

A HISTORY OF

Chatham County, North Carolina

With Sketches of a Number of Its Prominent Citizens

Published in *The Chatham News*, January – April 1932

And

December, 1931, Marks 161st Anniversary of Chatham County

Published in *The Chatham News*, November 1931

By Walter D. Siler¹

Foreword

By Steven E. Brooks, November 3, 2002

Judge Walter D. Siler's 1931 and 1932 historical sketches of Chatham County form the basis for much of what we know about the early history of the area. I have attempted to transcribe his work faithfully, modifying punctuation and spelling in some cases where I believed errors of typesetting in the 1930s needed correction for clarification or accuracy. His work should be read as much as reflective of the worldview of a prominent citizen of the 1930s as for its detail of the political and military life of the county in its early years. While whole sections of his work were used as chapters in the 1971 publication of *Chatham County, 1771-1971* by Wade Hadley, Doris Goerch Horton, and Nell Craig Strowd, it seems important to me that the entirety of his writings for *The Chatham News* be presented.

I have added footnotes as points of clarification and expansion in some cases where other works I have encountered add detail on some of the individuals cited in Judge Siler's work. It is my hope that these notes will add to the value of the history for the reader. As a direct descendant of Joseph John Alston, John Jones Alston, William Alston, John Birdsong, Isaac Brooks, Joseph John Brooks, Travis Harper, John Ramsey, and Edwards Rives, I hope that readers will understand that I naturally had more information about those individuals than about many of the other notable Chatham County leaders of its early history. I hope that those who can add information about other individuals in Judge Siler's work, or those who can amplify his writings about our early history, will do so and will make their research available through dissemination on the internet (particularly through the Chatham County Historical Association (<https://chathamhistory.org>)).

¹ Walter Davis Siler (1878-1951) was a distinguished Chatham County jurist. He was married to Lida Alston (1880-1928), a great-granddaughter of Joseph John (Chatham Jack) Alston. His series of articles on the early history of Chatham County were printed in *The Chatham News* from January 7, 1932 through April 28, 1932. An earlier article, printed by *The Chatham News* on November 26, 1931, covered the same period in lesser detail, and also briefly sketched subsequent periods of Chatham history, including the Civil War period. That article is appended to this one, in deference to the chronology.

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Published in *The Chatham News* – November 26, 1931

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Chapter I.

Early Settlers – Their Characteristics – Why Chatham Was Organized – Causes that Led to the War of the Regulation -- Prominent Actors in the Controversy -- Edmund Fanning, Herman Husband – Other Leading Spirits

For twenty years immediately preceding the organization of Chatham County as a political subdivision of the State of North Carolina, the territory now embraced within its boundaries was a part of the county of Orange. The parent county had been formed in the year 1751 from Bladen, Johnston and Granville, and as Chatham lies within the original domain of the last, our county may be properly termed a daughter of Orange and a granddaughter of Granville.

It is more than probable that some of Lawson's party² were the first white men to come into what is now the county of Chatham, but this is merely conjecture, while as to the identity of the first white persons to make permanent settlement within its confines, even tradition is silent.

However, long before the controversy between the Crown officers and oppressed and discontented settlers, which was to culminate in the Regulation movement, had its birth, many immigrants, having secured land grants from the Earl of Granville, bringing their families, slaves and household goods, had taken possession of many of the broad acres along the rivers and amidst the hills of what was then southern Orange. They had cleared land for cultivations, erected crude but comfortable log dwellings, and soon thrifty settlements dotted various sections of that locality.

Like the early settlers in all Piedmont North Carolina, those first to take up their abode in what was destined to be Chatham County, were, for the most part, of Scotch-Irish and German stock, who had come from Pennsylvania and Virginia though not a few were of English extraction who had come from the eastern section of the State; Chowan, Halifax and possibly other of the coastal and tide-water counties having contributed many families to the rapidly developing community.

Our earliest settlers were not adventurers, who came in quest of gold, nor were they of the turbulent and violent classes, who had departed from the older and more populous centers to escape the avenging arm of the law. They were of that sturdy, independent, liberty-loving type, such as Bancroft, the historian, had in mind when he said: "North Carolina was settled by the freest of the free; by men to whom the restraints of the other colonies were too severe."

