

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND of DUPLIN COUNTY North Carolina

First Settlers were of Scotch-Irish Descent -- Formed Churches and Schools In Various Parts of the Country.

By A. T. OUTLAW, Kenansville, N. C.

### The Colonial Militia

Colonel John Sampson (for whom Sampson County was named) was in charge of the militia in this part of New Hanover County and about one hundred of our militiamen were with him "upon the alarm (Spanish) at Wilmington" in September, 1748. The reading of their names reveals the fact that they are the ancestors of a large part of our population today, including the names James Fussell, Williams, Carr, Boney, Murphy, Murray, Wells, Brice, Hanchey, Houston, Rhodes, Thomas, Miller, Gavin, Hollingsworth, Dickson, Kenan, Routledge, and many others. Then the militia list of officers six years later included Colonel John Sampson, Captains Joseph Williams and William McRee, Jr., Lieutenants John Dickson and Robert McRee, Ensign Richard Miller, Quartermaster Thomas Kenan and John Miller, and others.

### The Formation of the County and Parish

Wilmington was then the County seat of New Hanover County and on account of the long distance and inconvenience to the people in the upper part they made several efforts to create a new county. Finally the new county—the County of Duplin and Saint Gabriel Parish—was established by an Act of the Colonial Assembly at New Bern in March, 1749. It was named for Lord Duplin, an English nobleman. The Act provided for holding the first court at the house of William McRee, Sr., of the Goshen Settlement. McRee had served for several years as a member of the Court in the mother county of New Hanover. The officers of the new county were as follows: Sheriff, William McRee, Jr.; Clerk of the Court, Robert McRee; Register, John Sampson; members of the Assembly, Dr. William Houston and Captain Francis Brice. The Justices of the County Court included Francis Brice, Captain Joseph Williams, Dr. William Houston, Colonel John Sampson, Captain Frederick Gregg, Andrew Thomson, George Meares, John Turner, John Herring, Nathaniel Hill, William McRee, Roger Snell, and others.

The vestrymen of the parish included William McRee, Charles Gavin, Colonel Sampson, Captain Brice, Captain Williams, Doctor Houston, John Herring, Anthony Cox, Mark Phillips, George Meares, John Turner and Thomas Suggs. The Reverends William Miller and Hobart Briggs were the only ministers of the parish under the old English system of joint operation of county and parish.

### The County Seats

The County Court was held at the McRee place in Goshen settlement for only a short time, possibly three or four years, and was then moved to a more central location on land given to the County by Captain Joseph Williams near the present Duplin-Sampson County line and near what is now known as Baltic, a station of the Clinton-Warsaw branch of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. This place remained the County seat for a period of about thirty years when Sampson County was cut off from Duplin in the year 1784. Following the formation of Sampson County the County seat of Duplin was again moved to a more central location on land given to the County by Captain James Pearsall, the present site, in what is now the town of Kenansville. It is claimed that Pearsall's "cool spring" was a deciding factor in locating the Court House here. Also, according to family tradition this old spring, still running, was first discovered years before by one Barbara Beverett, wife of a sea captain who was lost at sea, and after his death she married Joseph Carr and became the ancestor of a large and prominent family in Duplin County. The present Court House is the third building on the same site. The town was laid out on the public land during the year 1818 and was named for the Kenan family.

### Early Churches and Schools

The first settlers were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians and wherever they settled, their log churches and schoolhouses went up with as much certainty as their log homes. However there was no settled minister for many years. Among the ministers of that denomination in the early years

nerly, and others. Their principal places of worship were at the Golden Grove near the present town of Kenansville, Rockfish near Wallace, and a place near Goshen in the Faison community. Their church at the Grove is generally accepted as the oldest Presbyterian organization in the State. This old church and the home site of McAden, the first regular minister, have been appropriately marked by the State. Among the ministers of the Baptist denomination in the early days we find the Reverends William Goodman, Charles Hines, Francis Oliver, Silas Carter, William Wells, Jacob Williams, Job Thigpen, Hiram Stallings, and others. Their principal places of worship were at Bear Marsh, Nahunga, Concord, Island Creek, Muddy Creek, Limestone and Prospect. The first Methodist minister was the Reverend Beverly Allen who came after the Revolutionary War. He was followed by other circuit ministers. They organized churches at Maxwell, Rockfish and Island Creek. For some years they were under the care of Reverend Peter Carlton, a native of the County, and other local ministers.

