

EARLY SETTLEMENT AND MIGRATION OF NORTH CAROLINA

Condensed from the "Introduction" of
The Formation of The North Carolina Counties 1663-1943
By David Leroy Corbitt
(Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1950)

NORTH AND SOUTH CAROLINA MARRIAGE RECORDS: From the Earliest Colonial Days to the Civil War, Compiled and Edited by William Montgomery Clemens, Editor of Genealogy Magazine, 1927.

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Early Settlement and Migration.⁴

The first permanent settlement in North took place around Albemarle Sound and the rivers which flow into it, and the first settlers were from Virginia. The Raleigh colonization attempts at Roanoke in the late 15'00s and early 1600's were failures, so it was after 1650 that permanent settlers were entrenched in North Carolina. John Pory, Secretary of Virginia, explored lands along the Chowan River in 1622, and several other individuals visited the region early and returned to Virginia giving glowing reports of the new land. As early as 1665, Thomas Woodward reported that settlers were coming to the area "for land only," and Robert Lawrence reported in 1707 that he "seated a plantation on the southwest side of Chowan River" where he lived for seven years. Others aided in establishing the real foundation of North Carolina; including Thomas Relfe, Samuel Prickove, Caleb Galloway, George Catchmaid, John Jenkins, John Harvey, Thomas Jarvis, and George Durnat.

English courtiers though they saw an opportunity to acquire power and large returns in wealth from the region, and in 1663, Charles II granted a charter for the region to eight Lords Proprietor. According to the charter, the colony embraced the territory lying between thirty-one and thirty-six degrees north latitude, and extended west from the Atlantic Ocean to the "South Seas." On the 30th of June 1665, a second charter extended the boundaries thirty minutes northward and two degrees southward to include settlements already planted.

The Lords Proprietors soon organized a government and commissioned a governor, and the General Assembly obtained terms for landholders which were similar to those in Virginia. After due consideration, the Proprietors issued the "Great Deed of Grant" which opened a liberal land policy and encouraged immigration. Different forms of government were established early, following Virginia examples, but in 1669 a "Fundamental Constitution" was written by John Locke and signed by the Lords Proprietors. The province was to be divided into counties, each of which was to have four precincts. These precincts were to elect five representatives each, who together with the governor and five councilmen were to form the General Assembly. Some modifications were made, and in January of 1670, the Lords Proprietors issued

instructions to the governor, and “writs” were issued to the four precincts of Albemarle County.

From 1670 to 1696, there were four precincts, but by the latter year people had settled on the south side of Albemarle Sound, extending the settlements until they reached beyond the boundary of Albemarle County. The county of Bath was then created with two representatives to the General Assembly, and in 1705, Bath was divided into three precincts; Wickham, Archdale, and Pamptecough. In about 1712, the names of these precincts were changed to Hyde, Craven and Beaufort, respectively; and in 1722, Carteret and Bertie precincts were formed and the province began spreading southward and westward. On December 7, 1712, the “Colonies North” and the “Colonies South” were made separate provinces, and North and South Carolina came into existence.

Albemarle County included the precincts of Carteret, Berkeley, and Shaftesbury. Carteret Precinct was abolished in 1681 and became Currituck and Pasquotank Precincts, and Berkeley Precinct was renamed Perquimans Precinct. Shaftesbury was changed to Chowan Precinct in the same year. In 1705, Bath County was divided into three precincts; Wickham, Archdale, and Pamptecough. In 1712, Wickham was change to Hyde Precinct, Archdale was changed to Craven Precinct, and Pamptecough was changed to Beaufort Precinct. Pamteough was also spelled “Pamlico.”

In 1722, an act was passed witch authorized the justices of the peace of the several precincts to levy taxes, raise money, and purchase land to erect courthouses. If they failed to act, the governor was given power to appoint persons in their stead to accomplish the task. Problems developed in several of the precincts with respect to levying taxes and raising the necessary funds; and in some, controversy arose in locating the court houses, which factors made it difficult to preserve the official records properly. Many valuable North Carolina records were lost or destroyed as a result.

Controversy arose in 1732 regarding the creation of counties and precincts, and the Crown became involved, resulting in some being dissolved while others were newly created. By 1739, the population embraced within the confines of Albemarle County had become so extensive that the provost marshal could not adequately serve the colony. Therefore, the Legislature passed an act changing precincts to counties in March, 1739, and established a sheriff for each county to perform the duties of the provost marshal. Thus the term county has been used for the subdivisions of North Carolina since that date.

On December 22, 1789, the Legislature passed an act ceding the western lands (Tennessee) to the United States, and on February 25, 1790, North Carolina’s two senators in Congress made a deed with reservations which the United States Congress accepted April 2, 1790. After that date, the Tennessee counties no longer belonged to North Carolina. They included Washington, Sullivan, Davidson, Greene, Hawkins, Sumner, and Tennessee.

North Carolina has had one hundred and sixteen precincts or counties, and seven were ceded to the Federal government in 1790. Eight were either divided, abolished, or had their named changed.

English/Welsh Quakers, German and Swiss/German Palatines, Scotch/Irish, Scottish Highlanders, Moravians, English and New English, and settlers of other ethnic backgrounds all found their way into North Carolina.

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