

## Bladen Mother of 55 N. C. Counties

As Bladen county, mother or grandmother of Harnett county and 54 other North Carolina counties, is celebrating its 200th anniversary, it seems fitting to publish the brief sketch of the county's history written by Hector H. Clark for the Bi-Centennial edition of the *Bladen Journal*. It follows, but only that part which is of more general interest:

### The Cape Fear Dominant Factor In Early Settlements

Bladen county's settlement, growth and development are bound as that of all other sections, in modes of transportation and communication. In the day of settlement of the county, rivers were the only means of carrying commerce in quantities and to any appreciable distance. The movement of all products was towards some water course. Hence the settlement of Bladen along Cape Fear and South rivers. The Cape Fear being much larger, attracted more of the early settlers, but along both rivers the early settlers patented lands, developed plantations, built their colonial homes, owned slaves and came to be what we revere as the aristocracy. The people who lived some considerable distance from the rivers were said to live in the "backwoods."

Attempts were made in 1732 in the General Assembly to erect two new "precincts", Onslow and Bladen, really equivalent to counties. These attempts as well as others in 1733 were unsuccessful. When the matter was brought before the council in Edenton it was again declined and it was said "In Bladen there are not over three freeholders, Nathaniel Moore, Thomas Jones and Richard Singletary, and not over 30 families, including these freeholders." The proposal was finally passed November 11th, 1734, and signed by the Governor March 1st, 1735.

At the same time it was provided that land grants might be paid to the Crown in commodities at prices fixed some of which are: Rice 10 shillings per 100 pounds, to be fit for the European market; well dressed deer skins, 2 shillings and 6 pence per pound; tobacco at 8 pence and 4 shillings per pound, (the latter from Albemarle county only.)

A letter addressed by a missionary of the Church of England to the Bishop of London is indicative of the character and disposition of the early settlers of Bladen. He urged that "thirty pounds be paid to some sober clergyman to be sent over to Bladen precinct, where the Governor is settled at Brunswick (now Brunswick county) and where he tells me in his neighborhood are people well disposed to join with him in making up a handsome maintenance." The requirement that the clergyman be sober, and the disposition to contribute probably accounts for the type of citizenship which the county has always boasted of.

### First Court House

In 1738 the first court house was located in Elizabeth. It is said that the location was about 3 miles up the river from the present site of Elizabethtown at a place which is yet known as Court House Landing. Whether this is true I do not know, but Mrs. John McDowell has a large key, evidently very old, and it is reputed to be the key to the old court house which stood at Court House Landing. Doubtless this key will be exhibited with many other interesting relics on the day of the celebration.

### Magistrates In 1738

The names of the magistrates commissioned in 1738 will be of interest as many of them are identified with present day families, plantations and localities. They were: Matthew Rowan, Roger Adams, Thomas Johnston, William Forbes, Thomas Locke, Nathaniel Moore, William Maxwell, John Clayton, James Lyon, John Grange, Griff Jones, Hugh Blanning, Samuel Woodward, Robert Hamilton, Joe Davis.

### Counties Cut Off

In 1748 the people of the Pee Dee asked that a new county of Anson be formed. It was represented that they had 800 families, and they claimed that the Court House of Bladen was 100 miles distant from them. Anson was formed from Bladen, and again in 1752 another slice was taken to form Orange county.

An order was made in 1761 for the laying out of a town in Bladen to be called Cross Creek, "for the benefit of the back inhabitants of the Province." The location was and is the head of navigation of the Cape Fear river. Doubtless the town was laid out for the convenience of the people up country who hauled their produce to the nearest point where it could be shipped by water to a seaport.

### Court House Moved

The General Assembly of 1774 named commissioners to build a court house at Elizabeth and to remove the county court to the county town. It may be that his was the first action taken toward the removal of the court house to which I have referred. In April 1778 the Assembly ordered that a court house be built at Elizabeth Town after it was found that the commissioners appointed to this duty in 1774 had failed to discharge their trusts. William Salter, Abraham Barnes and James Clardy were named to let the contract.

### 300 At Capture

Although Bladen was sparsely settled when the Revolutionary War came in July, 1775, there were 300 of the Bladen Militia in the capture of Fort Johnson below Wilmington. They witnessed the departure of the last Royal Governor, Josiah Martin, when he found refuge aboard a British vessel. Details of the Battle of Elizabethtown and other engagements in which Bladen county patriots fought heroically will be written by some other.

