

## SOME HALIFAX COUNTY HISTORY

**Enfield and Halifax Scenes of Many Early Events—Dr. T. W. M. Long's Recent Address Upon Willie Jones and John Paul Jones at Unveiling of Markers to Them at Halifax a Few Weeks Ago.**

The records of no county in North Carolina are more redolent of historic interest than Halifax. The points of interest in those records are of state-wide significance, and several of them of national and international interest. The launching of John Paul Jones into the naval contests of the Revolutionary War concerns not only America but England and France as well. And no Revolutionary character in North Carolina had a deeper or more widely extended influence upon the attitude of Patriots and the course of patriotic endeavor in the State 160 years ago than had Willie Jones. But let's look at the early history of the oldest town in Halifax county and one of the oldest in all the midland coastal belt.

### Enfield In History

Doubtless many Enfield citizens do not realize the antiquity of their community nor the dignity to which it arose in later colonial days. It is an older town than Halifax. Indeed, it had attained its greatest prestige before Halifax was conceived.

#### When the State's Divisions Were Precincts, Not Counties.

In the earlier days of the Colony the divisions were called "precincts." "County" was a later comer. Edgecombe, Northampton, and Granville precincts occupied the territory west of the Chowan River and rather indefinitely westward. Edgecombe precinct then embraced what are now Edgecombe and Halifax counties. Enfield was the precinct center, corresponding to the present-day county seat.

But even a greater dignity had the ancient village. It was the seat of the court of an early district embracing Northampton, Edgecombe and Granville precincts, a principality in area at that time. The recent discovery on the writer's part of this fact explained what he had long wondered about—why Lord Granville's agent Corbin was dragged by irate citizens from his home below Edenton the eighty miles to Enfield and jailed. Moore's school history of other days told of the incident, but did not explain why he was brought to Enfield. But it was in Moore's two-volume history that I discovered the explanation.

But Enfield was to lose its prominence. In 1757, Edgecombe was divided into Edgecombe and Halifax counties. Enfield was in Halifax but not suitably located for the county-seat. The site of Halifax town was chosen as the county seat. Enfield soon lost its chief dignity as the seat of the district court. Yet it still long remained the largest village in that quarter of the State. It became and continued to be for a century and a half the residence of prominent planters and was dignified as the residence of the one North Carolinian who held more offices of dignity than any other North Carolinian. It was John Branch.

#### Governor John Branch.

It is hard to decide just which is the more fitting title for that former distinguished citizen of the State. He was governor of his State, representative in Congress, U. S. Senator, Secretary of the Navy, marking North Carolina for a continued distinction for representation in the Cabinet in that portfolio. Branch, Dobbins, Daniels are North Carolina's contribution to the post of Secretary of the Navy, and it will be a surprise if the State ever secures any other membership than that in the Cabinet—that post is marked for North Carolina. Governor Branch had early represented his State in both houses of the General Assembly. Among his other service was that of Military Governor of the recently acquired territory of Florida.

#### LaFayette's Visit to Enfield.

Washington, in touring the Southern States, had visited Willie Jones at Halifax, but when LaFayette visited the country in 1824 Willie Jones had been dead 23 years and Halifax had lost its chief ornament. Or perhaps Enfield better fitted in with the close of a day's journey. Anyway, the French Marquis and Friend of Washington spent the night at Enfield—in the Whitfield house, a two-story residence which stands today practically as it stood on that occasion. I first saw it 39 years ago. I saw it ten days ago. There is little difference in its state now and in 1895. It seems good for many more decades. Marquis LaFayette on the morning after his night in the Whitfield house, addressed the people of Enfield and perhaps a number of prominent visitors from the porch of that old residence.

At a distance to the rear of this house is the grave, I was told, of Governor Branch. Hard by the elegant home of Mr. R. B. Parker, father of Judge R. H. Parker, stood the residence of Governor Branch. His Enfield estate comprised much of the western

section of the present Enfield. Thirty-nine years ago the old town was notable for its number of elegant homes and for its solid citizenry. The old stock which dignified the town for so many years—the Parkers, Hunters, Bells, Whitakers, and others are now far from the ascendancy of other days, for Enfield has become a considerable town, composed chiefly of new-comers.

#### Those Young Judges.

It has been Enfield's misfortune not to be able to retain as residents the many bright young men who have grown up there since the sixties. I wrote sometime ago of the old town's nest of baby judges two-score years ago. R. H. Parker, Judge Barnhill, and Recorder Daniel Bell of Pittsboro were all infants during my residence in the old town in 1895. They all have risen to prominence in other towns. Anyway, you cannot find three finer men and more capable judges to their age than those three former Enfield tots. I will speak elsewhere of some of the present-day Enfielders.

### The Prominence of Old Halifax In N. C. History

I do not have to write a word about the history of the old town of Halifax, made prominent in the first place by the residence of Willie Jones, whose residence there probably accounted for the choice of that burg away up near the Virginia line as one of the State's early capitals. All North Carolina histories give accounts of the happenings at Halifax, and to them the reader is referred for definite accounts.

#### Dr. T. W. M. Long's Address

But I have before me a document that interests me and which, I believe, will interest the average reader of *The State's Voice*. It is a copy of the address of Dr. and Senator T. W. M. Long, of Roanoke Rapids, on the occasion of the recent unveiling of markers at Halifax in honor of Willie Jones and John Paul Jones, notable naval hero of the Revolution. I have read the address two or three times, hoping to find a section or two I could omit without loss to the paper as a whole. Every line of it interests me and I have just about decided to publish it as a whole.

