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REPORT of CHARLES B. SHAW, Esq.

Engineer of the Literary Board, on the Drainage of the Swamp Lands of North Carolina.

To the President and Directors of the Board of Literature of North Carolina:

GENTLEMEN:—A period has arrived in the operations preparatory to the Drainage of the SWAMP LANDS, which makes it necessary to submit a memoir of the Surveys and Examinations, and to suggest for your consideration the plans and estimates which have been deduced from them.

On the reception of your instructions to that effect, such instruments were purchased as were necessary for the commencement of the work, and as soon thereafter as practicable, a corps of assistants procured for the surveys.

Pending the organization of field parties, examination was made in the county archives at Hyde Court-house, for evidence of title, on the part of the State, to retroceded lands. The only deed of that description was one from Sheriff *James Watson* to his Excellency *Gov. Williams*, for a large tract of 56,000 Acres, lying in the rear of the front patents on the east side of Pungo River, forming a part of a large tract of 200,000 Acres granted to *John Hall*, in 1795, known as the Hall Patent, and subsequently the property of *John G. Blount*, dec'd. to whose heirs & to Messrs. *Smallwood* and *Donnel*, the remainder of it now belongs.

A connected chain of title exists in the Hyde county records, from the State, thro' *John Hall*, *J. G Blount* and *Edward Harris*, to *William Orr*, for whose taxes the aforesaid tract of 56,000 Acres was sold and duly conveyed to the Governor, for the benefit of the State, on 1st Sept. 1801; and the same is now on record in the Office of the Secretary of State.

Among the deeds transmitted to me by the Board, from Raleigh, are also sundry re-conveyances of large tracts in Tyrrel county—one in particular for 40,000 Acres, on the West side of Alligator River, and East of Alligator Lake, and a second for 22,000 Acres of reverted land, lying near Pungo Lake, known as *Jones & Davie's* Patent. This latter tract lies North of the 56,000 Acre tract in Hyde. There is also good reason to believe that 40,000 Acres of land, never granted to any individual or company, will, upon examination, be found South of Alligator Lake, forming in part the North boundary of the Hall Patent.

It thus appears that no less than 158,000 Acres of land, belonging to the State, lie contiguous to, and are more or less injured by the redundant waters of Pungo and Alligator Lakes. The drainage of these Lakes, or a reduction of their waters, appeared therefore to be an important preliminary to any attempt at reclaiming the State lands, and examinations for that purpose became necessary.

The special appropriations by the Legislature, of $8,000 to the purpose of draining Lake Mattamuskeet, had been expended, just previous to my arrival in that district, in the enlarging of a Canal before existing from Lake Landing to Ysocking Creek. The Canal had already been opened, and the water of the Lake was slowly subsiding; but an extensive shoal at the head of the Canal, upon which the depth of water did not exceed a foot, made it evident that, below that depth, the Canal could have no effect, except by its extension through the shoal to the deep water of the Lake. The undoubted property of the Literary Board in the Lake flats when reclaimed, the probability of their re-imbursing any expense incurred in their improvement, and the certainty that the Ysocking Canal could not effect that purpose, occasioned the institution of surveys, to determine how it could best be accomplished.

These examinations were the first undertaken, and in obedience to your subsequent instructions, were made with much care.

Among several modes which suggested themselves for drawing off the Lake waters, was that by a Canal from the North side to a remarkable bend of Alligator River, where an enlargement and an increased depth of the stream would permit the reception of the diluvial matter deposited by the Canal without interruption, at least for many years, of its discharge, and without impediment to the navigation of the River. A small Canal, constructed at private expense, extended nearly the whole distance, and afforded great facilities in the execution of a survey which must otherwise have progressed very slowly, from the necessity of penetrating an all-pervasive and very dense underwood of gall berry, fetter-bushes, and brambles, mixed occasionally with reeds. This route is known as that of Spencer's Ditch. A second line which solicited examination and presented similar exemption from the difficulties which usually attend swamp surveys, was that of Blount's Ditch, extending also from the North margin of the Lake to Alligator River, and distant from Spencer's Ditch about 3 miles at each end. The third line surveyed was that of the large Ditch at the side of the Rosebay Turnpike, extending from the West end of the Lake to Rosebay Creek.

