

# The State's Voice

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## GLIMPSES OF ORANGE COUNTY AND HILLSBORO HISTORY.

It would require a volume to do justice to the history centering about Hillsboro. Accordingly, this article comprises mere glances at it. For more than a century the citizens of the old village frequently dominated the policies of the State, were powerful in National councils, and even won international fame. The opinions of Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin are of international renown. A roll of the citizens of Hillsboro who have figured prominently in State and Nation itself would be impressive, several of whom would each require an article as long as this can be to set forth their services to the State and Nation, and to reveal their exalted characters.

### The Geographical Setting.

Orange County has been whittled down till it is only a mere slice of its original area. In its earlier history it embraced a great area in the northern central section of the State. Chatham and Alamance which we now conceive to have been the scene of the Regulator activities were parts of Orange. The Battle of Alamance gets its name from that of the Creek near which it was fought, as does the county. The Regulator trouble became a reason for the close trimming of the county's size, Chatham, for instance, being cut off the very year of the Battle of the Alamance. Orange was formed in 1751 from parts of Johnston, Granville, and Bladen.

It was the first of the truly piedmont counties. It will intrigue the reader to attempt to picture the virgin forests into which the settlers of the first half of the 18th century had penetrated to make their homes. They had trekked from eastern North Carolina and Virginia, leaving behind all means of water transportation and all touch with the old country and the growing commercial emporiums on the coast or along the navigable rivers. It was a lovely land into which they had come, a land through which the Haw, the Deep, the upper Tar and their tributaries flowed, a land of beautiful hills and lovely valleys.

### The Virgin Forests

We can find scarcely anywhere in the State forest land to compare in appearance with that which then extended from the foothills to the mountain tops. It was of forest area of great oaks, scattering chestnuts, poplars, and towering pines, punctuated with maple, gum, and dogwood, with here and there open areas dominated largely by the wild pea, somewhat akin to milady's sweetpeas of the spring garden. The axe had not done any of its deadly and transforming work. Almost every tree was a seedling and so nearly of the same planting period that they dominated the soil and prevented a younger growth which would have impeded the vision of the traveler. When fire destroyed such a growth, the whole tree died, and there were no clustering sprouts. Only fire and natural death removed the forest giants. No axe chopped down young or old oak to leave a stump which would send up a cluster of sprouts. I am inclined to believe that the prevalent cedar of the area is an interloper with the early settlers, and not indigenous. It was an open country and much more easily cleared for tillage than the virgin lands of today are.

Consequently, the early settler soon had an area of trees girdled and the beginning of a plantation established.

Much of the land of greater Orange is of flinty surface, the bright tobacco type of the belt. But across the present Chatham, from Pittsboro westward, extended a streak of heavy red soil. Either was fertile when covered with the virgin stratum of humus, but both types of soil, because of the prevalence of hills and dales, were easily worn out and gullied. Accordingly, it is presumable that the settlers at first had a comparatively easy task to make the food needed. But money was almost as scarce as hens' teeth, and was hard to get to pay the taxes levied. When Edmund Fanning, register of deeds for Orange, began to burden further the hard-pressed settlers, by extortionate demands, we see the beginnings of the smouldering fire which broke out into the Regulator war.

### The Beginnings of Hillsboro.

I do not know whether the name Orange was first applied to this area during the reign of William of Orange or was suggested by one or some of the Scotch-Irish settlers that came from north Ireland, to which section the name Orange is applied because

of Williams's settling those Scotch over there. Anyway, the county gets its name from that champion of Dutch and English freedom—in some respects England's greatest king and soldier. In the Alamance and west Chatham section many of the "Pennsylvania Dutch" (Germans) had located. Altogether, the settlers were of types to resent tyranny.

The site of the new town was located on the north bank of the Eno river, a branch of the Tar, I believe. One of the first settlers was William Churton, a surveyor for the Lords Proprietors (My authority says for Lord Granville, but I am not sure that the Proprietors had made any separate allotments of territory to each other. Lord Granville got an eighth of the territory of both Carolinas on the surrender of their interests to the king by the other seven proprietors in 1663.) Churton laid out the town. Main street is named for him.

Now consider the great city of Rochester, N. Y., and the still village-like Hillsboro and marvel that the former gets its name from one of the earlier inhabitants of Hillsboro, Nathaniel Rochester, who bought a large tract on Cates Creek. In 1783, Rochester, left Hillsboro and moved to Hagerstown, Md., and from there to the present site of Rochester, N. Y., that was in 1783. The town that sprang up on his New York lands was named for him.

### How Hillsboro Was Named.

The new town started off as Corbinton, next becoming Childsburg, in honor of Lord Childs, attorney general of the colony. His unpopularity caused another change of name, to Hillsborough, in honor of Lord Hillsborough, secretary of state for the colony, who is said to have been a relative of Governor Tryon's wife—an indication that the name was in vogue in 1776.

