

CIVIL WAR IN R-C: Colorful Story of Heroism and Sorrow

The great time of national testing—the Civil War—brought heroism and sorrow to the Roanoke-Chowan, as it did to the rest of the South.

People of Hertford and the surrounding counties were reluctant to leave the Union. But once the die was cast, thousands of young men from the area marched away to battles against countrymen.

The area was touched directly by fighting. Hertford's county seat, Winton, was put to the torch early in the war, and the area was to tremble time and again to the march of hostile troops.

The story of the Roanoke-Chowan in the Civil War is a rich, brave, colorful tale.

Here are only parts of the story. The following article tells of the actions of the Hertford County Court—the county's ruling body—during the years of the Great Conflict.

Other articles in the Civil War series tell of the various Confederate units in which Roanoke-Chowan men served, and of actions fought in the area.

Mirrored in the activity of the County Court during the 1861-65 period is the mounting anxiety, want, and despair of the Confederacy.

Here is that story:

A summer of great hope, exciting gatherings of eager young men, and ebullient preparation for war.

That was Hertford County in the greenest spring of 1861.

Four years later, the scene was one of despair, desolation, want, of gaunt-eyed men weary of fighting and homefolks worn with care and suffering.

The story of Hertford County's home front during four years of Civil War is told graphically in the minutes of the County Court, the governing body of the day.

From the first burst of enthusiasm, when companies of volunteer soldiers gathered at Hertford villages, to the final surrender, when tired veterans walked home to the battered county, the story unfolds in the record of the court's actions.

Drama Opens

The minutes for the quarterly meeting of May, 1861, opened the home front drama in Hertford.

By then, President Lincoln had issued a call for troops to put down rebellion in southern states, and a reluctant North Carolina had reversed a previous stand and seceded from the Union.

North Carolina's Governor had issued a call for volunteers to form regiments. And Hertford County was responding.

Already, three companies had been formed in Hertford. The County Court moved to provide for them.

It ordered county bonds, as many as \$6,000 worth, issued. Each volunteer company was to get five dollars per man from the fund for equipment.

Meanwhile, a committee to provide for the families of these troops had been formed, consisting of Richard G. Cowper, David Valentine and John B. Sharp.

L. R. Jernigan was named to head a committee in charge of providing equipment for soldiers.

His committee reported it had issued \$3,800 at its first meeting, and the committee was busy seeking tents, guns, uniforms, and other equipment for soldiers. All members of the court pledged the county's "full resources" to the families of volunteers and promised to fully equip "volunteers enrolled for the public safety."

At this first meeting as a county in the new Confederate States, the court attended to regular business, also. It appointed John Vaughan as guardian of Cuttawhisky Bridge, paid ferrykeepers at Wicacoan and Tar Ferry, issued a whiskey licence to Pleasant Jordan at the Winton Hotel and named tax listers.

August Meeting

As another Hertford County—this time a cavalry unit—moved out to join other North Carolina troops, the Hertford County Court met in regular session and heard an offer from Kenneth Rayner for \$145.40 to be spent for equipping Hertford soldiers.

Rayner had been an antisectionist and was perhaps hoping to show his change of heart in the matter.

Dr. G. C. Moore was elected new chairman of the County Court. As head of the Democratic Party in the county, he was taking over after a generation of Wig control. The War had destroyed the Whig Party along with the Union.



Winton Memorial Statue

There was no record of any war preparations other than Rayner's offer. In routine business, the Court issued \$640 for repairs to the Murfreesboro bridge and heard a report of a committee named to conduct the town election in Murfreesboro.

Three months later, in November, two of Hertford's first volunteer companies had been captured by the August invasion of Hatteras Island.

Hertford had organized a committee to provide for the families of the county's several hundred Confederate soldiers. Tillman Vann was named in the place of R. G. Cowper on the committee.

In routine business, the Court paid \$390 for a new bridge over Chinkapin Creek at Pitch Landing and issued whiskey licenses to William Day at Murfreesboro and Joseph Vinson at Saint Johns.

1862 Begins

The year 1862 opened with war threatening the very doorstep of Hertford County.

Federal forces had moved to seize Roanoke Island and lay open all of eastern North Carolina to invasion.

On January 28, 1862, ten days before the Island fell (and another Hertford County company was to be captured), the Hertford County Court met in special session and passed a resolution ordering Chairman Moore "in person or by letter" to plead with Governor Vance for "sufficient men with artillery to protect this part of the state from the invasion of the enemy."

The Court ordered Watson Daniel to contact state military authorities to collect funds due county slaveowners for five Negro men sent to Roanoke Island to help in the construction of fortifications on that ill-fated post.

On February 19, a federal force landed at Winton and burned the courthouse.

On the fourth Monday of the month, the County Court convened at the still-standing home of James Rhea ("the courthouse being burned by the enemy, the Yankees").

