

Ante Bellum Years: A Time of Growth

1830-60: Hertford County in Days Of Beaver Hats, Crinoline, Whigs

Life in Hertford County in the 1830-60 period was in contrast to that of typical Ante Bellum counties around it—but also bearing some of the typical marks of the era. Hertford Countians looked typically ante bellum. They dressed in frock coats, beaver hats and crinolines. They rode horses, buggies, gigs. They chewed tobacco, raised cotton, discussed politics, went to tiny schools.

By the time the period opened, an old colonial aristocracy had been replaced by many new families. The Wynns, Murphrees, Maneys, Brickles, had died out, moved to Tennessee, or migrated elsewhere, leaving only offshoots of these famous 18th century families.

During the 30 years, the makeup of Hertford society was typically composed of a few really wealthy families, a large population of planters with small and middle-sized holdings, and a significant segment of Free Negroes in a population of about 8,000.

Many Slaves; Few Slave-Owners

During the entire period, the number of slaves slightly outnumbered free persons. But the county's slaves were not gathered in big groups on large plantations, as was the picture in most surrounding counties.

Most Hertford planters were medium-sized operators, owning less than ten slaves. Less than half of the county's families owned any slaves at all.

Unique in the South, this small county had a Free Negro population amounting to ten per cent of the total population. Many of these pre-Civil War freemen had been living as such since colonial days. Thus, the county had a peculiar racial problem which it solved with amazing common sense.

The 1830-60 period in Hertford was an era of growth, as it was throughout North Carolina. During the 1800-30 period, North Carolina had sunk into a slough which won it the name of the "Rip Van Winkle State." But by the 1840's, the state was picking itself up and moving toward a growth that would make it one of the South's most progressive by the time of the Civil War.

This growth was reflected in Hertford County.

Whig Party: Favorite of Voters

The Whig Party, formed soon after 1835, was the party which advocated sweeping reform and progressive action in the state. Hertford quickly became an eastern stronghold of the party and during the entire period the party controlled Hertford politics.

Advances in education, religious organization, and economic fields characterized the period. In 1848-49, both Baptists and Methodists established colleges in Murfrees-

boro. During the same decade, the public school system began and more than 20 small units were set up in Hertford.

During the period, the famed Buckhorn Academy continued its long life and many of the county's leading men received their early training there.

Six new Baptist churches were formed in the county during the period, and the denomination became a leader in the growing religious life of the county.

Winton, Murfreesboro, Pitch Landing

During the entire period, urban life in Hertford was confined to the small, older villages of Winton and Murfreesboro and to busy Pitch Landing on Chinkapin Creek near present-day Harrellsville.

When the period began the economy of the county was based on products of its great pine forests. Cotton was becoming the leading agricultural product, but the county never became completely tied to a cotton economy. Livestock and forest products remained important economic factors.

Life in the period was almost completely rural. The typical Hertford County man was the small farmer, who with his family and three slaves or Free Negro helpers, lived an isolated and somewhat lonely life.

The few village-dwellers lived a life approximating the fabled descriptions of Ante Bellum southern living. These were few, however.

Few Collegians, Many Unlettered

Educationally, the county was typical. In 1850, less than half of the male population over 21 could read or write. Less than 20 men of the county had attended college. Most had gone either to the University or to Wake Forest College. Some had attended northern colleges.

This then, was Hertford of the 1830-60 period, a time of change and growth, unmarked by violence in either that growth or change, but building toward a time of greater promise for all its people.

(Articles on the 1830-60 period in Hertford County history are based mainly on a significant book of official records—the Minute Book of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. This book, now in the office of the County Clerk of Court, was one of a handful of records saved when the courthouse was burned in 1840. In detail, it tells of the official activity of the county's governing body. Other sources which served as a basis for articles included Winborne's "History of Hertford County," usual standard textbooks on North Carolina history, maps of the period, and sources used in other articles pertaining to post offices and churches in Hertford County during the 1830-60 period.)

Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions:

Life Mirrored in Court's Actions

The "County Court" of ante bellum North Carolina counties was the ruling body of the counties, clothed with complete powers in fields that are today handled by many government officials.

The court was officially the "Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions."

It was composed of all the county's justices of the peace sitting as a body.