The line of the Ysocking Canal was also surveyed and levelled, and soundings were taken of its depth, with the purpose of affording to the Commissioners, should they require it, the information necessary to the completion of that work.

A random survey was also made from a deep part of Lake Mattamuskeet, opposite *James McCloud's* house, to East Bluff Bay, and triangles were thrown across East and West Bluff Bays, whereby the direction and length of Canals between them and the Lake might be determined with all sufficient exactness—avoiding thus the difficulties of penetrating the dismals, which would have rendered it impossible to complete the survey before the re-opening of spring, and might postpone the work, should it be found expedient to undertake it, to the next year.

Surveys and Levels were subsequently taken between Pungo River and Pungo Lake, and a line of exploration run into the State tract of 56,000 Acres, to ascertain its character and capability of being drained, and the proper plans for that purpose; the results of which will be communicated in another place.

Before describing in their proper order the details of these several operations, a few remarks will be offered, explanatory of the position of these Lakes and their effect upon the immense wastes which surround them. They invariably occupy the highest ground, their sites having in all probability, once been firm ground, and their basins excavated by the action of fire; successive growths of aquatic and other plants have by degrees still further elevated their margins, and made them the receptacles of pluvial water from the adjoining swamps in rainy seasons. To these swamps, in the dry weather which may succeed, their waters are returned, the loose spungy character and great capacity for moisture of a purely vegetable soil, attracting the Lake waters to a distance that would be incredible to those unacquainted with such localities.

Free evaporation from the general surface of these vast solitudes, is almost impossible from their umbrageous character; it is probably not more than half that which occurs in cultivated districts. The excess of moisture must consequently either be taken up to supply vegetable growth, or escape by slow filtration to the nearest stream whose dull meanderings are at variance with all the purposes of artificial drainage. After long continued rains, or under the influence of high winds, the Lakes overflow, and their contents are suddenly poured upon the already half submerged swamps; a continued motion, or *press* as it is termed, of the water, then takes place in the direction of the greatest declivity, until it reaches the vicinity of cultivation, where, the soil being of a less permeable nature, and sometimes more depressed, water accumulates to the depth of several feet, notwithstanding the greater facilities there afforded for its discharge and evaporation. The duration of this evil is increased, though its intensity is no doubt abated, by the slow arrival of these redundant waters, which, having few vents in the shape of natural streams, are compelled to seek low and soft places whereby they may find exit. From these two causes, slow evaporation, and almost imperceptible drainage, result an autumnal and winter climate of uncommon humidity with the concomitants of rheumatism and pleurisy. In summer, the conjoint effects of heat and moisture are felt in malaria and the attendant diseases.

The evident remedy of the evils is, the removal entirely, or in part, of the contents of these great elevated basins, by Canals or artificial rivers, which shall at the same time receive the surface water of the country. Their greater inclination, resulting from their directness, their regular form and the secondary Canals, to be constructed as the sales of public lands progress, will reduce the lands contiguous to a sufficient dryness for all the purposes of agriculture. The clearing and cultivation of the lands will remove in part, if not entirely, the sources of disease; and their unexampled fertility, when reclaimed, will afford ample means of subsistence at home, to those who are now compelled to seek it in new and remote territories. I have no purpose to occupy your time with descriptions of the swamp region, already well known from the Memoir of *Judge Murphy*, and the reports of Mesrs. *Fulton* and *Nash*; taking for granted that what has been so often described is now well understood. I will proceed at once to a brief detail of the results of the several surveys before alluded to.

