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## The Commerce of Edenton to the Close of the Nineteenth Century.

**Essay Winning The Hinton Medal at The Edenton High School This Season. Written by Miss Allie Gardner of The Ninth Grade.**

Webster defines commerce "an interchange of goods, productions, or property of any kind either by barter or by purchase and sale."

Commerce is foreign or inland, therefore for foreign trade there must be a suitable port, so a brief description of the little seaport of Edenton is the first historic point to be recorded.

The exact date of the settlement of Edenton is not known, but as early as 1658 there was considerable development about this point; the ease of access by land and water for adventurous settlers having made it a focal point of immigration.

Among its many names it was mentioned as "Ye Port of Roanoke" and because of its fertility it was considered the granary of the province. The creeks and rivers surrounding the town were the highways of travellers and freight, and the woods were the pastures, in which numberless herds of hogs and cattle browsed. Fish abounded in the waters, game in the forests. The woods well timbered with pine, oak, cypress and juniper were empurpled with rich clusters of delicious grapes; the orchards loaded with fruits, and the generous earth with slight culture yielded abundant crops of grain.

Free as the air about them, gentle in their manners, the women of this province shown resplendent with the graces of nature, and Lawson wrote in 1708 "that the women are the most industrious sex in the place, making a great deal of their cloth of their own cotton, wool and flax, so they have no occasion to run into merchants debt or lay their money out in stores for clothing."

"The inhabitants visited and traded oftener in boats than in other vehicles, being so familiar with the oar; and they could spread with dexterity to the wind the sails of almost any species of craft."

"Sweet Edenton! loveliest village of the plain; Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain, Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid, And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed."

### Commerce During Seventeenth Century.

Very vague are the incidents recorded during this century.

From its settlement to the year 1698 North Carolina's legislative body was called a Parliament, from 1699 it was called an Assembly.

Money was very scarce, therefore trade was carried on chiefly by barter, and quit-rents and other debts were often paid in marketable articles of country produce. Even damages in law were ordered by the Assembly to be paid in deerskins, hides and furs.

Albemarle's insulated position, the want of commercial facilities, the character of the soil and the climate kept the place free from

### Commerce During The Eighteenth Century

Between the years 1749 to 1775, the first commerce of any extent was carried on, many ships entering this port during this time.

In 1752 great quantities of tar, pitch, turpentine, staves, corn, tobacco, pork, beef, bacon and lard were exported. During this same year Bishop Spangenburg wrote in his Diary at Edenton the following: "Tobacco is raised in considerable quantities, but it is generally taken to Suffolk or Norfolk in Virginia. The Virginia merchants ship that which is fit and pay the Carolina farmers what they please. There are also large quantities of cattle taken to Virginia, but the North Carolinians do not get the profits; they are reaped by the Virginians. The same is the case with hogs. They are taken to Virginia, slaughtered, salted up, exported and sold as Virginia pork. It is taken to West India and traded for rum, sugar, molasses, etc., which the Carolinians buy paying money for it."

At this time money is not scarce, trade is brisk and the people contented. Pursuits are becoming diversified; there is more activity, men are becoming speculative and commercial.

From May 1767 to Aug. 1772 money was received from "Country Duties" on rum, wine and spirits to the amount of 3867, pounds.

The ship Amelia in July 1768 cleared with an assorted cargo, among which were three bags of cotton, the first cotton ever shipped from this port.

From January 1774 to 1775 the principal article exported to the coastways and to the Southern ports of Europe, Africa, and the West Indies, were, tobacco, common and green tar, pitch, turpentine, staves and headings, pine planks, boards and oak lumber, oars, shingles, raw deerskins, other skins, bacon and beef and pork, Indian corn, bread and flour, peas and beans, wheat, herrings and other fish, flax seed, wax, tallow, resin, rice, potatoes, honey, snake-root, hoops, and thirty pieces of mahogany.

"In 1771 eighty-five vessels with tonnage of two thousand seven hundred and thirty one, and three hundred and seventy-one men entered and cleared this port, and in 1772 ninety-five vessels with four hundred and fifty-eight men and in 1773 ninety-nine vessels with four hundred and twenty-four men."

About the time of the Revolution Edenton had a good foreign trade; those principally engaged in this were Messrs. Richard and Thomas Brownrigg, Robert Armistead, Benjamin Russel, Alex. Miller, John Little and Collins, Allen Dickinson. Some of the ships sailing were the "Sterling," "Roanoke," "Providence," "Betsy," John Liberty," "Two Brothers," and "Mary and Mary Anna."