² John Lawson's party explored South Carolina and North Carolina in 1700-1701. See Lawson's 1709 publication, *A New Voyage to Carolina, Containing the Exact Description and Natural History of That Country: Together with the Present State Thereof. And A Journal of a Thousand Miles, Travel'd Thro' Several Nations of Indians. Giving a Particular Account of Their Customs, Manners, &c.*

These settlers, who poured into the valleys along the Deep, Haw, and Rocky Rivers, located on the Hickory Mountain and amidst the verdant hills and along the gentle streams that wend their way toward the sea, were enemies of tyranny and oppression. Their surroundings were the most primitive and they were forced to dwell remote from the centers of culture and social advantage, but they remained gentle in their tempers, serene in their minds and strict in their abhorrence of bloodshed and violence.

Love of liberty and hostility to outside interference with their domestic concerns was their most prominent characteristic, as was soon to be demonstrated in the controversy, which had been precipitated by the arbitrary acts and oppressive conduct of Edmund Fanning, Register of Deeds of Orange, and other Colonial officers, whose arrogance and rapacity had raised a storm that was to end in strife and bloodshed.

As the War of the Regulation is credited with having occasioned the creation of our county, and for the further reason that many of the inhabitants of the Chatham that was soon to be received into the sisterhood of counties, were active participants in both the agitation that led to the armed conflict and later in the battle that followed, brief mention will here be made of this interesting event in our State's history.

While there has been considerable controversy among historians as to whether the Regulators should be regarded as devoted patriots, who at Alamance were beginning an offensive against the mother country that was to culminate in the war for American Independence, or a poorly organized band of anarchists who were fatally bent upon overturning all form of government and destroying the safeguards that protected life, liberty and property, it is now pretty generally conceded that neither is correct. The conditions which led to the conflict were due to abuse, extortions, excesses and oppressive exactions on the part of the Crown officers on the one hand, and a determination on the part of the people to remedy the evils, and reform a system which had become harsh, burdensome and galling, on the other.

The chief causes of popular complaint were high taxes, corrupt and rapacious officials and extortionate fees. The system of taxation, which had apparently been devised without regard to justice or fairness, provided that all taxes should be levied on the poll, so that the owner of a single ox was required to pay the same as was the owner of a ten-thousand-acre farm and the cattle on countless hills. Money was, as is always the case in rural communities, distant from the marts of trade and centers of commerce, scarce, and this fact made it all the more easy for designing and dishonest officers to levy upon the property of delinquent tax-payers, collect an additional fee for so doing, and sell the property to some friend at a fraction of its real value. This system, which in this day would be termed "Grafting," was claimed to be a fixed policy and a constant practice with many tax collectors, and, of course, became the object of violent complaint and bitter resentment. Fees exacted by officers were claimed to be exorbitant, while the officers themselves were, so far as a large number were concerned, either corrupt or inefficient, and in many cases, both.

As early as the year 1761 dissatisfaction with conditions had become so general that concerted efforts were beginning to be made for redress, and at a meeting held on Deep River, on August the 20th of that year, resolutions were adopted appointing a committee to attend a general meeting at Maddox's Mill on the Eno River, a few miles from Hillsboro, on October the 10th.

"Where they are judiciously to examine whether the freemen in this county labor under any abuses of power, and in particular to examine into the public tax, and inform themselves of every particular thereof, by what laws and for what uses it is laid, in order to remove some jealousies out of our minds.

“And the representatives, vestrymen and other officers are requested to give the members of said committee what information and satisfaction they can, so far as they value the good will of every honest freeholder.”

At an Inferior Court held in Hillsboro in the latter summer an address containing the foregoing resolutions was read in open court, and the officers of the county promised to attend the meeting. But when the day came, though twelve delegates appeared on the part of those who were demanding relief, no officer was in attendance; such failure, it was charged, being due to the influence of Edmund Fanning, who, deeming the meeting an insurrection, had counseled his fellow office-holders to remain away.

The Maddox meeting seems to have resulted in nothing except the proposal that the people hold such meeting annually to discuss the qualifications of legislative candidates, advise the representatives of their wishes and to investigate the conduct of public officials.

Though the cause of complaint remained and the agitation was kept up, organized opposition to the royal officials remained dormant until about March, 1768, when the storm broke with redoubled fury. Besides the original grievances there was added the additional complaint that the Assembly had arranged to erect for the Governor a “Palace,” at the cost of fifteen thousand pounds.