Spencer's Canal was constructed for the improvement of private property, and commences half a mile from the north margin of the Lake; its width is 10 feet, its length 5 miles, and its depth varies from 1½ to 2 feet. The survey was made upon the Canal bank. At the point of commencement soundings were extended in a straight line into the Lake. Five feet water was found at the distance of 300 yards, and that depth is not increased more than one foot at the distance of a mile from the shore. Within a few yards of the Lake the land rises about a foot and a half. An alternation of very gentle ridges and depressions succeeds for nearly 2½ miles, the variation either above or below the Lake level seldom exceeding a few inches—the greatest depression being fifteen inches. The declivity towards Alligator River, is afterwards more rapid.—The first half mile is chiefly cultivated, and if thoroughly reclaimed from water, would be unsurpassed in fertility, producing at present with the most careless tillage, in good seasons, 8 or 10 barrels of Corn to the Acre. The two miles succeeding are heavily timbered, as is generally the unimproved belt of land around the Lake for the same width—the growth being cypress, black and sweet gum, and maple, with a luxuriant undergrowth of vines and flowering shrubs—Laurel & bay trees, with an undergrowth of gall-berry and fetter-bushes succeeded, followed by an extensive savanna overgrown with reeds and fetter-bushes, and interspersed with dwarf pines. These savannas are frequently devastated by fire; at other times they afford a valuable range to cattle and droves of hogs. The total fall from the surface water of the Lake to the ordinary water of Alligator River, is 4.818 feet. The reeds on the margin of the River indicate an occasional rise of 2 feet above this point, tho' during the flood of August last, the rise was probably 4 feet. The soil is easy of excavation, but difficulties exist in regard to the removal of the timber, and the interruption of water during the process of removing the earth.

Upon Blount's Ditch, appearances were similar to those allready described—the distance from the Lake to the river but 8 miles, and the fall 4.329 feet. Alligator River was surveyed between the mouths of these two ditches, and found to be extremely crooked, and of a very variable depth and width, altogether unsuited to the rapid conveyance of water. Spencer's Canal is the most suitable location on the North side; the River at its termination being 15 feet deep, and 15 feet wide, its width augmenting very fast as it is descended.

The tides as they are called, are mere accumulations of water under the effects of Northerly winds; in calm weather the River has probably very little fall before Spencer's Canal, the termination of which may be considered the termination of Albemarle Sound. It will be seen hereafter, that Pamlico Sound is about 5½ feet below Mattamuskeet, whence the difference of level of the two Sounds is ascertained to be 7 tenths of a foot, and not 3 feet as heretofore supposed. This result was to have been expected, as a fall of two feet from Albemarle to Pamlico Sound would create a constant and unstable current through Croatan Sound; instead whereof, it is at all times scarcely perceptible.

The Rosebay Turnpike Canal was next surveyed. This is at the West end of the Lake, the distance nearly 4 miles, and the fall 4.78 to a stake which is about 8 or 4 tenths above the ordinary water of Rosebay Creek; 5.20 may be assumed as the fall, the greater part of which occurs in the last mile, for which reason the depth of cut would be greater on the average than on other lines of greater declivity. Between the Lake and Rosebay there has been an extensive juniper swamp, indicating a sandy bottom, and I have heard that quicksand was encountered in digging the Canal. The Canal is about 20 feet wide and very shallow, its banks having in many places collapsed. The water is very shoal at its head, and for a variety of other reasons, not necessary to enumerate, I consider this the least eligible of the several proposed locations.

Ysocking Canal is that recently constructed for draining the Lake. The fund appropriated was evidently insufficient to accomplish a work of that magnitude; a part of it was necessary to purchase the right of way and the previously existing smaller Canal. As regards the actual labor performed there, I should suppose, from a very rough estimate, that it could not be less than 76,000 cube feet yards of excavation, of which the cost was something less than $5,000. No complaint can be made on the score of economy, but it is much to be regretted that the appropriation had not been larger, thus affording more latitude to the Commissioners in the selection of a suitable line. It does not become me to anticipate their report, but I believe it is now conceded by them, that with an extensive shoal existing, at either end of this Canal, and their exhausted means, they cannot accomplish their object.

I would recommend the expenditure of about $2,500 in removing the Mud Shoal, as it is called, in Ysocking Creek, and extending that Canal to the deep waters of the Lake; but I consider it too devious, even after those improvements, and of too irregular an inclination and section, to drain the Lake.

At Cypress Point, four miles West of Lake Landing, is the boldest part of the Lake shore. The depth of 5 feet may be had 200 yards from the margin. At the distance of 7 miles, as ascertained by our survey, there are two Bays of Pamlico Sound, one of which, East Bluff Bay, was sounded and exhibited a depth of 5 feet within a few yards of the marsh—the harbor capacious and secure, and having a general depth of 6, 7 and 8 feet. West Bluff Bay is divided from East Bluff Bay by Pungo Bluff, and is more remote from Cypress Point. It is also reported to be shoal and less secure as a harbor.

