

In Hertford During 1830-60 Period:

Whig Party Dominant in Politics

Politically, Hertford County was a Whig center in a land of Democrats during the 1830-61 period.

In fact, the entire Roanoke-Chowan section except for Gates County, was an historic center of eastern North Carolina Whiggism.

This party was formed early in the 1830's and represented interests which wanted the state of North Carolina to pull itself out of a slough that had earned it the name of "Rip Van Winkle State."

The party grew to power in the 1840's and from then until its breakup just before the Civil War, it was dominant in North Carolina politics. The center of Whig power was in the Piedmont and mountain areas, but the Roanoke-Chowan section was an enclave of Whig strength in the slaveholding, Democratic, east.

Hertford County became dominantly Whig shortly after 1830. Although Hertford County voted heavily against the new state constitution in 1835, (the forces

which sought this more democratic document later became the early strength of the Whig party), it sent a young lawyer to the Constitutional Convention who was to be one of North Carolina's most influential Whig leaders.

Kenneth Rayner was only 25 at the time, the youngest member of the Constitutional Convention. He opposed sections of the proposed constitution which would take the vote away from free Negroes, and wanted the section granting complete religious toleration (his father, Amos Rayner, had been an early Baptist preacher west of the Chowan River).

Rayner's active role in the convention marked him as a new political figure. He came back to his home county and was immediately elected to the General Assembly.

The new constitution changed

the method of Assembly representation. Hertford before the new document had elected one senator and one member of the House of Commons.

Soon after the new constitution, the Whig Party was formed, advocating a program of internal improvements and advocating strong national government.

For the next 30 years, until the Whig Party broke up on the eve of the Civil War, North Carolina was a strong two-party state, with the Whigs in control much of the time.

In Hertford County, Whiggism became quickly triumphant and remained so until The Civil War.

From 1836 until 1860, the county sent Whig representatives to the General Assembly and the county's voters consistently cast Whig majorities in elections for Governor.

Top Leaders

Some of the top leaders of the Whig Party during the period included: **KENNETH RAYNER** — Served as representative in 1835-6-8, again in 1846-48-50 and in the General Assembly Senate in 1854. Whig member of Congress in 1839-45. Leader in Congress, where he was known as a "State's Rights Whig." Could have had vice presidential nomination in 1848. Favored secession after break with party in 1857. But later critical of Confederate government. Moved to Tennessee after the war, became Republican. Named Solicitor of the Treasury in 1877 until death in 1884.

B. T. SPIERS — Lived in Maney's Neck. State Senator in 1840. Had cotton plantation in Florida. Ruined by Civil War.

RICHARD W. COWPER — Served as sheriff in 1825-36 and 1838 until 1844. During the period, he resigned three times to run for and be elected to the State Senate, in 1844-46, in 1852 and 1856. In 1858, he ran against the surging Democrats as candidate of the "Know Nothing" Party—a fragment of the dissolving Whigs—and was elected to the Senate. He served again just after the Civil war. He died in 1873.

W. N. H. SMITH — A graduate of Yale, a native of Murfreesboro. Smith was State Senator for Hertford in 1848 at the age of 36. He had been elected to the House of Commons in 1840. He later became a U.S. Congressman before the Civil War, and was member of the Confederate Congress during the entire war. Afterwards he was Chief Justice of North Carolina. He died in 1889.

DANIEL VANPELT SESSOMS — A resident of Pitch Landing on Chinkapin Creek, State Senator from Hertford in 1850. He was known as an intellectual leader of his party. During the time he was in the Assembly, the Democratic Party had the majority, but he was respected as an able legislator even by his bitter political enemies. He died in 1888 at the age of 79.

WATSON L. DANIEL — Hertford Whig representative in General Assemblies of 1852 and 1854. He bolted the party in 1852 to vote for Matt Ransom, a Democrat, for state attorney-general and was defeated for the Whig nomination by Joseph Blount Slaughter. A young man then, he went on to be a militia major, a post-Civil War officeholder. He was register of deeds in 1882-90.