As the county seat of Orange, Hillsboro became commercially and politically the most important town in central North Carolina. Salisbury will soon be looming up as a more westward center of influence and Charlotte as another. Salem, the creation of the Moravians, follows suit. Greensboro, Durham, Winston, etc., are still in the womb of the future. Pittsboro has its beginning 20 years later than Hillsborough.

### The War of the Regulation.

If the reader is not informed in any measure as to the history of the Regulators, I refer him to the histories of the State. But he will there find two views—one that the Regulator movement is utterly unrelated to the Revolutionary movement which followed four years later. Unfortunately, the leaders of the colony were not only in sympathy with the course of Governor Tryon but several of them were officers of the troops which Tryon led to Orange to smash the Regulators. Later when those leaders themselves became revolutionary and resisted the same oppression that the Regulators had earlier resisted, they were in no position to acknowledge the justice of the Regulators' cause. Some of the Regulators, after being harried by the troops led by the leaders of the Revolution, could not have been forced by any means to join with their former persecutors in the new movement. Some did, and it may be recalled that Dr. Geo. W. Paschal stated in this paper last summer that one of his own ancestors was both a Regulator, and a Patriot during the Revolution.

### A Conflict of Views Now Likely.

The second school of thought is that the Regulator movement was preliminary to the Revolution, and that the Regulators should be esteemed as beginners of the Revolution, or at least of a still-born revolutionary movement just as justifiable as the later one. Unfortunately, the descendants of the Regulators, till Dr. Paschal comes upon the scene, have not been writers of history; the descendants of the Revolutionary leaders, largely harassers of the Regulators, have been historically-minded and also alertly interested in sustaining the infallibility of their progenitors.

Right now a movement, headed by Attorney R. O. Everett, president of the Historical Society of Durham and Orange counties, is afoot to secure a recognition by the National government of the place of the Alamance Battle in the Patriot efforts of Colonial days, and an appropriation for a National park

about the site of the battle. It is not hard to foresee resistance on the part of descendants of the friends of Governor Tryon in 1771.

### Hillsborough the Scene of Rough Houses by Both Parties.

Anyway, Hillsboro was the scene of the acts which led Governor Tryon to lead an army against the Regulators. Fanning was seized and beaten. The court was broken up and the records marred. And after the battle, it was here reprisal was taken by the Governor. Here Few and Pugh, and others were hanged for participation in the Regulatory disorders and in the battle.

A few years later another Fanning, David, is to harass the ill-fated area with his Tories. Edmund Fanning, who had come to Hillsboro from New York, was a Yale graduate and a lawyer. After the trouble he moved back to New York. There seems no association between the two Fannings.

James Few, the leader who was hanged, was a native of Maryland. His parents brought him to the Hillsboro community when he was 13 years old. He was married in 1770, a year before he was hanged. It is possible that descendants of his are living. Whether the Few family which has furnished a University president are descendants of the same Maryland family is a question I should like to have answered.

### The Third Provincial Congress.

The second Provincial Congress and the Constitutional Convention had been held at Halifax in 1776. The Third Congress, part of the business of which was to establish some form of government for the

State, was held at Hillsboro in 1776. It was in honor of the State, as distinguished from the Colonial governors. This was Governor Burke, a youngster of only 30 or 31 years. Captured by David Fanning, he was imprisoned in Wilmington, but escaped, and contrary to an oath of parole he had given, returned to Hillsboro and resumed the governorship.

### Constitutional Convention of 1788.

When the constitution of the United States had been formulated it was offered to the states for ratification. North Carolina's convention to consider the matter was held at Hillsborough in 1788. That convention declined to ratify till a bill of rights, including religious freedom, should be inserted. Thus it was that North Carolina had no part in the first several months of the history of the United States—no part in the first election of George Washington as president. The convention held in Fayetteville later, given assurance of the requisite amendment of the constitution, did ratify. Rhode Island held out even longer. Through the act of that Hillsborough convention, North Carolina set a precedent which it is still willing to follow. She cannot be stampeded into secession, or other attitudes toward the constitution by the stampede of other states. November 7 last furnished the latest example of this State's determination to stand alone, if necessary, for principle's sake.

Hillsborough, thus it is seen, played a considerable role as capital of the State before Raleigh was even conceived, as did Halifax, New Bern, and Fayetteville.

### Hillsboro's Worthies.

If North Carolina should make a roster of its worthies, as King David did of his, citizens, if not natives, of Hillsboro, would form no inconsiderable portion of the whole list.

William Hooper, one of North Carolina's three signers of the Declaration of Independence, lived there and was clerk of the courts of several counties comprising the judicial district. Records in his hand may be seen at Pittsboro, of which court he was the first clerk. Hooper was originally from New Hanover, and one of his sons seems to have remained down there, becoming the father of the youngster who married Edward Jones' daughter, who in turn became the father of the second president of Wake Forest College, who is the grandfather of Mrs. Graves, mother of Louis Graves of the Chapel Hill Weekly.

Here lived Governor Abner Nash; here remained part of his descent to become useful and worthy

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