On March the 22nd, 1768, there was a petition presented to the authorities of Orange styled “The request of the inhabitants on the West side of Haw River, to the Assembly and Vestrymen of Orange County.” After reciting the fact that the officers had violated their agreement to meet the committee at Maddox Mill in obedience to the agreement, and reiterating the complaint as to the levy of illegal taxes, it was declared:

“We are obliged to seek redress by denying paying any more taxes until we have a full settlement of what is past, and a true regulation with our officers.

“Until such time as you will settle with us, we desire the sheriffs will not come this way to collect the levy; for we will pay none before there is a settlement to our satisfaction.”

This action brought no result, save to arouse the anger of the officials, who were so bitter in their denunciations of the “inhabitants of the West side of Haw River,” that many residents of that territory, who had taken no part in the movement heretofore, now joined their fortunes with that of their neighbors.

At a meeting held on April the 4th, 1768, the name “Regulators” was adopted by those who had been agitating for the reforms demanded by the meetings already held, and thereafter they were so styled. It was at this time also determined to request the Sheriff and Vestrymen to meet a committee and produce for inspection a copy of the list of taxables, a list of the insolvents, with an account of how the money was applied and to whom paid. Before the action of this meeting had been made known to the authorities, the Sheriff of Orange seized a horse, bridle and saddle, the property of a Regulator, and sold the same for taxes. This, as might have been anticipated, brought matters to an immediate crisis.

No sooner had the seizure of their comrade’s property been learned by the Regulators, that Husband says:

“They immediately rose to the number of sixty or seventy, rode to Hillsborough, rescued the mare, and fired a few guns at the roof of Fanning’s house to signify they blamed him for all this abuse.”

When Fanning, who was in Halifax, was advised of this rather drastic conduct on the part of the Regulators, he ordered into service seven companies of the Orange militia and hastened home to assume command. The Governor, apprized of the situation, approved this course, and authorized him to quell the disturbance or insurrection, as it was termed in royal circles, and called the militia of Halifax, Granville, Anson, Mecklenburg, Johnston, Cumberland and Bute to mobilize, subject to Fanning’s call. In addition the Governor issued a proclamation to be read to the people, while the council endorsed the Governor’s action and denounced the conduct of the offending Regulators as an insurrection.

At this juncture an effort seems to have been made to compose the differences between the warring parties, the officers agreeing to meet the Regulators with a view to an amicable adjustment. The latter appear to have entered into the negotiations in good faith, while the former, true to their usual custom, were utterly insincere in their supposed desire for reconciliation. Immediately after this agreement the Regulators appointed a committee to gather information and facts regarding taxes, fees, etc., and required its members to take an oath to do justice between the officers and the people. While the data was being collected, Fanning, who was the dominating personality of the office-holding class, at the head of an armed posse went to the Sandy Creek settlement, and arrested William Butler and Herman Husband, two of the most prominent Regulators, upon a charge of inciting rebellion, and conveyed them to Hillsboro, where they were incarcerated in jail.

The arrest and imprisonment of the two Regulators, not only aroused the frenzy of their fellow clansmen, but enlisted the sympathy of many who had never been identified with the Regulation movement, and who now armed themselves and joined a force numbering nearly seven hundred, which marched on Hillsboro to release the prisoners. Notice of their intended attack preceded them, and so alarmed the crown officers and their adherents that the imprisoned Butler and Husband were hastily released, and with them, the Governor’s Private Secretary hurried to meet the oncoming throng. This official, in the name of his royal principal, assured the people that if they would quietly and peacefully disperse, and return to their homes, and petition the Governor in the proper manner, that full justice would be done them. To this the Regulators acceded, only to be again deceived and imposed upon, for the Governor declined to ratify the conduct of his secretary, and, refusing to deal with them as an organization, demanded that they disband.

On the 21st of May, 1768, a general meeting of the Regulators was held at the home of George Sally, where

“It was unanimously agreed to continue our petition agreed upon at our last meeting to the Governor, Council and Assembly, for redressing very grievous, cruel, and oppressive practices of our officers, which we generally conceive to have labored under for many years, contrary to law.