LEWIS M. COWPER — Although he stayed above the partisan political strife, no record of ante bellum Hertford officehold-

ers would be complete without the name of this Murfreesboro man. A brother of Sheriff Cowper, he served as clerk to the Court of Pleas and Quarter sessions from 1823 until 1858 and again during the Civil War until 1868. He died in 1873. He was an

escort for the Marquis de Lafayette when that famous man visited Murfreesboro in 1824. He was the father of Pulaski Cowper, who was clerk to several North Carolina governors and head of the North Carolina Conscription Bureau during the Civil War.

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HERTFORD VOTING DISTRICTS: 1830-60

Polling Places: 1830-60

Hertford Countians voted at five places during the 1830-60 period.

Polling places were located at Winton, Murfreesboro, Saint John's and Pitch Landing throughout the period.

Bethel, later Harrellsville, became a polling place in 1850, in place of Pitch Landing. "However, later in the year, Pitch Landing again replaced Bethel as southeastern polling place. In 1854, Harrellsville was added to the four other points as a polling place.

Elections were important times. They were held every year for some public offices.

The County Court appointed election officials for each polling place, and politicking was spirited at the polls.

Results of elections were usually entered into a voting record book and were also immediately sent to party newspapers in Raleigh.

Winton polling place usually had the largest vote in the county, although Murfreesboro at times was first. Pitch Landing was usually third, but sometimes Saint John's vote was larger.

About 700 Were Voters

During the entire 1830-61 period, Hertford County—with rare exceptions — returned majorities for the Whig Party in national, state, and local elections.

The total vote during the entire period varied between 450 and 700 votes.

North Carolina elected Whig governors during the 1840-50 period. Democrats thereafter. But Hertford County voters continued to give majorities to the Whigs.

Representative election results. In 1836, Whig gubernatorial candidate Edward Dudley received 376 Hertford votes to 264 for Democrat R. D. Spaight. Dudley was elected. (Governors were elected for two-year terms.)

In the presidential election that year, Hugh White, Whig candidate, got 253 Hertford votes to Democratic Martin Van Buren's 214. Van Buren was elected.

In 1840, Whig gubernatorial candidate John M. Morehead got 394 votes in Hertford to 231 for R. M. Saunders. Morehead was reelected to a second term.

In 1850, the year the Democratic Party recaptured the North Carolina Governorship, Hertford gave unsuccessful Whig candidate Charles Manly 270 votes to 171 for Democrat D. S. Reid.

In 1860, when the Whig Party had split apart on the secession issue, Hertford cast its majority for John Bell, the southern Whig candidate. He got 418 votes to 248 for John Breckenridge, the southern Democratic candidate and 20 for Stephen A. Douglas, the "regular" Democrat candidate.

Transportation (Continued from Page 1)

then until the Civil War and afterwards it was operated by Boone Harrell and his family. It was located between Harrellsville and Cofield, where the present-day Wicacoan River bridge is located. During the entire 1842-60 period, the Harrells received \$80 a year for keeping the ferry. In 1854, Harrell sought to give up the job. The County Court appointed a committee to "entreat" with him to continue as keeper and authorized that a new ferry boat or "flat" be built. In that year, Harrell died, and Mrs. Ann E. Harrell took over as Hertford's only woman ferry keeper. She was still keeping the ferry, receiving \$80 a year, in 1860.

TAR LANDING FERRY—This ferry crossed the Wicacoan River at present-day Harrellsville and was kept by the namesake of that town — Abner Harrell. He received \$30 a year as keeper of the ferry. First mention of the ferry is in 1847, when Harrell was paid \$14.67 for its keep. After that, he received \$30 a year. In 1854, he received \$45.25 for building a new boat for the crossing.

PETTY'S SHORE FERRY—This ferry crossed at another ancient Chowan River crossing south of present-day Tunis. In 1858, it was announced that a new ferry had begun operating here and ferry rates were set for it. Other ferries, privately-run, crossed the Chowan at Winton and at "The Harbor," near present-day Christian Harbor in the southeastern section of the county.

Meherrin Names

Place names along the Meherrin River have gradually fallen into disuse as the river's commercial use declines.

Even as late as 1915, however, there were ten place names listed on a soil survey map of Hertford County along the Meherrin in the county.

They included (starting from the mouth of the river and going westward): Parker's Ferry, Mitchell's Landing, Dunn's Fishery, Sear's Wharf, Mudhole Fishery, Hill's Ferry, Griffin Landing, High Hill, Worrell's Landing, Skinner's Bridge Landing and Murfreesboro.



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