

# Militia Muster Rollbook Important Historical Find

Hertford countians of the early years of the 19th century lived a rural, lonely life.

Nearly all the county's people lived on farms, scattered through out the broad forests, and fields.

Only when they gathered for infrequent public events did Hertford's people get together in large groups.

One of the most typical get-togethers of this period was the militia muster.

Many tales are told of these musters of the citizen soldiers. It was a time of much levity. Militia organization was extremely loose. Officers were elected by the men. The muster was mainly a time for socializing.

In general, there was a militia regiment in each county. The regiment was composed of several companies, and the county was divided into "captain's districts." Every three months, all able-bodied men were required to attend their company's muster. Once each year, the entire regiment mustered at Winton.

Militiamen were required to supply their own weapons. Only a few of the more interested officers and men bothered to have uniforms. Probably the most important part of the muster was the pay period. Soldiers received a small stipend for attendance at muster.

Absenteeism was high at the musters, especially at routine company get-togethers. There was little penalty attached to being absent. A small fine was levied against absentees.

### Significant Book

One of the most significant documents from the early 19th century in Hertford County is a small ledger book, owned by the Thomas family of near Bethlehem Church, listing absentees from a militia company in that area.

The little book covers a period from 1822 to 1830. Nearly all Hertford public documents of that period were destroyed in a courthouse fire in 1830.

The entries in this document give a picture of Hertford life in this period, and are significant because of the rarity of public documents from the period.

Here from this important historical document are the places musters were held for a Hertford militia company during 1822-30:

The company in 1822 was commanded by Michijah E. Newsom, Captain. Nicolas-Barrow was lieutenant, Alfred Barrow was ensign (junior lieutenant).

First muster recorded in the book is a muster held at Lemuel Eley's on July 20, 1822.

On the 5th of October, a muster of the company was held at James P. Jones. This was harvest time, and nearly 20 men were listed as absentees.

### County Muster

Two weeks later, the annual regimental muster was held at Winton, and 13 men of the company were absent.

On February 1, 1823, the company mustered at busy Pitch Landing, the important village on Chink-

apin Creek. Nine were absent. Nine militiamen who were present failed to bring guns.

A muster was held at James Rawls' "old place" on March 8, 1823. Another was held at Cornelius Holloman's on May 17, 1823, and again at Lemuel Eley's on July 19. Only eight men were absent for this summertime get-together.

Not until December 13 was another muster held, this one at William Jones'. Fifteen were absent.

Jesse Barnes was host to a muster on February 7, 1824. James Godwin's was the scene of a muster on May 8, 1824, again on June 19, still again on October 9.

On November 5, 1824, the general county muster was held at Winton, and on January 8, 1825, the company mustered again at Godwin's. The unit met again at Godwin's on May 14.

When the battalion mustered at Pitch Landing on May 20, 1825, only five men were absent from Newsom's company. However, eight were listed as "without guns."

The unit mustered at Godwin's again on October 8, on January 14 and March 4 in 1826.

A general county muster gathered at Winton on November 4, 1825.

**Thomas In Command**  
At a muster held at Godwin's on May 5, 1825, Captain Abraham Thomas was commanding the company, and the report says he "took horse."

A battalion muster gathered at Pitch Landing on May 19, and for

## Wharf Rates Indicated Economy

The importance of waterways in the commerce of the 19th century is indicated by the many private docks and wharves which served river traffic.

Most of the products of the soil and forest were hauled by river boat and barge.

In 1859, the Hertford County Court published rates of wharfage which could be charged in the county.

It authorized John O. Askew of Pitch Landing—the important commercial center on Chinkapin Creek—to charge the following rates for use of his wharf:

For round barrels, per barrel—one cent each (turpentine and tar were loaded in barrels); for shingles—five cents per thousand; for cotton—five cents per bale; for sawed lumber—ten cents per thousand feet; for barrel staves—ten cents per thousand.

Thus the importance of the naval stores and lumber products industry is shown strikingly in the wharf rates charged at an important Hertford landing.

Askew was also ordered to keep a 50-foot right-of-way open to the Wicacoa River for use of the public.

the first time, Captain Thomas's little book lists a court martial held for absentees.

The clerk of Hertford's county court reported that the men without guns at the muster were tried on July 12, 1826, but that "no execution has issued against those that had no guns as the fines is not enough and I cannot alter them."

Kerr Montgomery was host to the company on September 9, 1826. Twenty-four men were absent.

Twenty-seven men were absent at the next general muster, held in Winton on October 20, 1826.

On November 8, a "general review" of Hertford's citizen soldiers, was held at Winton and 17 members of Thomas's unit were listed as absent.

In 1827, the first muster was held at White Plains on the Winton-Saint Johns road, and another at Rawls' Quarter in February.

Luke McClohon was host to a muster on May 20, 1827, and several men were court martialled for being absent and for coming to the muster without guns.