Dr. Long and his brother, former Senator Lunsford Long, now a resident of Raleigh, are descendants of General Allen Jones, brother of the Patriot leader Willie Jones, and it was very fitting that he was selected to make the address of the memorial occasion. I was chatting with him at his lovely Roanoke Rapids home one evening last week, enjoying the traditions of Halifax and the Joneses when Mrs. Long, who by the way is a twin sister of Solicitor and former Senator Burgwin of Northampton county, found the copy of the address and gave it to me. I only thought to get a few pointers from it, but here it is. Read it yourself.

But let me say first that "Willie" Jones is not what it appears to be. The "Willie" was the name of a Church of England minister in Old Virginia where the father of Willie and Allen Jones lived before coming to North Carolina and settling in Northampton county. The name is pronounced "Wiley"—Wiley Jones. See if you can keep from calling him as the spelling suggests. I find it hard to do. But here is the address:

### The Story of Willie Jones and John Paul Jones.

#### Historic Events of Halifax Town.

Halifax, the ancient town where we gather today, has been the scene of many stirring events. Here lived and lies buried Joseph Montfort, the first, last, and only Grand Master of Masons of, and for, North America. Here Flora McDonald's husband was imprisoned. Here the Halifax resolves were written. Here LaFayette was entertained. Here the great Washington likewise was received by admiring throngs. Here Cornelius Harnett read first to our people, or our mother Commonwealth, the Declaration of Independence. Here the first constitution was written. Here for the last time in our beloved State was heard the notes of "God Save the King" as Cornwallis and his troops traveled northward to Yorktown. Here lived William R. Davie, the founder of the University. Here met Willie Jones and John Paul, whose memories we honor today. Who and what manner of men were they?

#### Willie Jones Educated in England.

Willie Jones, son of Robin Jones and Martha Cobb, was born in Surry County, Virginia, May 15, 1741. Robin Jones was commissioned as attorney

and agent in the province of North Carolina for Lord Granville about 1720. He sent his sons, Allen and Willie, at an early age to England to school, completing their education at Eton College. Willie, on the completion of his studies, remained in Europe until the early sixties, returning to North Carolina a well-rounded man of the world, who had sworn himself to a life of celibacy. During his sojourn abroad he had witnessed the deplorable conditions of the masses of the people in England and on the continent of Europe under strongly centralized autocratic governments which, no doubt, shaped his political philosophy that so clearly stood out in his maturity.

#### He Moves to Halifax.

While abroad his father died, and Willie Jones upon his return to this country found himself a man of great wealth. His brother, Allen, had married and built a home at Mt. Gallant, in Northampton County, and Willie inherited his father's old home, the "Castle." However, he decided that he would rather live in the town of Halifax, and so tore down the "Castle" and out of its timbers built for himself his home at Halifax. The "Grove" he called it. He designed it himself and built it in an enormous grove of oaks. It was a large house, solid and substantial in appearance. On the first floor he had built a bay window, a luxury in those times, and fitted it with large plate glass panes brought at great expense from France. He wanted this so that he could get a good view of his private race track. His house was not unusual in appearance, or for its size. The rooms were large and roomy, and in one there was a secret cabinet that was, no doubt, the safe depository for many an important paper in the stirring times in which the owner of the stately mansion figured prominently.

Halifax was in colonial days and during the Revolution the political Mecca of North Carolina, and this old home of the then political leader was the council hall of many an important meeting. In it George Washington visited. In it Cornwallis and Tarleton figured. In it governors, congressmen, senators and political wire-pullers laid their plans and worked out the destiny of Carolina.

#### Breaks His Vow Not to Marry.

Here in this house Willie Jones lived alone for awhile, but always surrounded by a gay and brilliant society. In those days when North Carolina was yet under English rule and the day of independence hardly dawning, he cared but little for politics. It was not until the spirit of independence spread through America that he forsook the life of a gay society bachelor to take up arms in the battles of his country and State. Forsaking his life of celibacy in June 1776 he married Mary, the daughter of Joseph Montfort, of Halifax. This marriage was eminently successful and he never regretted having rescinded his vow of celibacy. His wife was more than twenty years younger than he, and it was said that when she first saw him on his return from England and she was but a child she said, "I am going to marry that man." And she did. Many stories are told of her wit and as many more of her beauty and goodness. All who knew her loved her. She had five children to live to maturity, and they were all devoted to their mother. She had all the graces of a charming lady and was, in fact, a remarkable woman.

Just about the time of his marriage rumors of revolution were heard and these were stirring times in North Carolina. He entered the political arena where he was to play a leading part, until he should quit the stage forever. He made his first public appearance at the provincial congress in New Bern August 28, 1774. He was always backward about appearing before the public, and never before had so appeared, and probably never would have except in the cause of independence, and he went to this congress in the interest of independence, as did his younger brother, General Allen Jones. He was not a member of the next provincial congress, but was working all the while in the cause of independence as only he knew how to work.

At the fourth provincial congress which met in Halifax, April 4, 1776, Willie Jones was a delegate from the burrough of Halifax, but John Webb had to be chosen as a substitute because of the absence of Jones occasioned by a visit to Georgia as superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Congress, an office which the Continental Congress had in the meantime bestowed upon him.

#### President of Council of Safety.

At this time he was elected president of the Council of Safety, virtually governor of North Carolina. This Council was very active and efficient, especially in promoting the cause of war. Its duties seem to have embraced all forms of governmental activity and in no sphere was it lacking. It appointed officers of all kinds, heard cases and complaints, authorized the expenditure of monies, issued pardons, called elections, arranged for the buying of ma-

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