

Position Indicated By Gun Permits:

# Free Negro Population Was Large

One of the most significant statistics in the governmental history of Hertford County in the 1830-61 period is the total of Free Negro citizens allowed to keep guns.

Under the state laws regulating Free Negroes, a permit was required by free persons of color in order to keep a gun.

During the period, Hertford had one of the largest Free Negro populations in the South. From eight to 12 per cent of the population consisted of free persons of color.

And, during this entire period, most of these Free Negro families were trusted to the extent that they were allowed permits to carry guns.

The statistics are indicative of the place of the Free Negro in ante bellum Hertford society, of the wide extent of the Freeman's

influence. No other county in North Carolina has had the unique racial relations story which is the product of the presence of this large number of pre-Civil War free colored people.

During the 1830-61 period, a total of 384 permits to carry guns were granted to Hertford County Free Negroes. This is an average of 22 permits per year for which there was a report.

**Permit History**

The gun permit history of the Hertford County Court of Pleas and Quarter sessions shows:

There were no reports on gun permits until 1843. One permit was issued that year. (The records for 1829-43 are missing).

In 1845, the first complete total was reported. In that year, 14 Free Negroes were issued permits. In 1846, four gun permits were allowed.

Then, in 1847, a total of 35 gun permits were allowed. This indicates that at least half of the Free Negro families in the county were allowed to keep firearms, and had resources enough to own a gun.

In 1848, a total of 36 gun permits were issued.

In 1849, only four permits were allowed. However, the law was loosely observed, and families which kept guns sometimes forgot to come in and renew their permits.

In 1850, 47 gun permits were allowed. Among those given permits were names familiar today as leading Negro families of Hertford County. They included Boon, Newsom, Chavis, Reed, Archer, Manley, Reynolds, Weaver and Hall.

1851—A total of 21 gun permits were issued.

1852—Thirty-three gun permits were issued.

1853—Thirty-three gun permits.

1854—Fourteen gun permits.

1855—Thirty-eight gun permits.

1856—Twenty-one gun permits.

1857—Fourteen gun permits.

1858—Thirty-eight gun permits.

1859—Eighteen gun permits.

1860—In this final year before the Civil War, eleven gun permits were issued to Hertford County Free Negroes. Probably many other Free Negroes were using old permits. At this time, there were over 1,000 Free Negroes in Hertford, out of a population of some over 8,000. Two of those granted gun permits this year were Augustus Reynolds and Henry Best.

In 1861, two gun permits were issued. After this year, when the Civil War began, no permits were issued.

County Court Granted Hundreds of Indentures

# Apprenticeship Way of Life for Many Negroes

One of the major tasks of the County Court in the ante bellum period had to do with apprentices. These were of two types.

Major type were the children of Free Negroes. The Free Negroes constituted from 8 to 12 per cent of the population of Hertford County during the 1830-61 period.

Under stringent state laws, Free Negroes were carefully regulated as to the occupations which they could undertake. The great majority of Free Negroes served as farm laborers. Many owned their own land, some even owned slaves.

Many Free Negro families apprenticed some children of the family to white masters, who were required to pay them in kind for their work. Undoubtedly, much of this was done unofficially.

Thus, during the entire period of 1830-61, the Hertford County Court minutes show a total of 220 orders for apprenticeship. Most of these were children of Free Negroes apprenticed to white families to learn farming or housework.

**Some Whites**

Another much smaller group were white children—mostly orphans. About five per cent of the

apprenticeships in Hertford County during the 1830-61 period included this type.

A year by year rundown of the apprenticeship picture in Hertford County Court minutes shows:

1830 — Five apprentices, sometimes known by the colonial designation of "indentured servants," were bound to white families.

1831 — two apprentice orders.

1832 — 29 apprentices were bound to families, most to learn farming.

1833 — A total of 12 apprentices were bound by order of the County Court.

(There is a gap in the Hertford Court Minutes from 1833 to 1842.)