“And in pursuance of a verbal message from the Governor, sent us express by his secretary, we agree to renew our petition, and being conscious of our loyalty to King George the Third, on the present throne, and our firm attachment to the present establishment and form of government, which we firmly believe all our grievance are quite contrary to, by downright roguish practices of men who have crept into posts of office, and have practiced upon our ignorance and new settled situation.”

In June the proceedings of this meeting were delivered to the Governor, and he answered in a letter, in which, among other assurances, he declared:

“You may depend upon it, I shall, at all times, endeavor to redress every grievance in my power that His Majesty’s subjects may labor under.”

He closes his communication by advising that the tax for 1767 is seven shillings a taxable, and stating that he will be at Hillsboro the beginning of next month.

In July, true to his promise, Governor Tryon went to Hillsboro and while there he was in communication with the Regulators, several letters passing between him and them. On August 18th, he addressed a letter to the meeting that had been called by them, in which, after reproving them for their course in refusing to pay their taxes, and their threats against the lives of many of the inhabitants of the county, he closed by requiring that twelve of the principal Regulators furnish him bond in the sum of One Thousand pounds, as a security that no rescue should be made of Husband and Butler, who were to be tried at the Superior Court of Hillsboro to be held in September. The bond was not given and to the end that the court might not be interfered with in its deliberations, the Governor called out the militia.

When the trial of their chiefs came on, more than 3,600 Regulators assembled at Hillsboro, but the presence of the military force had the Governor’s desired effect, and the cases were tried without any interference. Husband was acquitted, while Butler and two other Regulators were convicted, but were pardoned. Found guilty at this term of court of extortion, Fanning appealed, and the Attorney General of England declared that the charges were groundless. All in all, it would seem that the session of court might be regarded as a triumph for the Regulators.

But they seemed to have felt little inclined to be content with what they had gained, and so, impatient for a more speedy relief than either the courts or the Assembly seemed willing to secure for them, that they now entered upon a career of excesses that lost them, to a considerable extent, that popular sympathy that had heretofore been theirs.

At a court held in Hillsboro in September, 1770, a mob of more than one hundred and fifty Regulators, headed by Herman Husband, Rednap Howell, William Butler and James Howell, armed with clubs and bludgeons, entered the court house during the sitting of the court, drove the presiding judge from the bench, beat up William Hooper and John Williams, two prominent attorneys, dragged Edmund Fanning through the streets, and after whipping him severely, destroyed his furniture, valuable papers and other personal effects, and demolished his house. After maltreating and abusing several other prominent gentlemen, they took possession of the courts house, organized a mock court, and having secured possession of the court dockets, made many scurrilous and profane entries therein.

In the midst of the excitement, which followed these outbreaks, the Assembly met in New Bern on December the 5th. It was evident that something must be done and that quickly, to restore tranquility and a respect for law and order, or the entire colony would be reduced to anarchy. The Assembly at once entered upon the task of trying to devise by legislative means some method of restoring order, and consequently acts were passed relative to the selection of sheriffs and defining their duties, regulating the fees of public officers and reforming the court procedure.

What was known as the Johnston act, so named because it was introduced by Samuel Johnston and which contained drastic provisions for the prosecution and punishment of all such as might incite and participate in a riot in any Superior Court of the Province, was also enacted.

As a further means of bringing peace and quiet to the disturbed and distracted section, it was determined to create a number of new counties in the territory where the Regulation sentiment was most pronounced, so that large bodies would have less occasion to assemble at any one place in the disaffected district. As a consequence, bills were introduced providing for the creation of Chatham, Wake, Guilford and Surry, and were all speedily enacted into law, the act establishing Chatham being ratified on January the 26th, 1771.

All these measures proved disappointing results, for the Regulators became more violent in their denunciation of all governmental authority, and the situation became so acute that the judges protested against holding court at Hillsboro in March, assigning as a reason that it would be impossible to dispatch business with any feeling of personal safety to themselves.

In view of this alarming state of affairs, the Council advised the Governor to call into service the militia and to move upon the Regulators, "with all expedition." The Chief Executive acted upon this advice without delay, and soon had orders issued for the mobilization of 2,500 volunteers.

