of Rev. Hugh McAden (sometimes spelled McCadden): * * *

"Being sent for, and very earnestly entreated to go to Tar River, I took my journey the same evening, with my guide, and rode to Bogan's, on Tar River, twenty miles. Next morning, set off again, and rode to old Sherman's, on Tar River, and preached that afternoon to a small company, who seemed generally attentive, and some affected."

Next day he went to Grassy Creek, sixteen miles, where was a Baptist meeting house, and preached to a people 'who seemed very inquisitive about the way of Zion.' The next day he accompanied his host, old Mr. Lawrence, to Fishing Creek, to the Baptist Yearly Meeting; and on Saturday and Sunday preached to large and deeply interested audiences. * * * On Tuesday, April 13th, 1755, he set out homeward, and rode twenty miles, to Mr. Toole's, on Tar River, etc.

No Jews are mentioned in the different sources and Roman

Catholics would have found the district unwelcome, to say the least, because the Papists, as they are called in the Colonial Records, were intensely hated by the Protestant denominations.

One can easily imagine the narrowness and bigotry of the early settlers by reading the many stories of cruelty contained in the sources.

Quakers were declared undesirable citizens because they refused to bear arms, their very peaceable ways appeared to affect their neighbors most unpleasantly, and the very qualities a citizen to-day most admires in a fellowman were frowned down upon by the spirit of the age.

Gradually, intolerance gave way to tolerance, and unenlightenment to enlightenment, under the steady advance of the school teacher, who has done more than any one else for the progress of North Carolina. He has prepared the way for the newspaper which now reaches the remotest corners of the State, and which, year by year, raises its readers to an intellectual height undreamed of by our ancestors.

The present day citizen of Edgecombe sits in happiness and peace "under his own vine and fig tree," and on the Sabbath worships God in his own way.

"Equal rights to all, special privileges to none," stands as the Palladium of every true American, and how feelingly do the public school children of all denominations unite in singing:

"My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of Liberty."

Early History of Edgecombe.

Dr. Jeremiah Battle, a native of Edgecombe, prepared in the year 1812, a full and interesting, statistical and historical, account of the county, which he presented first to the local "Agricultural Society," and then sent to the "Editors of the Star."

In this article, entitled "The County of Edgecombe in 1810," the writer gives the following opinion as to the advent of the white man:

"When the county was first settled cannot be well ascertained from any documents here, but it was probably prior to the year 1726, the oldest land patents we have met with bearing this

date, as the first settlement of the continent commenced at the mouths of rivers, so these interior settlements commenced at the mouths of creeks, progressing upwards as the natives gave ground. At the mouth of Town creek, it is believed, was the first settlement of the county. The site of Tarboro and its vicinity were settled at an early period."

In the Colonial Records I find that several patents were issued for grants of land in Edgecombe precinct during the year 1735, and a few during the preceding year, but one must not infer that these were issued to the first settlers, for prior to 1733, Edgecombe was a part of Bertie, and whatever grants were made to those who lived in this district before the latter date received their lands as residents of Bertie, so it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine when and where the pioneers of our county located their initial settlement.

At a Council held at the Court House in Bertie Precinct on Friday, October 17th, 1735, matters which may throw light on our early history came up for deliberation before the Honorable Board of the Royal Colony of North Carolina, namely:

* * * * * * * "Read the Petition of the Inhabitants of Tar River, setting forth that they are 20 families in number. That Simon Jeffries, Dec'ed, obtained in his own and in his son Osborn's name three Patents for 1,000 Acres of Land on said River, the Warrants for which have been so run out as to take in 15 miles on the said River.

"That the Orphan of one Boyd hath a purchase Patent for 7,000 Acres of Land beginning on Town Creek, which will take in most of their Settlements.

"That one of the Pollocks has purchased patents for 5 Surveys and Town Creek and several others lay claim thereto tho they never made any settlements.

"That your Petitioners have been at great charge in cultivating and improving the aforesaid Lands and have the late Governor Burrington's Warrants for the Lands whereon they have settled.

"Therefore most humbly pray that the aforesaid Jeffrys' Land and the Lands held by Purchase Patents be resurveyed.

"Whereupon his Excellency, the Governor, by and with the advice of his Majesty's Council, was pleased to order that Mr. Attorney-General doth forthwith Enter a Prosecution against

the several patentees mentioned in the aforesaid Petition in his Majesty's Court of Exchequer."

North Carolina was inundated with a steady stream of immigrants during the pre-Revolutionary period and Edgecombe received her full share of the newcomers, many of whom came from Virginia.

To quote again from Dr. Battle: "The principal 'object of the first settlers' appears to have been the enjoyment of ease and idleness; and there is not, perhaps, a spot in the State where a mere subsistance was, and still is, more easily procured than here. The chief, and almost entire occupation was hunting and rearing stock, which consisted principally of horses and cattle. The former ran wild, and were pursued and taken by stratagem when necessity required; cattle were esteemed of more value, and were kept gentle, but subsisted through the year without feeding, except cows and calves. Agriculture was scarcely thought of. The settlers were much of their time under the necessity of eating meat without bread; a horse and plow served a whole neighborhood."