### Members House Commons

The Bladen members of the House of Commons of the General Assembly in the colonial period from 1734-35 to 1775 were: Hugh Blanning, John Dolleson, Sir Richard Ezerhard, William Forbes, William Bartram, Thomas Robeson, Joseph Clark, Isaac Jones (who dedicated the land of Elizabethtown), Robert Howe, Hugh Waddell, Joseph Williams, William McRee, John Gibbs, Thomas Thomas Robeson, John Burgin, William Salter and James White. In the Provincial Congresses, 1774-1776 the delegates were: William Salter, Walter Gibson, James White, Thomas Owen, Thomas Robeson, Jr., Nathaniel Richardson, Martin Colville, James Council, Thomas Amis.

### Robeson Is Cut Off

In 1786 Robeson county was formed out of Bladen and in 1788 the Great Swamp section was added to Robeson. So great a slice was taken by Robeson that it is now often called the State of Robeson. In 1789 a part of Bladen was given to Cumberland. In all parts or all of the counties of Anson, Brunswick, Columbus, Cumberland, Orange and Robeson. All of them have produced the finest type of citizenship and have developed and prospered. They have furnished to the state and nation great statesmen and illustrious men and women. Worthy daughters of a noble mother.

The Federal census of 1790 gave Bladen 837 free white males over 16 years and 830 under 16; 1863 free white females; slaves 1676.

### After War

Chaotic conditions existed throughout the country after the Revolutionary war principally because the national, state and local governments had not become well ordered. Until a semblance of orders was obtained and definite policies were advanced there was no progress, and people were concerned not with development but with existence. When recovery began generally, Bladen secured its fair share and its people depended largely on the production of tar, pitch, turpentine, staves, headings, shingles and lumber. The shipment of these products was by river to Wilmington.

### John Owen, Our Governor

In 1828 Bladen county furnished its first and only Governor to the state when John Owen was elected. Governor Owen was a man of great ability. Addressing the General Assembly he urged better transportation facilities, particularly opening of communication between Albemarle Sound and the ocean. He laid before the Assembly what was being done in New York, New Jersey and New England in the schools and urged that it was a false system of economy which held the

hands of our legislators from establishing public schools. He pleaded for relief against unhealthy conditions in the eastern counties, and attributed the condition to the want of drainage. His proposed remedy was that the state own its own slaves and use them in cleaning out the rivers for transportation and in draining the swamp lands in the east. Governor Owen must have deeply appreciated the value of transportation in development. At that time when railroads were new he proposed that a commission be appointed to ascertain the costs of the Fayetteville and Yadkin railroad.

Two years before the expiration of Governor Owens term he entered the race against Judge Mangum for the United States Senate. During a bitter campaign Mangum wrote a letter to Owens challenging him to a duel. The challenge was later withdrawn and Owens retired from the race.

Information from a reliable source is that the challenge of Governor Owens by Judge Mangum was brought about by John Chavis, a remarkable negro, whose life finds no parallel. On a wager that a negro could not be educated he was sent to Princeton University. He completed his education and returned to Granville county near the Wake county line. He was licensed to preach in the Presbyterian church and preached to both whites and blacks. At the same time he opened a school where he taught the whites during the day and negroes at night. Among the products of his school one became Governor of the state, another became United States Senator, two of his students were sons of Chief Justice Henderson.

### James I. McKay

James I. McKay of Bladen was elected to the United States Congress in 1834. He became chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, and was an acknowledged tariff expert. His tariff act prepared with Robt. J. Walker, Secretary of the Treasury became an administration measure. So satisfactory was it that no effort was made for fifteen years for its change.

James I. McKay's claim to high philanthropic purposes and broad vision can be gained by reference to his will, which was admitted to probate in 1855. In one item he devised Bellfont plantation—1400 acres near Elizabethtown—to his wife, Eliza Ann McKay; during her widowhood then "in trust for the county of Bladen on the express condition that the said plantation shall be used as an experimental farm, and that the poor of the county, and poor and indigent orphans, who are directed by law to be bound out, should be kept, maintained and employed on said plantation under such rules and regulations as the county court shall prescribe." In another item of the will his executors were directed to hire out certain slaves for 2 or 3 years to raise a fund for their transportation to the free colony of Liberia, and to take requisite means for their transportation under the direction and patronage of the Colonization Society.