The examinations which have been made of Lake Mattamuskeet, have satisfied me that it ought to be drained; and, from the information as yet obtained, a Canal from Cypress Point to East Bluff Bay, would best attain that end. Previously, however, to deciding on the location, I would recommend an examination of the Harbors of West Bluff and Mount Pleasant Bay. The total fall from the Lake to Pamlico Sound, as ascertained by the levelling of Ysocking Canal, is 5½ feet to mid-tide; this fall in a distance of 7 miles, will give an inclination to the bottom of the Canal, of 78 100ths of a foot, or decimally expressed 0.000156. A Canal 35 feet at bottom, and 50 feet at the water surface, with 5 feet depth, would comprise an area of 212¼ square feet, the perimeter of the bottom and sides would be 55 feet, and the division of the former quantity by the latter, would give its mean depth, or what hydrodynamists term the radius of its section. The velocity generated by that inclination and mean depth, would be about two and a fifth feet per second, which multiplied into the area 212¼, and afterwards divided by 27, to reduce it to cubic yards, gives 17¼ as the quantity per second drawn from the Lake. This Canal would pass through the lands of *Blount*, *Donnel*, and *Smallwood* and others, now quite unimproved, and its capacity would require increase, with a view to pass off the accumulated quantity of water between the Lake and the Bay. A proportion of the expense would have to be defrayed by the owners of the land under the existing law, altho' the land reclaimed by the operation from the Lake would alone authorise it. About one cube yard per second must be the increased capacity of discharge for each additional square mile of improved land; and to provide for improvement on each side of the Canal to a distance of 2 miles, that the marginal lands might be drained without diminishing the flow of water from the Lake, the discharge at the mouth of the Canal must be 31¼ cube yards per second. This would be nearly accomplished, by making the Canal 60 feet wide at bottom and 75 at the water surface, at its embouchure. Such dimensions would give a discharge of 29⅝ cube yards.

An enquiry will now arise, whether some economy might not result from making the process of draining the Lake more gradual, thus giving the Canal only such dimensions as will drain off the Swampy waters, and preserve the reduced level of the lake, after it shall have been attained. Supposing the Lake waters to be lowered nearly to the Canal bottom, upon the occurrence of rain, as soon as the Canal was filled, there would be a heavy press of water back into the Lake, which would continue until the Canal water subsided below the Lake level.—The quantity of water so discharged into the Lake, would but slightly affect the level, and upon the discontinuance of rain, the flow from the Lake would recommence.—The Lake has been found, by my recent survey, to contain 36 square miles. One inch depth upon a square mile, requires a drain capable of venting one cube yard per second, for 24 hours. A Canal which would drain 17¼ cube yards per second, would reduce its waters one-fifth of an inch in 24 hours, and could the same head be maintained, would discharge 60 inches in 300 days: the time would be nearly doubled, however, in consequence of the continued reduction of the head, unless a more rapid discharge be afforded by an increased width at the lower end of the Canal, whereby an uninterrupted efflux may be afforded to the Lake waters.

If we suppose that by the expenditure of a small sum upon the Ysocking Canal, it can be made to discharge half the quantity of that to East Bluff Bay, their joint effect would accomplish the reduction of the Lake 4½ ft. in about 300 days; and supposing that a warm summer should evaporate one foot more of water than fell in the same time upon the Lake, its waters might be reduced 4½ ft. in eight months, and 3½ ft. below their present level in less than two-thirds of that time, or about 160 days; the precise period would vary according to that of the rapid evaporation, and whether it take place at the commencement or latter part of the period of discharge. If the dimensions of the Canal be restricted to a width of 60 feet, a slight diminution of the discharge from the Lake would occur during the heavy rains, which would, however, be more than compensated at other times, by the increased rapidity which would result from the more ample dimensions below, and consequently greater fall from the Lake when the lower sections of the Canal were not filled. If these Canals be executed, they will probably be undertaken by the slave owners in the neighborhood, where the yearly value of a slave's labor varies from 80 to 90 dollars. If clothing and subsistence be rated at 60 per annum, and one-fifth be added for contractors' profit, the daily labor of a slave will cost about one half dollar. From 500 to 600 cube feet per day is the ordinary work of ditchers in this country, according to the character of the ground. Taking the mean of the two, the mere excavation of each cube yard would be nearly three cents.—Supposing the two banks to be 20 feet wide at top, with a slope of one and a half to one, the mean distance of transportation at the upper end will be about 42 feet, and 51 at the lower end, averaging 46 feet, in which distance 3 men will easily transport what 2 can excavate. The removal of 2 cube yards would thus cost 15 cents, or 7½ per yard; but one-fourth must be added to this estimate for idle days and loss of time from bad weather, whence the price per cube yard becomes 9½ cents.