1842 — Two apprentice orders.

1843 — Seven apprentice orders.

1844 — Two apprentice orders were bound at the one term of court reported that year.

1845 — Six apprentice orders.

1846 — Twenty-three apprentices were bound. Most were listed as "child of color" and bound to white families to "learn farming."

1847 — Thirteen apprentice orders were signed by the County Court.

1848 — Four apprentices were bound.

1849 — Six apprentices were bound.

1850 — Only one apprentice order was given.

1851 — Ten apprentices were bound, including "two orphans."

1852 — Fifteen apprentice orders were given by the county court.

1853 — Fourteen apprentice orders were given.

1854 — Five apprentice orders.

By this year, white landowners were using the apprentice laws to get labor for the booming cotton business. Apparently, they were taking young Free Negroes into apprenticeship against their will.

The County Court passed a ruling at its August, 1854, session that "no Free Negro 15 years or older may be bound without notice given to the Free Negro at the courthouse door."

At the same term, the County Court ordered one white farmer to appear before it and "show cause why an indenture should not be rescinded."

1855 — Seven apprentice orders.

1856 — Five apprentice orders.

1857 — Thirteen apprentice orders. Five of these were described as "mulattos," recognizing the

fact that many of Hertford County's Free Negroes were white-skinned people, descendants of lines that were almost completely white.

1858 — Twelve apprentice orders. Six of these listed as "mulattos" and four were "orphan whites."

At the same time, the Court ordered a Free Negro woman to come into court and show cause by her daughter should not be apprenticed. This reflected newly-passed law regulating Free Negro apprenticeship. These new laws made it easier for Free Negroes to be indentured to whites.

1859 — Only four apprentices were bound this year, but the operation of new laws was causing some confusion. One Negro girl only three years old was bound, this although the law required that apprenticeship had to be a voluntary action on the part of the person to be apprenticed.

Further, the court ordered two more Negro women into court to show cause why their children should not be bound as apprentices.

1860 — Nine apprentice orders.

1861 — Fourteen apprentices were bound.

# 1830-60: Top Dates In Hertford

1830—Hertford Courthouse is burned by Wright Allen, seeking to destroy papers of a trial.

1832—"Ahotskey Ridge" post office becomes Mulberry Grove, then "Saint John's, as Dr. Godwin Cotton Moore settles nearby and rejuvenates old center of colonial life west of Chowan River.

1833—New Hope Methodist Church formed in far northern corner of county. Maney's Neck one of county's most populous rural areas.

1835—Bethlehem Baptist and Buckhorn Baptist churches are organized as the denomination becomes strong in two important rural areas.

1835—Constitutional Convention liberalizes North Carolina government. Party politics begins to bring state out of slough which has earned it name as "Rip Van Winkle State."

1837—Pleasant Grove Baptist Church organized near Mulberry Grove plantation in Saint John's area.

1839—Mount Tabor Church organized south of Murfreesboro.

1840—First public school system organized in North Carolina. Hertford has a dozen small units.

1840-60—Whig Party becomes dominant in Hertford politics. Kenneth Rayner county and state Whig leader. Dr. Godwin C. Moore leader of minority Democrats in Hertford.

1842—Union Academy organized at Bethel (later Harrellsville). With older Buckhorn Academy of Maney's Neck and Banks' School of Murfreesboro, form educational triumvirate above level of tiny public schools.

1844—Murfreesboro Baptist Church organized. Town is largest county community with 200 population.

1847—Harrellsville incorporated as town. Nearby Pitch Landing still most important Wicacoan River point.

1848—Chowan College founded as Chowan Female Baptist Institute.

1849—Wesleyan College organized by Methodists in Murfreesboro.

1854—Julian H. Picot becomes master at Buckhorn Academy. County spending about \$2,000 for public school system.

1854—Murfreesboro Gazette begins publication as party newspaper.