In Hertford County during the 1830-60 period, there were from 20 to 35 justices in the county at any one time. Justices were elected by the General Assembly. Many men served for decades as justices.

Later during the period, the large group of justices usually elected a "Special Court," a sort of executive committee of four or five justices.

The County Court met once each three months—hence the "quarter sessions" part of the name—and usually took two or three days, maybe more, for its work.

The court had executive duties: it appointed tax officials, road overseers, slave patrols, ferry-men, guardians, jurymen, and other county officials. It had judicial duties: the "Special Court" heard minor criminal and civil actions. It had, of course, legislative duties: it set the tax rate and decided on public improvements, named school officials, election officials, and approved all bills.

Some of the county officials of the period included:

SHERIFF—This ancient office was the county's principal executive office. The sheriff was tax collector, process-server and general executive jack-of-all-jobs. He was elected by the people received fees for his work.

COUNTY TRUSTEE—Generally appointed by the County

Court, this official was in charge of the county's money.

REGISTER—The official who registered deeds and other official documents. He was appointed. All deeds, conveyances, wills, and other traditional courthouse papers had first to be reviewed and approved by the County Court.

CORONER—Another ancient officer, he presided over inquests. During this period, frequent inquests were held.

CLERK OF COURT—During the period, there were some

Whigs Dominated Government

Vann Was Longtime Court Leader

During the entire 1830-61 period, Hertford County had but three men who served as chairman of the County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions.

John Vann, who had come to Hertford County in 1800 at the age of 33 from his native Gates County, was named chairman in 1830 and held the office until 1850, when he died at the age of 83.

John A. Anderson succeeded Vann and served until he resigned in 1857 during the turmoil of the breakup of the Whig Party. Democrat Dr. Godwin C. Moore, a Democrat, succeeded him. Anderson was re-elected as chairman in 1861, but died shortly afterward and was succeeded again by Dr. Moore.

Vann was perhaps Hertford's most durable ante bellum politician. He had been a young man when the Revolutionary War ended, had served Hertford County in the General Assembly's Senate three years after crossing the Chowan from his native Gates and again in 1835.

changes in Superior Court lines.

Hertford was generally in a district with Bertie County and others to the east. The Court Clerk had general duties in probate matters much as today.

There were other officials with self-explanatory titles: surveyor, entry-laker, county attorney, standard keeper.

After 1839, when the first state school law was passed, the County Court appointed the "Board of Superintendents of Common Schools." This group usually

selected its own chairman and dispensed local and state school funds to district committees.

The "Wardens of the Poor" were a group named to dispense funds to indigent poor.

There were also district election officials, district tax list takers and constables to be appointed.

Constables were supposed to be elected, but many districts didn't bother, and the County Court regularly appointed about half of the county's constables.

Anderson resigned his post in 1857 as the Whig Party broke up over the slavery-secession question. Dr. Godwin Cotton Moore of Saint Johns, who had been the leader of the minority Democratic Party during the entire period, was named chairman as a vigorous group of young Democrats took control of county politics.

Anderson was named chairman again for a short period in 1861, but died a few months later. He was succeeded by Dr. Moore.

All members of the County Court were important landholders, leaders in their communities. Many served for decades as members of the court. From the membership of the court, nearly all county officials were chosen.

The party in control of the General Assembly could change the makeup of the court.



Hertford Roads, Bridges, Ferries, Towns of 1830-60 Period

Extent of Trade Indicated

Transportation in 1830-60 Period

Transportation in Hertford County during the pre-Civil War period was focused on the county's waterways.

The great bulk of traffic traveled on the streams, creeks, and rivers.

The roads which crisscrossed the county were little more than paths. But when they came to the many waterways, the two modes of travel—land and water

—met. At these crossings, ferries and bridges were located to carry the traveler and the wagonloads of farm and forest products.

The County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions was in charge of bridge building and ferry-keeping in these days. The records of the county's governing body give detailed picture of the bridges and ferries which served Hertford County in those

days, and provide an insight into the transportation picture in the county during the period.