The area of a section taken midway between the head and mouth of the Canal, supposing the average cut to be 5½ feet, would be about 34 yards; which would give as the cost of one mile, at 9½ cents per yard, $5,682 80-100ths, and for 7 miles the sum of $39,776 60-100ths. The quantity of good land, which will be reclaimed from the Lake, will be 10,000 Acres, and the value cannot but exceed the expenditures, even after deduction of interest upon the capital expended between the construction of the Canal and the sale of the land.

To ascertain how much good land would be laid dry by the operation of draining down 3½ft. below the present level, a survey was first made of the Lake margin; after which, soundings were taken at the depth of 3½ feet which were surveyed by triangulation; and the quantity included between the present and lower margin, determined by the difference of the two areas.

The Lake bottom was also bored with a land auger to the depth of several feet at every sounding station. In some instances a few inches of sand were found overlying a deep vegetable soil, but in most instances sand was absent. Sand would be more generally fonnd at the surface of the soil, that being more exposed to the attrition of the water, whereby the vegetable matter would be removed, and the sand, from its greater weight, be left behind. The quantity of that matter must rather add to, than detract from the value of the soil. Some clay and red ashes are also found at the Lake bottom, intermixed with vegetable matter. All the soundings are properly registered, and, with the other field books, preserved for your inspection. A general Chart is in preparation, exhibiting all the operations of the season; it will be transmitted by the first opportunity after its completion.

A survey was also made from the head of Alligator River to Alligator or New Lake, to ascertain its level and position. This survey passed though the tract of 40,000 Acres supposed to be State property.

This Lake is 4¾ miles from Alligator River, near the mouth of Blount's Ditch, and is elevated above it 8 281-1000ths ft.—It is consequently 4 feet above Lake Mattamuskeet, and 9½ feet above mid-tide of Pamlico Sound. It was surveyed by triangulation, and found to contain very nearly 5,000 Acres, but little of which would be reclaimed by a reduction of the Lake waters 5 feet as is contemplated.—The benefits proposed to be attained from that operation would be general, however, in regard to the large tracts of public land on the South, the North-East and South-West of the Lake. A belt of land from two to three miles in width, would also be rendered susceptible of cultivation. But the conclusive argument in favor of this drainage is its being indispensible as regards the valuable tract of 56,000 Acres on Pungo River, of which I shall next speak. The dismal between the River and Lake contains some valuable juniper timber, and, after the reduction of the waters of Alligator and Mattamuskeet Lake, the piney savannas near Alligator River may be cultivated in Rice, there being no doubt that the head of the River must be reduced some inches below the present level, when the press of water from those two Lakes shall have ceased.

The Southern boundary of the 56,000 Acre tract, as defined in the Sheriff's deed to *Gov. Williams*, is a line running N. 30° E. 4 miles to Alligator Lake, which line commences at a stake which was, at that time of the first survey, N. 30° E. 4 miles from a certain gum tree at the head of Rutman's Creek. This Gum was one of *James Wilkinson's* corners, and easily pointed out by persons in the neighborhood. A random survey from the deep water at the confluence of the Creek and Pungo Rivers, was made to this tree, whence the required line was run without deviation for 3¼ miles, but was abandoned in consequence of unfavorable weather, and the great difficulty of progress, on account of the thickness of the undergrowth, which, for the purpose of levelling, was necessarily removed to a greater extent than a mere land survey would have required. It was considered doubtful at the commencement of this survey, whether this line would strike the Lake, the general opinion being that it would prove to be too much to the North. It was nevertheless thought expedient to run the line a portion of the way, with a view to examine the general character and level of the tract, and afterwards, by a survey of the road from Rutman's Creek to the head of Mattamuskeet Lake, connecting thereby with the survey before made to Alligator Lake, to determine what the true direction of the South boundary of the tract should be. The line was afterwards, in that way, found to bear N. 37° 23' E. which is the most Northerly line that would at all touch the Lake, and consequently gives the natural boundary required, with the least possible invasion of the Hall tract East of the supposed line. The State tract was originally sold to *Wm. Orr*, and divided from the Hall Patent in the deed of conveyance by the aforesaid line, bearing N. 30° E. to the Alligator Lake. The proprietorship at that time was in Judge *Edward Harris*, and no reasonable doubt can be entertained of a right to draw a line which shall touch the Lake. Whether the quantity of land will exceed or fall short of that specified in the deed, remains yet to be ascertained. The original deed to *John Hall* calls for so many natural boundaries, that a correct map cannot be made from it: some new surveys must be resorted to. I should not, however, expect the quantity to vary much from that specified, judging from appearances on the State Map.