Among the early educational institutions in Duplin County, the old Grove Academy in the Grove settlement was the first. It was established by an Act of the Assembly prior to the establishment of our State University and many of those who attended it became outstanding men of our County, State and Nation. Prior to this time, however, the County had several schoolmasters and among them was Henry Gillman who taught at various places in the neighborhoods of Rockfish and Maxwell for several years. Prior to the beginning of the public school system in 1841 the County had as many as nine private educational institutions and as many as fourteen more after the year 1841, making as many as twenty-three in all, in addition to the free school system. It has often been said that this record of educational facilities compares favorably with that of any county in the State.

### Doctor Houston and the Stamp Act

During the early part of the year 1765 the British Parliament passed a law known as the Stamp Act. All legal instruments such as deeds, bonds, notes required heavy stamp tax. The said Act contained other ruinous and unpopular requirements and the people were aroused. However, all of the disturbance over the Act was during a short period of time and the resistance to it was strong enough to bring about an early repeal. In London Dr. William Houston who lived at Sarecta had been appointed Stamp Distributor for North Carolina without his solicitation and on account of the extreme unpopularity of the law he was subjected to considerable embarrassment. He resigned without ever attempting to execute the duties. In various places images of him were condemned, hanged and burned, and he complained of so much condemnation without a hearing. Careful study of the matter reveals that the indignation of the people was not against Doctor Houston personally but against the principle of the Stamp Act. All of these demonstrations did not in any way affect the standing of Doctor Houston in his home county where he was highly respected and honored by his fellow citizens. He was a man of unusual ability, a physician and surgeon at Sarecta and was prominently identified with public affairs for more than forty years. Doctor Houston's name has been appropriately honored by the State with a highway-historical marker about two miles north of Kenansville at a point where the Sarecta road enters the highway.

### The Revolution

In the Revolutionary War a large majority of the people of this County were enthusiastic American patriots and played an important part from beginning to end. Two British armies invaded the County during the War, the first under Lord Cornwallis in his march from Wilmington to Virginia during the month of May, 1781, and the second under Major James H. Craig in his march from Wilmington to New Bern during the month of August, 1781. General Kenan and his militia, and others, engaged Major Craig at old Rockfish bridge near the present town of Wallace in his purpose to in-

Colonel Routledge in the Grove settlement for several days. The old site of the battle at Rockfish has been appropriately marked by the State. General James Kenan and General Joseph Thomas Rhodes are generally regarded as the County's most outstanding military leaders of that time. General Kenan was head of the Duplin militia and performed conspicuous service in various parts of the country. General Rhodes was an officer in the regular army and served in the north, locally, and in battle at Eutaw Springs where he and his company were highly commended for bravery in action. Other Revolutionary leaders who have been mentioned for conspicuous service include Majors Shadrack Stallings and James Gillespie, Captains Daniel Williams, George Miller, James Love, Bourden, Moulten, Routledge, and many others. In the beginning of the War our County was well represented in the battle at Moore's Creek bridge on February 27, 1776. A company of minute men under Captain James Love was in active service. Young John Grady, a private in that company, lost his life in the battle and his name is recorded in history as the first martyr for American Independence in North Carolina. A monument to his memory stands on the battlefield. Later in the War brave Captain Love and a group of patriots were taken by surprise and brutally murdered by the British at Alexander Rouse's tavern near the little bridge a few miles above Wilmington. Rouse was a former resident of Duplin County. The British invasion of Duplin County was marked by much cruelty, burning of homes, stealing, etc., and for a time the Tories were very troublesome. A common practice with the Tories was to terrorize, murder and plunder under cover of the darkness. Colonel Owen Kenan, a brother of General Kenan, was one of their victims.

### The Railroad

The Railroad was started by the faith of a few citizens of Wilmington and was first meant to connect Wilmington and Raleigh and bore the name of those two cities. The course was later changed to form a junction at Weldon with another road and then became known as the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, later the Atlantic Coast Line. The State, first and last, put a large amount of money into the stock of this railroad. At the time it was one of the longest roads in America and was said to be longer than any in Europe.