Dr Dillard relates an interesting fact concerning the "Mary and Mary Anna." "Communication or traffic with neighboring

or distant points was carried on by means of batteaux and sail boat. Richard Brownrigg, owner of the Mary Anna, traded in lumber, staves and farm products. This ship once aided an English merchant vessel at sea. When the disabled vessel arrived in her home port, the owner presented Richard Brownrigg with a large silver tankard, upon which is engraved the following couplet: "Ye gift of ye owners of ye Mary and ye Mary Anna. To drink prosperity to North Carolina. On the other side is engraved the letter 'B.' This trophy is still held in the family."

After January 1, 1775 we would not import any East India goods or British manufacturers, nor export to Great Britain any tobacco, pitch, tar, turpentine, or any other articles, and even our women declared they would not drink any tea until the tax was removed.

On the 24th of July 1782, Captain Meredith from Bordeaux brought to our town two distinguished visitors, Baron de Poelnitz and his wife, Lady Anna Stuart, daughter of Earl Bute. They were passengers on his ship en route to Philadelphia.

In March 1776 a law was passed that no pork, beef, rice, flour, peas or bacon be allowed to be exported except in return for salt arms or ammunition actually imported in this province.

In 1794 Schooners "William's Industry," "Two Friends" and sloops sailed from this point to Baltimore and Philadelphia.

In 1799 there were forty-three arrivals and as many departures. The exports from this port in the year ending September 30, 1794 amounted to \$50,648.

At the end of the century we find it to be the golden age of social enjoyment and prosperity in North Carolina but on the high seas American ships were frequently subjected to wrong and indignities by British cruisers, which seized their cargoes or crews on various pretexts.

The pirates on the coast, the dangerous coastways and the unhealthy climate were the chief hindrances to the growth of Foreign commerce during this, the 18th century.

### Commerce During the Nineteenth Century.

There was at this period of our history a good trade between the West Indies and several of the Eastern towns; Edenton, the most important, was largely engaged in the shipment of staves, tar, pitch, lumber and provisions, importing salt and tropical stores in return; all this was ruthlessly stopped by the embargo laid by Congress. This extreme measure failed to bring England to any surrender to search the American ships, and as Americans were resolved for indemnity for the past and security for the future, war was declared, when two kindred nations wasted blood and treasure in a fruitless quarrel.

The Dismal Swamp Canal was to prove of great benefit to the eastern counties, but was yet unfinished, so all vessels bound to New York or Baltimore passed out to sea by Hatteras with all

its dangers to crew and cargo.

In 1819 the first steamboat entered our waters, "The Albemarle." It was used as a ferry boat between Edenton and Plymouth and carried the Raleigh mail. The trial trip was made in two hours and five minutes, a distance of twenty miles. Its schedule is still preserved. It was tendered President Monroe as a pleasure boat when he visited our town in 1819, for the purpose of inspecting the lower sound in reference to inland navigation.

In 1819 many schooners, sloops and vessels sailed to and from our port to Savannah, Philadelphia, Charleston, New York, West Port, Baltimore, South Quay, Bermuda Islands, Guadeloupe, St. Eustatia, Boston, Bristol, B. I. Some of these vessels were the schooners, "Elizabeth," "Governor Brooks," "Emanuel," "Caroline and Mary," "Sidney," "Susan," "Tabitha," "Six Sisters," "Triton," "Edenton" and the steamer Albemarle.

In 1822 from January 21st to February 11th, there were many arrivals and departures from this port, sometimes ten a day.

From October 26, 1828 to the end of the year there were thirty eight arrivals. Five came from foreign ports, namely: from the Island of Martinique, St. Barts and the West Indies.

In 1829 one hundred and twenty vessels came in. Forty three from these foreign ports the West Indies, Malaga, Gibraltar, St. Barts, Cadiz, Turks Island, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Madeira St. Thomas and St. Johns.

In 1830 one hundred and seven vessels arrived. Eleven came from foreign ports.

In 1831 fifty-five vessels arrived. Eleven came from the West Indies.

After hostilities had ceased between the two countries, it seemed a great thing to the people of the coast to once more enjoy the full benefits of trade and commerce. All foreign commodities were very scarce and costly. Salt was made on the seacoast in limited quantities, but of very inferior quality. It was very gratifying to the people to see the stores filled with goods of every description and commerce become brisk again in 1821.

The estimated value of exports in 1827 was \$5,000,000 from the Albemarle Section alone; but sad to relate "his prosperity is followed by the record that Edenton continues with Halifax to lose importance in the march of events, many villages surpassing them in inhabitants and trade."

The imports in 1829 were all manufactured goods, whiskey, salt, rum and wine, while the exports consisted of corn, tar, staves, turpentine and cotton. So great was the production of corn that three ship-loads went out in one week to Southern Ports.

In 1830, North Carolina had more shipping in the coasting trade than any other state except Virginia, and the commerce of Albemarle alone employed five times as much shipping as belongs to the whole state.