From 1842 until 1860, the County Court dealt with 17 bridges and five ferries. Most of these ferries and bridges were in existence when the period began. During the 18-year period, the County Court issued many orders for repairs to bridges and ferries. It hired ferrykeepers and

paid them for their work. It set ferry rates for users of the facilities.

The main roads in Hertford County during the period connected the tiny villages of Winton, Murfreesboro, Saint Johns, Pitch Landing, and Harrellsville. Main roads led from Virginia across the Chowan to Murfreesboro, from Gates County across the Chowan to Winton and on across the county to Saint Johns and Northampton, from Chowan River crossings in Bertie northwest to Saint Johns and into Northampton.

Show Importance
The locations of the bridges and ferries and the business transacted at these crossings indicates the relative importance of the roads and the travel on them. Most of the ferries operated by the county were free ferries. Private ferries were operated across the Wicaccan and Chowan and charged rates which were set by the county.

Ferry List
Main ferries in Hertford County during the 1842-1860 period include:

Ferry Rates: 1844, 1858

An insight into the transportation picture in Hertford County during the decades before the Civil War is found in the schedules of costs charged by ferries which operated across the county's waterways.

It was the day of the horseback traveler, the buggy. It was a day when wagons hauled farm products and forest products through the twisting roads.

Two schedules of ferry rates for the 1830-61 period are preserved in the minutes of the Hertford County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions.

They are schedules for the Wicaccan River Ferry in the year 1844, and schedules for costs of Chowan River ferries in 1858. In 1844, Wicaccan ferry rates were:

For man and horse	5 and a fourth cents
For man and gig	12 and a half cents
Single man	three cents
Two men, horse and buggy	18 and ¼ cents
Buggy or two horses	31 and a half cents
Two-horse wagon	20 cents
One-horse wagon	18 and three-fourths cents
Two-horse closed carriage	37 and a half cents

In 1858, prices for ferry travelers had generally doubled from those of 14 years before.

The Chowan River ferry rates list not only the types of passenger carriers which one was likely to meet on an Ante Bellum road, but show some of the economic traffic which used the roads, ferries, and bridges of the period.

The rates included:

Single person	6 and a fourth cents
One person, horse and sulky	25 cents
Two-horse rockaway or buggy	50 cents
Four-horse carriage	one dollar
One-horse wagon	37 and a half cents
Horse and cart	25 cents
One person on horse	12 and a half cents
One person, horse and buggy	37 and a half cents
Two-horse carriage	75 cents
Four-horse wagon	one dollar
Two-horse wagon	50 cents
Drive horse, less than 5	5 and a fourth cents each
Loose horses, more than five	five cents each
Cattle	5 cents each
Sheep and hogs	2 cents each

The small flatbottom boats used as ferries in these days usually could not accommodate more than one or two of the larger carriers on a single trip.

HILL'S FERRY—On the Meherrin River east of Murfreesboro, this ferry had been established in the early 18th century. During the 1830-60 period, it was an important crossing from traffic heading north into Virginia.

In 1846, the County Court was looking a "keeper" for the ferry. It paid \$30 for a temporary keeper for three months work. In 1847, David Gatling was paid \$110 for keeping Hill's for a year. He received similar payment in 1848 and 1849. In 1850, he received \$135 and in 1851 got \$101.25. In 1852, Gatling died and the County Court sought a new keeper. In 1855, the Court was still seeking a keeper. In 1856, it paid Jefferson D. Gatling \$41.88 for keeping Hill's. Then, in 1857, Richard G. Cowper was hired and paid \$201 for a year's keep of the ferry. He received the same in 1858 and 1859. In 1859, H. C. Madry was high bidder at a public sale of the keeper's job for the ferry. He received \$199.50 for keeping the ferry a year. During the entire period, the keeper of Hill's Ferry received the largest pay of any of the county's ferrykeepers, indicating that it was the busiest ferry in the county.

MANEY'S FERRY—Located on the Chowan River near the Virginia border, this had also been an ancient river crossing, and important link in the Virginia-North Carolina transportation system. In 1846, a Hertford group met with a Gates committee to choose a keeper for Maney's. There is no further mention of the ferry in Court minutes. It was still operating in 1860, but was by then of little importance.

WICACON FERRY—Also known as "Harrell's Ferry," had been established in the early years of the 19th century. From

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