The next muster was held at Watson Lewis's store at White Plains on August 4, 1827, and again absenteeism was high. Another muster was held at Jesse Barnes' on October 6 and the general county muster gathered at Winton on October 26.

**"Court Marshal"**  
Absenteeism was so bad that on December 15, a "court marshal" was held at Cornelius Knight's to try absentees who did not attend the White Plains' muster.

Captain Thomas, Lieutenant W. W. Scosoms and J. Jenkins, ensign, were the company officers sitting as court martial.

Another muster was held at Knight's on the same day, and another court martial was assembled at James H. Godwin's to try absentees from this muster.

From this time on, it was routine to hold a court martial at each muster, to try absenteeism from the previous muster.

During 1828, musters were held at Miles H. Jernigan's, White Plains, and Godwin's. A general muster was held at Winton on October 24.

By this time, Ed. H. Newsome was serving as ensign of the company, commanded by Captain Thomas.

During 1830, all musters of the company were held at Godwin's and there were less than ten absentees at each muster.

Authorized John O. Askew of Pitch Landing—the important commercial center on Chinkapin Creek—to charge the following rates for use of his wharf:

**EXPLORERS**  
(Continued from Page 2)

Indian village, marked on John White's map somewhere along the lower reaches of the Roanoke in present-day Bertie County. It is thirty days as some of them say, and some say forty days' voyage to the head . . . which head they say springs out of a main rock in that abundance, that forthwith it makes a most violent stream; and furthermore that this huge rock stands so near unto a sea, that many times in storms the waves

## Winton Meet Pushed for Good Roads

(Continued from Page 6)

they have no roads they are savages.

In January 1921, "corduroy" roads such as the Romans found when invading Germany and Holland centuries before were still used in this state. They were made by laying logs lengthwise

along a trail, crossing them with small cuttings and sometimes adding sandy soil for surfacing.

But automobiles couldn't navigate these "corduroy" roads, and it was the automobile which revolutionized the 20th century.

An advocate of good roads said that all that was needed was to induce more people to buy automobiles. Once the state started its 1921 road-building operation, the "autoists" and supporters of better roads were off to the races.

Such emphasis was placed on roads that Guilford County won a \$1,000 prize offered by a New York paper for the best stretch of road in the Atlantic states.

Gov. Angus McLean continued the progressive spirit started in Gov. Morrison's regime, encouraging the legislature of 1927 to raise total borrowing for roads to \$11 million. Most of the primary road-building using funds from the two bond issues had been completed by 1929, when Chairman Page resigned as head of the Highway Commission.

In 1931, despite the depression, Maratico promises great things, and by the opinion of M. Hariot the head of it by the description of the country, either rises from the Bay of Mexico, or else from very near unto the same, that opens out into the South Sea."

the state voted to take over maintenance of all roads built during the 1920's. To do this, 30 prison camps were built throughout the state, and \$6 million was allocated for road work. By 1935, however the roads had grown so bad again and the bridges were so weakened that the General Assembly voted an emergency allocation of \$3 million to restore them to good condition.

Road construction and maintenance then kept pace with the needs from 1935 through 1948. During this 13-year period, paved road mileage in the state rose from 58,000 to 64,000. But the farmers and the citizens living on the other unpaved "country roads" were forgotten, and their voices were heard loud and long in the campaign for the governorship in 1948.

William Kerr Scott, who was to rise to fame as "the squire of Haw River," set his cap for the Governor's mansion after a long tenure as the State Commissioner of Agriculture.

But they were fooled, for the voters gave Kerr Scott the sup-

port he wanted. In turn, many sections of the state which had mostly secondary roads finally got "out of the mud" with the all-weather roads constructed by the Scott Administration.

The succeeding administration of Gov. William B. Umstead continued the road construction, concentrating primarily on several new bridges to span eastern waters and open tourist areas to easy access.

Not until the administration of Gov. Luther H. Hodges, who advanced at the death of Umstead in 1954, did the State Highway Commission undergo a housecleaning.

Hodges proposed to rid the group of sectional interests by appointing a new 14-man commission to operate on a statewide basis. A traffic engineer was employed as active head of the department, which in turn was divided into primary and secondary phases. Large interstate federal roads project have been a major concern of the Hodges reorganized commission.

After Scott became Governor, he exceeded Johnson's estimate by having a bill introduced "by request" in the Assembly, asking for a \$200 million bond issue.

The Assembly, most of whom were not in sympathy with Scott, expected to defeat his bill by passing it. This odd quirk could have doomed the bond issue, for the legislature tacked a one-cent increase on gasoline gallons onto the bill before approving it. The legislators expected that since the bond issue had to be submitted to public referendum, the voters would vote it down because of the increase in the price of gasoline.

But they were fooled, for the voters gave Kerr Scott the sup-

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of every DAY  
of every WEEK  
of every YEAR

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AND ABLE TO HELP

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