It ordered the sheriff to assemble "the whole of the magistracy" of the county to a meeting on April 7 to "provide a suitable courthouse."

In routine business the governing group let repairs for Hill's Bridge and appointed a county school board and taxlisters.

The meeting on April 7 met at Union Methodist Church near Winton. Thirty-three justices were present, John W. Harrell presided in the absence of Chairman Godwin C. Moore.

Kenneth Rayner explained the purpose of the meeting, and the justices ordered that the church be used as a courthouse and appointed a committee to renovate it for that purpose.

The burning of the courthouse and the military disaster which accompanied it were on the minds of the justices.

They ordered a nine-man committee to "examine free negroes who engaged with the Yankees in

the raid in burning, stealing." The committee was authorized to arrest or order to "quit the county" and free negroes found to have aided the federal expedition.

Another five-man committee was named to "collect evidence on burning of cotton, the courthouse, and other houses." The County Court evidently hoped to use evidence to get some financial payment for the destruction.

In the routine matter, the court settled a dispute between two competing ferryman at Winton. It ordered L. R. Jernigan to discontinue his ferry at Winton, rather than have the Barfield's Ferry—a mile downriver—discontinued. Evidently, the Union forces had destroyed at least one ferry boat.

Supply Preparations

Another special meeting of the Court convened on March 23, 1862, to prepare for relief work among families of the county's soldiers.

At the meeting, John Harrell was named commissioner for provisioning families of soldiers.

The state had passed its first relief bill for soldiers' families, appropriating \$1 million for the purpose. Counties were to receive a quarterly sum from the state and spend it locally for soldiers' families.

For his job, which became practically a fulltime task, Harrell was to receive one per cent of the county's allotment and be paid for travel expenses.

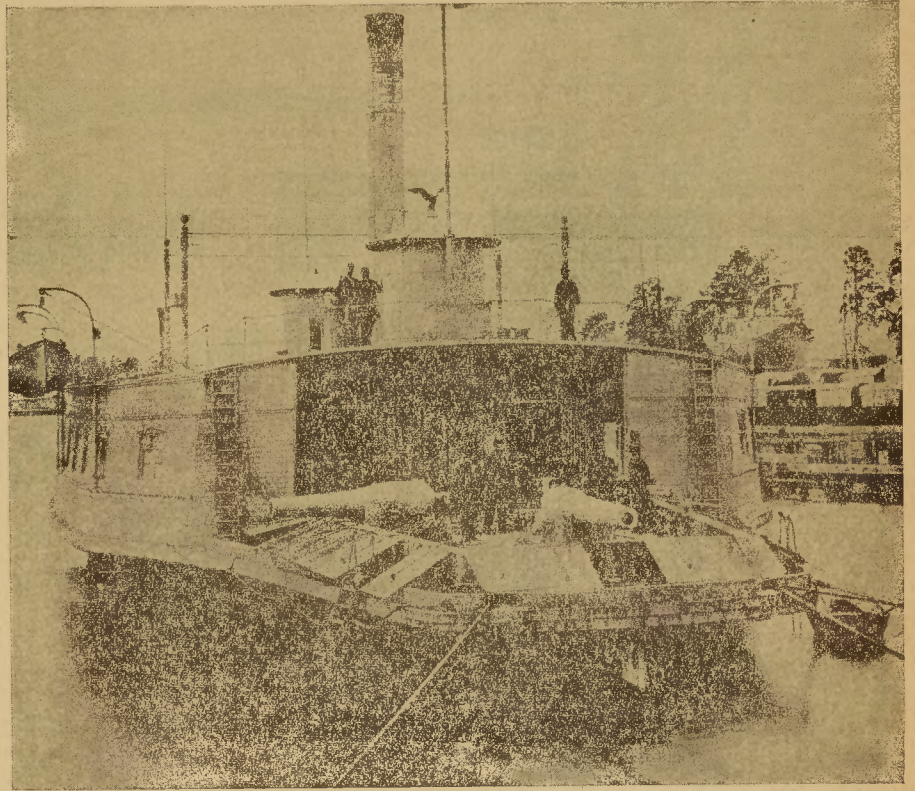
But Mr. Harrell saw quickly the job was too demanding. At another special meeting on April 20, he resigned. But the Court prevailed upon him to continue and raised his pay to two and a half per cent.

Only routine business was transacted at a regular session of court held on April 26, 1862. John O. Askeew was named guardian of Chinkapin Bridge at "Pitch Landing. Tax listers were named. Ferrykeepers at Tar Landing and Wicacoan Ferry were paid and Henry Maddey received \$199.50 for repairs to Hill's Bridge.

Summer Scare

As the bright, hot days of summer, 1862, arrived, the tempo of war stepped up. In Virginia, the mighty Union army of McClellan moved against Richmond and reeled back from the bloody battles known as the Seven Days.