An issue of the old Wilmington News, dated August, 1838, carried the following story: "The Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad is now open to the depot at Mrs. Teachey's 42 miles north of Wilmington, and the cars will run regularly to that point. Within three weeks ten more miles will be thrown open to travelers. The bridge across Neuse River is ready for laying down the iron and every hour diminishes the distance to be traveled over the stages." Mrs. Teachey above referred to was Mrs. Mary Holmes Teachey, widow of Captain Daniel Teachey, and the depot was what is now the town of Teachey's.

Another news report, dated February, 1839, is as follows: "We regret having been unable to attend the big celebration in Waynesboro on February 22, in connection with the completion of the railroad between Wilmington and Waynesboro. This is an important event and will mean much to the development of the State. Farmers near Waynesboro are now shipping their hogs and produce to Wilmington and the shipment is less than a day in transit." Old Waynesboro here referred to was on the Neuse River just southwest of the present city of Goldsboro. By March, 1840, the railroad was fully completed all the way between Wilmington and Weldon. Within a short time after the advent of the railroad the towns of Wallace (formerly Duplin Roads), Teachey's, Rose Hill, Magnolia (formerly Stricklandville), Warsaw (formerly Mooresville and Duplin Depot), Bowden, Faison, and Calypso, sprang up and the territory along the railroad soon became thickly populated and the County as a whole was rated among the best in the State.

A full and just description of this period in our history would require considerable time and space. Then, too, this brief and hurriedly written outline is intended to cover only the historical

**INTRODUCTION:** This paper represents a lot of tiresome research and careful study. It is intended to stimulate interest in local history, and it is my contribution to Duplin's 200th Anniversary observance. — A. T. O.

The history of this old County, formed in 1749, would fill a big book and therefore many interesting and important points cannot at this time and place be mentioned. However, a brief outline of the County's foundation may possibly be of some interest to students of local history.

The public records reveal that a large number of our citizens of today are of the same blood as our first settlers who promptly set out to establish churches and schools in various parts of the County. Those sturdy pioneers of the early days would have been a credit and a blessing to any part of the country and their good works are, to a large extent, responsible for the fact that our County of today is one that is largely made up of as good and noble men and women as the country affords. The history of any section is little or nothing more than that of its people and the spirit of the forefathers is clearly reflected in the lives of their descendants. Indeed, we should feel a modest pride in the noble character and worthy achievements of our County's founders and benefactors and be reminded of our own duty to those who shall come after us.

### The First Settlements

The first settlers in Duplin County (then upper New Hanover) were Irish, or Scotch-Irish, from northern Ireland. They came to America under the patronage of one Henry McCulloch about the year 1736. According to Captain Matthew Rowan, the Surveyor-General, the first of McCulloch's settlers came on a ship commanded by one Captain Ure and that some of the free passengers on the ship, bound for Charleston, were persuaded to remain here. McCulloch was a wealthy merchant of London and received from the King (George II) several grants for large tracts of land in the Carolinas. He persuaded the King that he could place colonists on the lands in large numbers and the King was, of course, anxious to colonize the New World. The colonists came and occupied the land of McCulloch upon certain conditions as to title and McCulloch made certain promises to the King as to the number to be settled and the number of acres to be received. According to the evidence a number of the promises were never fulfilled and there was considerable dispute about the McCulloch grants. The settlers were in three groups, as follows: (1) Sorecta (now Sarecta), on the North East river where, according to Captain Rowan, ten houses had already been built by John Pidcock, John Porter and William Lewis; (2) at Goshen, near the mouth at what is now known as Millers bridge and near a large tract of land that had already been granted to Rice Evans; (3) at the Golden Grove near the present town of Kenansville. Other early settlements were at the Red House near the present town of Wallace and Teachey's; the neighborhood of what is still known as Beasley's Mill in Magnolia township; on Turkey branch where the Kenans lived; and on upper Goshen which is now the town of Faison.

McCulloch claimed four thousand acres at the Golden Grove in 1735. About the same time as the McCulloch settlers, or soon thereafter, many other families came into the section from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, the Albemarle section of this State, and from nearby counties of Dobbs (now Lenoir and Wayne), Craven, Beaufort and New Hanover. They were settled mainly along the North East river and its principal tributaries, to-wit: Rockfish, Island Creek, Maxwell, Grove, Muddy Creek, Limestone, Goshen and Burncoat.