

WIKACOME IN WEAPOMEIOK

The Home Of George Durant
BY CATHERINE ALBERTSON

With the establishment of Geo. Durant on the peninsula now called by his name, the connected history of North Carolina begins. And it is a matter of pride to the citizens of the Old North State that our first settler, with a sturdy honesty and a sense of justice shown but seldom to the red man by the pioneers in the colonies, bought from the Indian chief, Kicocanen, "for a valuable consideration" the land on which he established his home. The deed for this tract of land is now in the old court house at Hertford, N. C., and is the earliest recorded in the history of our state. The following is an exact copy of this ancient document:

George Durant's Deed
from
Kilcoconem

Known all men these Presents, that I, Kicocanen King of the Yeopims have for a valuable consideration of satisfaction received with ye consent of my People sold and made over and delivered to George Durant a Parcel of land lying and being on Roanoke Sound and being on a river called by ye name of Perquimans which isueth out of the North side of the aforesaid Sound and which land at present bears ye name of Weecomecke, Beginning at a marked oak tree which divideth this land from ye land I formerly sold to Samuel Pricklove and extending westwardly up ye said Sound at a point or turning of ye aforesaid Perquimans river and so up the eastward side, of ye said river to a creek called by ye name of A-wosenake to wit all ye land between ye aforesaid bounds of Samuel Pricklove and the said creek whence to ye head thereof. And thence through ye woods to ye first bounds. To have and to hold ye quiet possession on ye same to him, his heirs forever, with all rights and privileges thereto forever from me or any person or persons what soever as witness my hand this first day of March 1661.

KILCOCANEN
or
KISTOTANEW

Test
Thos Weamouth,
Caleb Calloway,

Having thus fairly and justly purchased his lands, as this and other deeds from Kilcoconen testify, Durant proceeded to establish his family and belongings on his estate, and to take up the strenuous life of a pioneer in a new country. And a fairer region never gladdened the eyes of men making new home in a strange land. In the virgin forests surrounding the settlers' homes the crimson berried holly tree against the dark background of pine brightened the landscape during the grey winter days. The opulent Southern spring flung wide the white banners of dogwood, enriched the forests aisles with fretted gold of jessamine and scarlet of coral honeysuckle, and spread the ground with carpet of velvet moss, of rosy azaleas and blue-eyed innocents. The wide rivers that flowed in placid beauty by the wooded banks of the ancient peninsula of Wikacome formed a highway for the commerce of the settlers and a connecting link with the outer sea. And however fierce and bold the wild creatures of those dark forests might be, the teeming fish and game of the surrounding waters and woods often kept far from the settlers' doors the wolf of want and hunger.

The fame of this fertile spot spread and ere long George Durant was greeting many new-comers into the country. Samuel Pricklove had preceded him into Wikacome, and later came George Catchmaid, Captain Hecklefield and Richard Saunderson; and later still the Blounts, the Whedbees, the Newbys, and Harveys and the Skinners came into the neighborhood and settled in Durants Neck and throughout Perquimans county.

At the homes of the planters on Durants Neck, the public business of Albemarle was for many years transacted. Courts were held, councils convened and assemblies called; while from the wharves of the planters on Little River and Perquimans River,

white sailed vessels carried the produce of the rich neets and dense forests to New England, the West Indies and the Old Country.

Many of the most interesting events in the early history of Carolina occurred on Durants Neck. The Culpepper rebellion of which George Durant and John Culpepper were the leaders and which began in Pasquotank, had its culmination at Durants home on Little River. There also Governor Miller was imprisoned, and the leaders of the rebellion organized a new people's government, independent of Parliament, Proprietors and King.

At Hecklefield's home on the adjoining plantation the Assembly of 1708 met to investigate the Cary-Glover question, and to decide which of those two authorities should occupy the governor's chair. There also Governor Eden was sworn in as ruler of North Carolina under the Proprietors, and there the death of Queen Anne was announced to the Governor's council, and George I formally proclaimed true and lawful sovereign of Carolina.