The North Western corner, and thence nearly to the centre of this tract, is flooded by the waters of Pungo Lake. A line of levels was therefore run from Clark's Mill on Pungo River, to Pungo Lake, using for its great convenience the banks of Mr. Clark's head-race, by which his Mill is supplied with water from the Swamps in that direction. From the head of the race, the levels were continued until they reached the flood waters of Pungo Lake, which, at that time, covered the country for two miles from its margin, being 17 222-1000ths feet above Pungo River, whence there can be but little fall to Pamlico Sound.

The Southern end of the tract is, in fact, heavily timbered, and is elevated in some points 13 feet above tide, probably, in a few places, less than 9 or 10 feet. At the greatest elevation, a forest of Canes 12 or 15 feet in height, give the best evidence which could be desired of fertility. The timber is of the description most indicative of fertile soil, and the luxuriance of the undergrowth unequalled even in this region of redundant vegetation. The North end of the tract between Pungo Lake and the front patents, is one extensive bed of maiden reeds, and its general elevation is from 12 to 17 feet above tide; fire has repeatedly swept over its forests, and the Lake waters have subsequently so often and constantly overflowed it, that reeds alone have succeeded them. Draining alone is necessary to make the land valuable; the whole of this tract is thought to promise considerable fertility when reclaimed: it possesses a vegetable soil some feet in depth, with a clay bottom. In regard to the present condition of this and other Swamp regions, it may be remarked, that there is no want of a general declivity to carry off the rain water, but of channels into which it may flow; artificial rivers must be formed where nature has not provided them. One inch of water falling upon a retentive soil, upon one square mile, is equal to 86,044 cubic yards; a day contains 86,400 seconds: consequently, for the complete discharge of a rain 1 inch deep, upon a level, the canals, both principal and secondary, must have a capacity of discharge equal to 1 cube yard per second, for every square mile which they are intended to drain. For a fall of 2 inches, their capacity must be doubled, for 3 inches tripled, &c. This calculation applies to lands under a complete system of drainage, where, by means of secondary drains and water furrows, and the removal of roots, morasses and other obstacles, the water may be discharged as fast as it may fall. In ordinary rains, the velocity with which water is discharged from the surface of swampy districts must be many times less than in a country under cultivation, both from the retarding causes above mentioned, and the general inequality of the surface, all concavities having of necessity to be filled up to the general level, before a discharge of their waters can commence, except by slow filtration, through a spongy soil. The retardation of the effluent water is not so great in heavy as in moderate rains, but is even then very considerable. An example will afford a better idea than general explanation. In the extraordinary flood of August last, preceded, as may be remembered, by a prolonged drought, the waters of Lake Mattamuskeet, as was ascertained by careful measurement at the time, rose 7 inches during the rain, which fell without intermission 36 hours; and after the cessation of rain, the rise was augmented 2 inches by the influx of water from surrounding Swamps.

(To be concluded next week.)

The Sub-Treasury.—It is a remarkable fact, that South Carolina is the only State that has, through its Legislature, expressed an opinion in favor of this bill. The States of New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Ohio, Tenn., and Kentucky, having 121 Representatives, have instructed their members to vote against it. Maryland, Indiana, Massachusetts, Vermont and Delaware, are beyond all question as firmly opposed to it. Add these to the instructing States, and it makes 154 Representatives who *ought* to vote against the bill, being a majority of 68.

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