Although the colonists were, by nature, "docile, peaceable, and easily governed," still they did not hesitate to assert their rights, as evidenced by their boldness in resisting royal authority on several occasions.

A case in point happened soon after Governor Johnston put an end to the Legislature for its failure to uphold him in the collection of Quit Rents at unlawful places.

Some months thereafter, in 1737, according to Wm. L. Saunders, Col. Rec., Vol. IV., Prefatory Notes, pp. xvi and xvii, at the General Court at Edenton, a man was imprisoned for insulting the marshal in the execution of his office during the sitting of the Court, and the people of Bertie and Edgecombe precincts, hearing that he was imprisoned about his quit rents, rose in arms to the number of 500, and marched within five miles of the town, intending to rescue him by force, in the meantime cursing the King and uttering a great many rebellious speeches. By this time the man had made his peace with the Court, and the crowd learning the truth, dispersed without doing any mischief, threatening, however, "the most cruel usage to such persons as durst come to demand any quit rents of them for the future," and the Governor goes on to say

further, "how to quell them I cannot tell if they should attempt an insurrection against next collection."

It may interest the present citizens of Edgecombe to know what Johnston's estimate of their ancestors amounted to, and I, therefore, add two more sentences from his pen: "The people seem here to be persuaded that they may do what they please, and that they are below the notice of the King and his ministers, which makes them highly insolent. They never were of any service to the Lords Proprietors, and if something is not speedily done to convince them that his Majesty will not be so used, I am afraid they will be of as little profit to the Crown."

It was my purpose, at the outset, to confine myself strictly to earliest settlers of our county, but in the course of this article I found that a somewhat general presentation of colonial affairs was necessary. I have, however, succeeded in connecting Edgecombe directly with all the events mentioned and my readers can rest assured that the above facts were taken from unimpeachable sources, so far as I have been able to learn.

In my opinion the history of our county should be taught in the local public schools. For this reason it is imperative that a good, readable account of our past should be prepared by one of our older citizens, many of whom are capable of the task, and who ever undertakes this laudable work will earn the everlasting gratitude of posterity.

A Tarborean's Experience Abroad.

EXIN, PROVINCE POSEN, PRUSSIA, July 20, 1899.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SOUTHERNER:

For the benefit of your readers who have not had the pleasure of crossing the ocean, I will tell some of the chief incidents of our trip from the morning we left New York harbor up to the present writing.

We sailed from the North German Lloyd pier on July 4th. Our ship, Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse, the largest and fastest boat in the world, had nineteen hundred persons on board. Thousands stood on the wharf to witness the departure, and, as the boat slowly backed out into mid-stream, a mighty shout

went up from the assembled hosts on shore, which was answered by those on board, the ship's band adding spice to this outburst of American enthusiasm by playing one of Sousa's stirring marches. Even after the shouting could no longer be heard we could see the crowd waving their handkerchiefs and small American flags until we lost sight of them. The scene was one never to be forgotten and one which has to be seen in order to be appreciated fully. After passing out of the harbor the pilot left us and then began the voyage across the broad Atlantic.

No one in our party was seasick at any time during the seven days we spent on the water. The trip was most remarkable, as there was not a single rough day, and the boat succeeded in breaking her own record from shore to shore. She arrived, however, several hours late at her first port, Cherbourg, France, on account of a fog in the English Channel which caused the ship to go one hundred miles out of its course and spoiled our chances of becoming famous, because, under favorable conditions, the fastest record eastward would have been broken by five hours. The fog came near causing our vessel to share the fate of the Paris. The officers of the ship had lost their bearings and were surprised all of a sudden by seeing rocks ahead. The boat immediately turned around and put off as quickly as possible. In four minutes more we would have been wrecked. Very few of the passengers learned of this until some hours afterward, and all the excitement had then passed away.

France was the first country of Europe whose shores I beheld. The picture before me was the most beautiful that I had ever seen or have seen since. Instead of the low-lying, barren lands along the coast of the United States, the country is elevated and cultivated down to the water's edge. The farms are regular and hedged off from one another by bushes. In a cove lies the city of Cherbourg. Oldtime fortifications with old-fashioned cannon protect the harbor. Some of the fortifications are built on surrounding islands and, as the ship passed them, we could see French soldiers on the breast-works. The placid bay dotted with small sails, the blue sky overhead, the old city with its fortifications, with a background of perfect green made up the picture. After we left Cherbourg, we touched at Southampton, but it was too dark to make any observations. The trip from Southampton to Bremen was a lonesome day, because so many passengers had disembarked that the big ship

seemed deserted. After a great deal of trouble we arrived in Bremen at ten minutes to one A. M. No one on the ship seemed to be able to give us any information whether we could get accommodations the night of our arrival. We took chances on receiving our baggage and went ashore. Our hand-satchels were examined at the wharf. The custom-house officers were not rigid with us, but the preparation for the examination was trying, as so many pieces of baggage had to be inspected. We went to a hotel with the crowd and found that there were no rooms to be had, so other quarters had to be sought after, although the night was far gone. We saw a hotel called Englische Hof and went in. The clerk seemed very excited because he had some patrons and moved about like a busy man. We told him what we wanted and he immediately ran to a blackboard. Then he drew chalk marks through some figures which were the numbers of our rooms to be, and arrangements were complete.