In North Carolina, federal cavalry units attacked villages in counties east of Chowan River, came as far west as Gatesville. See COURT, Page 5



FEDERAL GUNBOAT WHICH ASSAULTED WINTON—The USS Commodore Perry was a New York harbor ferryboat in the peaceful years before the Civil War. But in February, 1862, it was part of a small fleet of Union vessels which ferried troops on a warlike mission. The Perry tossed shells at Winton on February 19-20, 1862, and landed federal troops which burned the town. This photograph was taken several years later as the Perry served in the blockading squadron stationed in North Carolina coastal waters.

Incidents on Chowan River in Summer of 1863:

Wheeler's Report Mirrors Story Of Civil War Times in R-C Area

Major Samuel J. Wheeler of Murfreesboro, who was a civilian in civilian life, was one of the Roanoke-Chowan's most colorful Civil War soldiers.

His unit was the so-called 12th Battalion of Cavalry. It was composed of three Roanoke-Chowan companies, two from Northampton and one a mixed unit from Bertie and Hertford, all of which had been independently organized in 1862.

On May 3, 1863, the three companies were formed into a battalion under Wheeler's command. The job of the unit was to patrol the Chowan River.

Union forces were in firm control of the North Carolina coastal areas, and also held Suffolk in southeastern Virginia.

From these coastal towns, Union cavalry continually patrolled into the Roanoke-Chowan area. Intermittently, the federal forces carried out large scale cavalry raids toward Rocky Mount and Tarboro, mostly from their bases at New Bern and Washington.

In the Roanoke-Chowan region, the raids were usually on a small scale. Federal gunboats were in complete control of the river, however.

But in the summer of 1863, there were rumblings that the Union forces planned to put into execution a move they had discussed for more than a year.

They planned a strong cavalry raid from Winton, across the Roanoke-Chowan to Weldon. At this strong point, the vital Wilmington-to-Richmond railroad crossed the Roanoke River. The federals wanted to cut this lifeline of the Confederacy.

Federal forces began to probe the Chowan River line.

In mid-June, 1863, as the major armies of both sides moved northward toward Pennsylvania and the high tide of war at Gettysburg, Major Wheeler's little unit in his native county had its first brush with the probing Union forces.

See WHEELER'S REPORT, Page 5

Little Told Tale:

Some Joined Union Army

An untold—until recently often lushed—story is the Roanoke-Chowan contribution to the Union army in the Civil War.

Many Roanoke-Chowanians had misgivings about the idea of secession from the Union. When war came, federal forces sought Union sentiment was so strong in the region that it was mentioned in dispatches.

The Union officer who commanded the forces which burned Winton in February, 1862, said he headed for the Hertford village because he had heard large numbers of Union sympathizers had gathered there.

This sentiment gradually declined as the Confederacy's long war rolled on.

But the Roanoke-Chowan was in a peculiar situation. It was in the No Man's Land between Union forces which controlled the eastern areas of North Carolina and Confederate troops which firmly held the line of the Roanoke River.

Thus, by 1863 and 1864, the area was becoming a favorite haunt of deserters from both

armies. These deserters, and other outlaw groups, formed themselves into bands of marauding fighters, known as "Buffaloes."

Thus, it was made easier in this region for a man who wanted to change colors in the war.

Many did. A list of Hertford men who "went into Union lines" during the war totals 27. A list of Hertford County men who "became Union soldiers" totals 25. There were others, in Hertford and Bertie especially.

Most of the names of men of Union soldiers are missing. Interestingly enough, records of the bureau which kept these names were destroyed soon after the war ended.

But from remembrances and family tradition, some of the names of Hertford men who wore the blue survive.

William A. Overton was one. He became a lieutenant in the Union army.

Thomas D. Parker, a Hertford man, deserted from the Confederate cavalry and also became a federal officer.

Henry Dozier and Jacob Nowell of Hertford County became Union soldiers, and like many former Confederates were not called on to serve in units which fought against the south. They went west with U. S. cavalry to fight in the Indian wars.

Perry Overton was another Hertford man who became a soldier in the Union army. The stark entry beside his name: "hanged at Tarboro after the war."

James B. Holloman of Hertford met a similar fate. Isaac Godwin was a deserter who was captured and shot.

Joseph Parker was one who was shot after the war because he "went into Union lines." Benjamin Parker was also listed as having "gone into Union lines."

Some Roanoke-Chowan negroes, both free negroes and slaves, served in Union colored units after they slipped across the Chowan and joined Union forces. Several hundred negroes escaped the area to put themselves under the protection of the federal forces.

Since February 1, 1928

We have played a part in many anniversaries during the past 31 years. The good people of the Roanoke-Chowan area have purchased jewelry from us to commemorate important events throughout the years. We appreciate their friendship, confidence and patronage and we want to say Thank You to each and everyone as we commemorate this important milestone in our county's history.

We Join Our Fellow Citizens in Celebrating the 200th ANNIVERSARY of HERTFORD COUNTY