With 1,068 militiamen, commanded by himself, the Governor reached Hillsboro on May the 9th, having encountered no opposition on the march. On the 14th he camped on Alamance Creek, some miles from Hillsboro. On the 16th his troops, in line of battle moved on the Regulators, who had assembled to the number of 2,000. Neither force seemed to have a great thirst for battle, and the Regulators sent a communication to the Governor asking for permission to lay their grievance before him. He replied that he could have no parley with citizens in a state of armed rebellion, and ordered them to disperse and submit to the laws of the Province. He gave them one hour in which to determine their course, at the expiration of which he sent for the reply; the officer who went for it advising that unless they dispersed the Governor would fire upon them, whereupon they replied: "Fire and be damned."

The troops commanded by Governor Tryon were commanded to fire, which, after a short delay, they did. The Regulators returned the fire, and the battle was on. The engagement continued for two hours, when the Regulators, defeated by the organization and discipline of the militia, were through into confusion and driven from the field. As a result of the battle, the royal forces lost nine killed and sixty one wounded, while the Regulators had nine killed, quite a number wounded, besides fifteen captured.

While Governor Tryon's course in immediately extending pardon and amnesty to all who would submit to the government and take the oath of allegiance, a few persons being exempted from the benefits of his proclamation, would indicate a spirit of great leniency and forbearance, his conduct at the trial of the prisoners, six of whom were hanged, was marked with such cruelty and inhumanity as to clothe his name with eternal infamy.

The victims of the gubernatorial wrath were neither traitors nor outlaws, and their summary execution for having, though in an unwise and unlawful manner, sought a redress of their grievous wrongs, was a cruel, vindictive and despotic act of folly characteristic of a tottering government soon to be overthrown.

The Colonial office-holder, who more than all others, by his conduct, furnished the principal cause and excuse for the Regulation movement, was Edmund Fanning, chief representative of the royal government, and the dominating factor in Orange County. He was a native of the State of New York, an alumnus of Yale college, having graduated from this renowned institution with distinction, in the year 1757, a lawyer of splendid ability and a man of commanding talents.

By the Regulators he was regarded as a dishonest and rapacious official, who was systematically despoiling the people, and while evidence is inadequate to convict him being the corrupt and venal character that he has sometimes been painted, it is easy to understand how one with his insatiable thirst for office and his success in satisfying it, would not be regarded with much popular favor. He was at one and the same time, member of the General Assembly from Orange; Register of Deeds for the same county; Judge of the Superior Court, and Colonel of the militia.

In addition to these positions of trust and profit, Fanning, it would appear from the records, managed to become a member of all such committees and commissions as had in charge the expenditure of

public funds, as is illustrated by the fact that he was named in the bill creating Chatham as a member of the commission to “employ workmen to build a court house, gaol, and stocks.” With all these sources of income, he soon became a man of wealth, and whatever may have been his charm of manner and however honest may have been his official dealings, to the hard-working, overtaxed countrymen of Orange he appeared to be endowed only with “winning ways to make men hate him.” He was the first of the detested race of carpetbaggers to appear in our midst, though it should be said to his credit, that his administration, bad as it was, might be easily termed a visitation of mercy, in comparison with the havoc wrought by the horde of the same breed that followed him nearly a century later.

As might have been expected, he adhered to the cause of the British government when the Revolution came, and in 1777, while living in New York, where he had followed Governor Tryon, he recruited a corps of Tories, called by him the “Kings American Regiment.”

He fought through the war and became a General in the British Army.

His affinity for office followed him wherever he went, and he was in turn, Surveyor General of New York, Councilor and Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, and in 1786 became Royal Governor of Prince Edward Island, which office he held for nineteen years. He died in the city of London in the year 1818, leaving a son who became an officer in the British Army, and two daughters, each of whom married a titled Englishman. He had two nephews who became distinguished American soldiers in the War of 1812, and they rendered valiant service in behalf of the Republic to whose liberties their uncle had always been an enemy.

The most active and influential character among the Regulators, and the one most potent in the dissemination of propaganda and the organization of the movement, was Herman Husband, a Quaker preacher from Pennsylvania, who had several years before moved to North Carolina and settled on Sandy Creek, in what is now Randolph County.

He was a man of much native ability, better educated than the people among whom he lived, and seems to have been as noted for his business shrewdness, energy and thrift as for his predilection for political strife. Personally popular with a people groaning under the burden of high taxes and exasperating local government, he soon secured a considerable following and was twice elected a representative from Orange to the General Assembly. From this body he was expelled in 1770, and committed to New Bern jail for an alleged libel on Judge Maurice Moore and for being “a principal mover and promoter of riots and seditions.”