There is no such thing as a hotel register in Germany. All one has to do is to come into a hotel, ask for a room and the next minute he is ascending the steps, that is, if there are rooms to be had. We asked the clerk why the hotel was called an English Hotel when no one spoke English. He replied that it was the head waiter who spoke English. Next morning we discovered that the head waiter knew three English words. Our trunks were found soon after breakfast. We had them inspected and sent by express to Berlin. If they had gone by freight, I don't believe we ever would have received them. My advice to a tourist in Europe is not to take a trunk along. The Germans are slow and good-natured people. One must let them take their time.

After attending to our baggage we took a drive through Bremen. The first part of the drive was spent inspecting a large park, the "legend" of which was related to us by the coachman. He was our guide, so we had to take his word for everything. He spoke in German, but translated into English, his words were about as follows: "There was once a man who had both legs cut off, he crawled over this ground and died, and all the ground that he crawled over was made into a park." You can take both the story and the wording for what it is worth. I will say, however, that we saw in this park a statue of the legless

man. Bremen is an ancient looking town, but some of the new buildings would do honor to our large cities.

From Bremen we went to Berlin on the Express. In German it is called the Schnell Zug. We were shut up into a compartment, but it is an advantage over an American train, in that you can make yourself as comfortable as if you were in your own room. No one else can get into your compartment except through the door on the side of the car. Every compartment has a door on each side, so that a train can be emptied three times as fast as it is in America. At every station the passengers jumped out, drank a glass of beer, ate a sandwich, and waited for the conductor's whistle to get on board again. To me this kind of railroad traveling seemed like child's play. In fact, the whole train, engine and cars, are midgets beside ours. But, as I said before, the German leads a life of ease. If he couldn't eat and drink all day, life would not be worth living. Six hours' traveling put us in Berlin. We hired a cab and drove to the hotel. At the door we were received in state by a number of hotel officials. It afterwards turned out that their extreme goodness resulted from the anticipation of a large tip. The greatest evil is the desire among the employees in any kind of business to get all they can out of a person, especially if he is an American.. I would call it a failing, because at heart no one is better than a German. Their best quality is extreme politeness. Mark Twain taught me a lesson which I put in practice the night after I arrived in Berlin. In his Tramp Abroad he mentions the following custom prevalent throughout Germany: "When one sits at a table and a German wishes to take a seat at the same table, he bows to the one seated, although they have never seen each other before. Whichever person leaves the table first bows to the other, who returns the courtesy." To return to myself, I will say that the night following my arrival in Berlin, I was seated at a table in one of the large beer gardens. (Perhaps the good people of Tarboro may be shocked at the idea of a beer garden, but custom favors it, and a German experiences no feeling of impropriety by taking his wife and children there to enjoy a pleasant evening.) Two gentlemen sat down beside me, but not before they had tipped their hats and wished me good evening. I was not expecting it, but my quick American mind took in the situation,

so I immediately returned their greeting. I determined to leave the table when they were busily engaged in conversation, to see if they would notice it. I waited, arose, and made my bow. It was very pleasantly returned. A German will go out of his way to do you a favor. We asked a number of them for certain streets and the situation of buildings, all of which questions were not only verbally answered, but in deed, as far as they could spare the time.

The most interesting palace that we have visited is Sans Souci. It was here that Frederick the Great spent his summers. We were shown Voltaire's room, Frederick's library, his art gallery, and the room in which he died. The clock which stopped at twenty minutes past two, the moment of his death, is in the room. His death scene is preserved in marble. We also visited the vault in which he lies buried, and stood beside his coffin. We were then on historic ground, for it was over the ashes of the Great Frederick that Queen Louisa, her husband, King Frederick William III., of Prussia, and Alexander I., Czar of Russia, swore eternal enmity to Napoleon Bonaparte.

From Berlin we went to Exin, the birthplace of my grandmother, where we are at present. It is a small town and a fine place to study Polish-Prussian peasant life. I found that the Polish-Prussian peasant is as ignorant and slovenly as the Southern negro. A number of peasants of both sexes were gathered at the depot on our arrival and blocked our exit from the train. I shall never forget the rough way in which the conductor handled one of the women. He gave her a terrible blow on the head. My spirit of humanity revolted at the sight, but I, nevertheless, knew that he was justified, because the only way to handle the peasants is to treat them like brutes. The small children looked at us as if we were gods, and examined our satchels to see where we were from. They caught sight of our steamer tags and their curiosity was satisfied. The poor wear wooden shoes and in walking on paved streets they make a sound like the clattering of horses. On entering my aunt's house the servant kissed my grandmother's hand, which is the custom in this part of Prussia.

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