# Indicated By Inspection Points Naval Store Industry Big

An important county official in ante bellum days was the "inspector of naval stores."

These inspectors were responsible for checking the quality of the vast barrels of tar, pitch and turpentine which were a major product of Hertford County forests.

An insight into the extent of the forest industry is indicated by the story of inspector appointments made by the Hertford County Court during the 1830-55 period.

During colonial times, inspectors appointed by the colonial government were assigned to various busy river landings to inspect all products that were to be exported.

In this early period of the republic, the inspectors were re-

sponsible only for the purity and correct weight of naval stores.

During the 1830-55 period, eight landings in Hertford County had inspectors appointed to look after the naval stores business.

**Ended in 1855**

No inspectors were appointed after 1855, indicating the waning importance of naval stores as a product of the county.

Bull, in 1850, when the period opened, naval stores were probably the county's most valuable export. In that year, the Hertford County Court appointed inspectors at four places.

These included Murfreesboro, Pitch Landing (near present-day Harrellsville). Inspectors were appointed for the Chowan River and Wicacoan River shore from Pitch Landing to the Bertie County boundary.

From Pitch Landing to Taylor's Mill on the Chowan River was one inspection district, from Taylor's south to the Bertie Line was another district.

In 1831, inspectors were named for Murfreesboro, Pitch Landing and Hill's Ferry. The latter point was on Meherrin River halfway between Murfreesboro and the river's mouth.

In 1832, an inspector was appointed at Pitch Landing.

In 1833, an inspector was appointed for Pitch Landing and Isaac Taylor was named inspector from his Chowan River Mill (now known as Swain's Mill) to "The Harbor," a famous landing on the Chowan River in what is now Christian Harbor section of southeastern Hertford County.

(There is a gap in the records from 1833 to 1843.)

In 1843, an inspector was appointed for Pitch Landing.

In 1846, Augustus Bass was named inspector at Pitch Landing and Thomas Britton at Hill's Ferry.

In 1847, inspectors were named at The Harbor, at Hill's and Pitch Landing. Bass was renamed to the job at Pitch Landing.

**New Landing**

In 1848, Bass was reappointed at Pitch Landing and a new landing was becoming important. John B. Sharp was named inspector at Tar Landing. This was the Wicacoan River landing point at present-day Harrellsville. It was also an important ferry point. Abner Harrell, the namesake of

Harrellsville, was for many years the ferrykeeper.

In 1849 and 1850, Augustus Bass renewed his \$1,000 bond as inspector at Pitch Landing.

In 1851, Joseph Scull was named inspector at Tar Landing. In 1852, Scull and Bass were reappointed.

In 1853, Bass was reappointed at Pitch Landing and James Alston was appointed as Tar Landing inspector. They renewed their bonds in 1854 and 1855.

After 1855, there is no record of inspectors. Naval stores were waning as an economic product of Hertford County.

# Poor Fund Existed in 1830-60 Era

The poor of Hertford County in the 1830-60 period were a concern of government officials, but there was no elaborate governmental machinery to help such poor.

The County Court named a three-year board of "Wardens of the Poor." A tax was annually levied for aid to the poor. During the period, this tax usually amounted to about \$1,000 a year.

The Wardens doled out the funds.

Hertford County early decided that it should have a poorhouse. In 1830, the wardens were empowered to purchase land for a poorhouse. Although there is no record that the facility was built, it is safe to assume that some sort of home was built.

That the Poor Fund was not always used is indicated in that same year, when \$450 was taken from the fund to help pay for a new county courthouse.

In 1843, the poor problem seemed to have been acute. The County Court ordered that \$380 worth of corn be purchased for distribution to poor.

In 1857, the Court ordered that 100 bushels of corn be purchased for the same reason.

This indicated the usual manner in which destitute people were taken care of by the county. Gifts to the poor were usually made "in kind," in the form of a dole of corn, bacon, sometimes clothing.

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