His conduct in industriously creating a discontent and counseling and advising his associates to violence and excesses, and then fleeing when the conflict for which he was so largely responsible came, left a stain upon his memory, that no explanation of his most ardent admirers has ever been able to remove.

Deserting his followers on the eve of the battle of Alamance, he made his way to Pennsylvania and settled near Pittsburgh. Though exempted from the general pardon issued by Governor Tryon and a reward of one hundred pounds and a thousand acres of land offered for his capture, he was never apprehended. After the Revolution, he returned to North Carolina, but only remained for a short time.

An agitator, rather than a patriot, his subsequent career showed him to be, for in his old age, he became involved in the Pennsylvania Whiskey Insurrection of 1794, and, as a result, was arrested and put in jail. He is said to have been released by the efforts of David Caldwell.

Though never a resident of Chatham or what is now Chatham, he owned considerable land within its boundaries, as court records show, all of which he sold after departing from the State.

He is reputed to have been a land surveyor, and tradition credits him with having laid out and surveyed the old "Stage Road," which traverses the county and was for many years the line of travel from the western and central section of the state to Raleigh.

The land owned by him was in the western section of the county, in the vicinity of Siler City, he having acquired by grant from the Earl of Granville, the plantation now owned by Messrs. C. N. and N. B. Bray, and other tracts in that section.

After Husband, the most prominent actors on the part of the Regulators, were Rednap Howell, a native of New Jersey, who had many years before come to North Carolina, and James Hunter, a Virginian, who had settled in the Sandy Creek section. The former, an itinerant school teacher, was styled the "Poet of the Revolution," he having made war on the Orange officials in "ambling epics and jingling ballads," while the latter seems to have been a man of greater strength and character. He was known as the "General of the Regulators," though he declined to command at Alamance and advised that every man "command himself." Though outlawed and forced to leave the Province, when the Revolution began he returned to North Carolina, joined the American army, and became a brave and fearless soldier.

~ End of Chapter I ~

Chapter II.

Organization of the County – Early Officers – Location of the Court House – Government Under the Crown – Lawyers – Interesting Court Entries

At the session of the Assembly, which convened at New Bern on December the 5th, 1770, the bill to organize the County of Chatham was introduced. The measure was entitled: “An act for the establishing a new county between Campbellton³ and Hillsboro, by taking the Southern Inhabitants of Orange County, by erecting the same into a Distinct County, by the name of Chatham County and St. Bartholomew’s Parish.”

Its preamble recites: “Whereas, the great extent of the county of Orange render the attendance of the inhabitants of the southern part thereof to do public duties extremely difficult, and expensive, for remedy thereof, it is enacted by the Governor, Council and Assembly, etc.”

Section I provides:

“That from and after the 1st day of April, next the inhabitants of the County of Orange, lying to a point 16 miles due south of Hillsboro and bounded as follows:

‘Beginning at the aforesaid point, running due West of the Guilford County line; thence South along Guilford County Line to Cumberland County line; thence along Cumberland and Wake County lines to a point due east of the beginning, be erected into a distinct county by the name of Chatham County and St. Bartholomew’s Parish.’”

It was by this act also further provided, that after the 1st of April, an Inferior Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions should be held for the county of Chatham, on the first Tuesdays of February, May, August and November of each and every year at the house of Captain Stephen Poe; the Justices yet to be appointed, being directed to meet at the same place on the first Tuesday in May and take the oath of office. Provision was also made for the levy of a poll tax of two shillings upon each taxable person of the county for three years for the purpose of building a court house, prison and stocks.

Among other provisions, provision was made for the nomination by the Inferior Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Chatham of eight freeholders at each term just preceding the Superior Court for the Hillsboro District to serve as Grand and Petit Jurors in that court, this county being in that district, and another for the employment of workmen to build a Court House, jail and stocks at some place to be selected by a committee or commission composed of Edmund Fanning, Mark Morgan, Richard Parker, Stephen Poe, and Richard Cheek.

The County was named in honor of the Earl of Chatham, the greatest English statesman of his day, and one of the greatest of all time. Throughout his long and brilliant career, he was the great champion of America in the British Parliament, and North Carolina has perpetuated his name by the counties of Pitt and Chatham, while our own county named is capital in honor of his illustrious son.