Another prominent meeting place for the courts, councils and assemblies in colonial Albemarle was the home of Captain Richard Saunderson in the Little River settlement on Durants Neck. Of the many notable events that occurred at the home of this wealthy and influential planter probably the Assembly of 1715 leads in interest and importance. The acts passed by this assembly are the oldest on record in the state. They were directed to be printed, but the order was probably never carried out, as none but manuscript copies of these acts are now extant.

Among the most important of the laws enacted by this assembly was one making the Church of England the established church of the colony. Though freedom of worship was granted to all, and the Quakers were allowed to substitute a solemn affirmation, when necessary, in lieu of an oath. Other acts necessary to the welfare of the colony were passed, and a revision of all former acts were made. Edward Moseley of Chowan, Speaker of the house was present on this occasion, as were Governor Eden, Thomas Byrd of Pasquotank, Tobias Knight of Currituck, Christopher Gale of Chowan and Maurice Moore of Perquimans.

Of all these old homes on Durants Neck where so much of the early history of our state was made, none are standing, though the sites of several of these historic places are well known to the dwellers on the peninsula. When the tide is low on Little River, the bricks of what was once the home of Governor Drummond can be seen. And an old tombstone found in the sound, which is now used as the lower step of the side porch in a beautiful old home on Durants Neck once the property of Mr. Edward Leigh, now owned by Mr. C. W. Grandy of Norfolk, is said to have once marked the grave of one of the early Governors of our state. The inscription on the tomb is now obliterated, but the original owners of Lands End, as the old Leigh home was named, declared that Governor Drummond's name was inscribed thereon, when rescued from the sound; though as Drummond was hanged by Governor Berkeley of Virginia it is hardly probable that his body was brought back to Durants Neck for burial.

The site of Durant's home is well known, and until a few

years ago a tombstone bearing his name, it is said was standing under an old sweet gum tree on the bank of a great ditch near the sound. But the field hands in clearing the ditch undermined the stone and covered it with earth, so it is now hidden from view.

But though no monument now marks the resting place of our first settler, there is no need of "storied urn or animated bust" to keep alive in the hearts of his countrymen the memory of our earliest settler, and of the brave, fearless, manly spirit which made him a tower of strength to the Old North State in the struggles of her early days.

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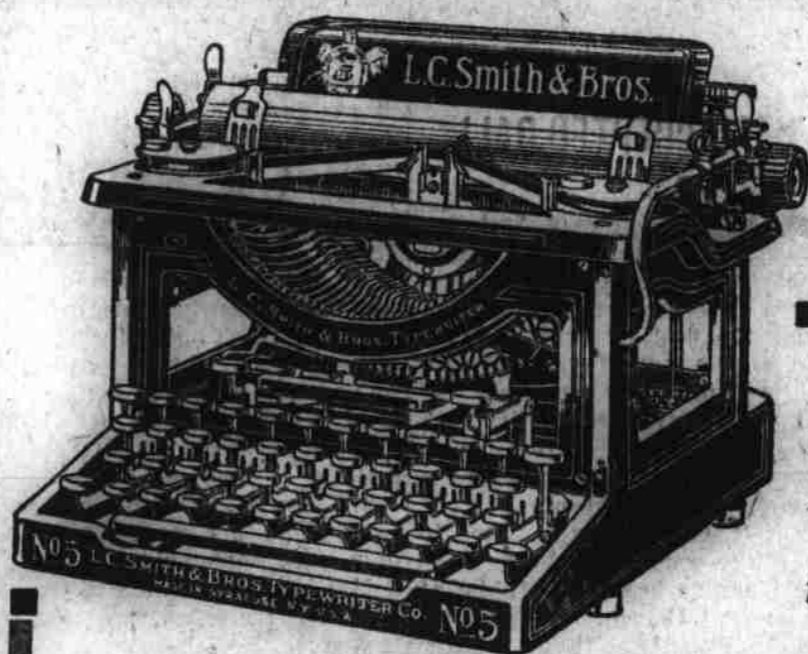
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