About this time the fisheries

near Edenton became a matter of

considerable interest, seines being used for this work. As many as 300,000 herring and 13,000 shad have been caught at one haul. The amount invested was \$300,000 giving employment for two months in the year to about 5000 hands and 200 vessels, consuming annually about 100,000 bushels of salt and putting up annually about 90,000 barrels of herring.

In 1836 the Dismal Swamp Canal was completed and ready for traffic. The trade of the town was soon connected by a new water course with the outer world. The dangerous voyages through the inlets and out into the ocean were by degrees abandoned, and almost all direct trade with the West Indies ceased. Our commerce then became chiefly inland; our goods were ordered from Baltimore and Norfolk, but the want of regular post routes limited the mails.

The Albemarle Steam Navigation Company had her boats plying between here and Franklin, Va., before the Civil War. Some of the boats were "The Stag," "Ela," "Curlaw," "Lota" and "Chowan." This was the only means of transportation from here to Virginia save by stage coach.

In 1861 came the cruel war, when fields no longer bore the rich harvest to ship North, when commerce became men, when fathers and brothers, clothed in the immortal gray, left home to give—not to sell—themselves for right, while the women spun, wove and fashioned garments for the children at home; and all honor to the men of Edenton, who sent the church bells to Richmond, that they might be cast into cannon for the defense of the country in response to Beauregard's call under the leadership of William Badham.

Cruisers swarmed along the whole coast, and it became a matter of great peril to send out any commodity by way of the ocean. This led to a scarcity of salt, sugar, coffee, molasses, and everything which had been formerly imported from Europe or bought of Northern merchants.

The war over, the blockade lifted, the South began to rise from devastation. The fields were again cultivated, the products shipped North.

In 1869 Hedrick & Brother introduced into our waters the first pound net, thus simplifying the fishing industry.

In 1879 the first telegraph line was brought to Edenton, and in 1881 the Norfolk Southern Railroad opened to Edenton, thus enabling her people to ship their product by rail to Norfolk instead of by sailboat.

In 1888 the Branning Manufacturing Company located at Edenton, manufacturing pine lumber, the product being shipped to Northern markets.

In 1896 the Edenton Ice & Coal Storage Company was established, manufacturing immense quantities of ice, which was so beneficial to the fishermen in preserving and shipping their fish to Northern markets.

The most important traffic

now is the shipping of cotton, lumber, fish, truck melons and poultry.

At the close of the nineteenth century a mighty change has come to the travel and traffic of our little town. Steam and electricity have triumphed over space. The iron lines have reached from the sea to the mountain barriers. From here to Virginia rush the vehicles of wealth and pleasure, and instead of the wagon train toiling slowly we see the mighty train dash by with speed comparable to that of the hurricane, bearing burdens of produce which would have proved to our ancestors, as "fixed and immovable as the everlasting hills."

The writer wishes to acknowledge the kindness of friends who have lent books and pamphlets and given facts concerning this subject.

References were found from "Iredell's Life and Letters," N. C. Reader, Dr. Dillard's "History of Edenton and its Environ" and "Wheeler's Reminiscences."

### Savage Siftings.

Rev. H. H. Butler filled his regular appointment at Oak Grove Sunday.

Misses Lucy, Mattie and Nellie Byrum had as their guests Sunday night Messrs. Wilbur Morris, Lin Rountree, Willie Barnes, Earl and Walter Barnes.

Mr. Paul Parker is spending a few days at his home in Lewiston.

Mr. Archie Lassiter accompanied Miss Allie Vann to Middle Swamp Sunday evening.

Mr. Lin Rountree and Miss Mattie Byrum called to see Miss Eva Barnes late Sunday evening.

Mr. Percy Hobbs accompanied Miss Pearl Benton home from Oak Grove Sunday evening.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Parker of Pamco, spent Sunday evening with Mrs. M. E. Jones.

Mrs. A. T. Beamon returned home Thursday from Portsmouth where she has been visiting her grandchildren.

Messrs. Vernon Beamon and Willie Barnes were out "dear" hunting Sunday morning.

Mr. Clyde Benton called to see Miss Blanche Lally Sunday night.

Messrs. Vernon Beamon and Vernel Hoggard were the guests of Miss Minnie Small Sunday night.

Miss Dixie Saunders was in town Monday evening.

Mr. J. O. Jones of Portsmouth, spent Sunday with his mother, Mrs. M. E. Jones.

Mr. Robert Parker of this place died on Friday June 12. Rev. H. H. Butler conducted the funeral Saturday evening. He was a successful member of Oak Grove Christian Church. He was 68 years of age, and leaves many friends to mourn his loss.

Mr. Henry Ellis died on Saturday June 13th, 1914, of the same neighborhood and was buried on Sunday evening.

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