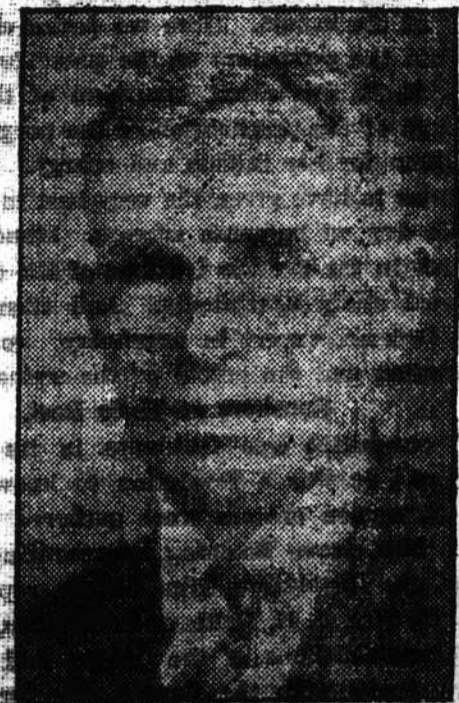
### Railroads Come In

About this time a new form of transportation was becoming popular. It was destined the change would trend the growth and development of the counties. Especially did it effect Bladen in halting growth along the rivers. Railroads were building. The Wilmington, Charlotte and Rutherford Railway was chartered in 1853. Building started from Charlotte and the road reached the point to where a town was located. This town is Abbottsburg and is named in honor of Joseph C. Abbotts, who came along with the railroad in 1863 and established a large lumber business. Almost at once Abbottsburg became the largest town in Bladen county. For several years the railroad company maintained its shops there. They were removed after the line reached Wilmington in 1873.

After the railroad came through other towns grew up along the line. In short order Bladenboro, Clarkton, Council and other towns began to grow. The railroads attracted freight and passenger transportations from the rivers. During the next fifty years the people looked on the railroads as the arteries of commerce. Consequently the towns along the railroads grew and the surrounding county was developing rapidly.

**Archie McL. Graham.**—He is known to his thousands of friends as "Archie" Graham. Apart from his successful candidacy a few years ago for representative from Sampson county to the General Assembly, he has never before sought political preferment. However, he has been distinguished as a long-time member of the Equalization Board, which apportioned the State's school funds among the counties and districts under the former regime, and as a member of the present School Commission, which has almost absolute control over the State's school funds under the new regime. As a member of both bodies, he has served efficiently and shown a high degree of good horse-sense.

Mr. Graham, the latest entry in the Congressional race of the Third District, is a son of the late most highly esteemed Dr. Graham, who practiced for decades at Wallace, Duplin county. His mother was one of the distinguished Murphy family of Pender county. His residence as a lawyer has been Clinton. He is therefore



**A. McL. GRAHAM**  
Clinton, N. C.  
Candidate for Congress in  
Third District

and Frank Graham, presidents of the State University.

be adjudged from the fact that he is a first cousin of both Edward Graham most intimately associated with the three westernmost counties of the Third district.

The intellectuality of Mr. Graham, so far as heredity determines it, may "Archie" is a friendly fellow, puts on no airs, makes no pretensions to flowery oratory, but is a downright worker. The editor of *The Voice* knows Archie Graham and knows that he is thoroughly dependable. There was no trouble about collecting for the hundreds of legal advertisements published for him in the old *Sampson Democrat*. When he got ready to pay, he would come into the office, call for the book, credit those charges he intended to pay and sum them up and write a check for the total. In that respect he has only one match in the writer's experience and that is Wade Barber of Pittsboro. They said whether they had collected or not— not leaving, as some lawyers do, despite a sense of justice, the papers to lose items for which the lawyers and not their clients had been reckoned as responsible.

That is the kind of man Archie Graham is, but he has some mighty good men running against him and the Democratic voters of the Third district will have to do their own choosing.

### CANDIDATE FOR JUDGE FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT



**CHARLES ROSS**  
of Harnett County

Democratic Primary, June 2, 1934

"Mr. Ross by nature and training has the qualities of head and heart which will insure the maintenance of the high standards the people of the Fourth Judicial District are accustomed to expect."

Harnett County Bar