Under the Colonial system in operation at the period now being considered, the principal legal tribunal of the different counties of the State was known as the “Inferior Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions.” This court was composed of the Justices of the Peace of the County meeting four times in each year, when, besides trying misdemeanors and certain kinds of civil actions, it performed most of the

³ Alternate spellings are “Cambelton” and “Cambleton.” I have transcribed the “Cambellton” spelling throughout this history. The town was renamed “Fayetteville” in 1783, in honor of the Marquis de LaFayette.

functions now devolving upon the Board of County Commissioners, as well as many now within the jurisdiction of the Clerk of Superior Court.

There were also judicial districts composed each of several counties, and these were denominated "Superior Court Districts," and were presided over by the Chief Justice of North Carolina and two Associate or "Assistant Judges" as they were styled. The Hillsborough District had a session of the Superior Court twice each year, and Chatham sent jurors to each term until the year 1806, after which Superior Courts were held in our own county. The first Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions met on the 6th of May, 1771, at the place designated by law, viz: the house of Captain Stephen Poe. Before this tribunal came William Hooper, who presented his commission of appointment from the Governor, filed a bond with approved surety, and was duly qualified as County Court Clerk for Chatham.

Mr. Hooper was then an attorney residing at Hillsborough, and was destined to fame, not only as a lawyer and statesman, but for his patriotic services in behalf of American liberty. He later occupied many positions of public trust in the State and was a signer of the American Declaration of Independence. The first book of records in the office of the Register of Deeds is in his hand writing and is as legible today as when written in 1771.

At this same time, Elisha Cain, producing his commission, filing his bond and taking the prescribed oath of office, became the first Sheriff of the County. It was several years after this before the office of "Public Register," which corresponds to the present office of Register of Deeds, was created, and at this time most of the duties now devolving upon that official were performed by the County Court Clerk.

The records fail to indicate how many sessions of the court met at the residence of Captain Poe, but it is assumed that the committee named to choose a site for the location of the court house and other public buildings acted with promptness, and that the seat of government was soon established at the point selected, viz: on the farm of Mial Scurlock, about one-half mile south of the present town of Pittsboro. The exact spot on which the court house stood may still be pointed out, as may also the site of the old jail, which was just south of the court house and about and about 75 yards northwest of the Scurlock dwelling, the only habitation in the immediate vicinity. It is said that the Commissioners determined upon this location because of its being near the geographical center of the county, and that nearby was a never failing spring noted for its excellent water.

The court house must have been built soon after the organization of the county, for in the year 1774 it seems to have been in need of repairs, and at the November term of the Court of that year, it was ordered:

"That John Dillard be allowed the sum of Ninety-One Pounds Proc money for services done in building a gaol and repairing the Court House."

The original building was a wooden structure, and when the seat of government was later moved to Pittsboro, it was sold and by the purchaser moved to Pittsboro, where it was used for many years as a store house, later a storage room, and in later years as a meat market and garage. It stood on the main street of Pittsboro and was in a good state of preservation when destroyed by fire a few years ago.

There was no village or settlement at the original capital of the county, which was known as "Chatham Court House." The only buildings near were the residence of Major Scurlock, a store house and some

outbuildings. The seat of government remained at this place until some time after the Revolution when it was removed to its present location when the town of Pittsboro was established.

As Chatham's existence did not begin until after the meeting of the first session of the Colonial Assembly for the year 1771, its first representatives appeared at the second session of the Assembly. They were Isaac Brooks⁴ and John Wilcox, two of the county's most prominent citizens. Both have many descendants in the county and other sections of the state, and they have just cause to be proud of these honored ancestors.

Mr. Wilcox was one of the most enterprising and substantial business men of the county, and was the owner of the old Iron Works at Gulf, which was then in operation. He furnished iron to the American government during the Revolution, which was soon to begin, and his petition to the Governor of North Carolina for payment of his claim for iron delivered to the American army, in order that he might re-build his furnace, which had been washed away by one of the freshets, to which Deep River is subject, is still extant. He owned considerable lands on Deep River, his holdings comprising all the vicinity of the present town of Gulf, the Cumnock property, the "Evans place," and other large tracts. Coal was discovered on this property, and he opened a mine and used coal in his furnaces. This was the beginning of the Deep River Coal mining that has been in operation, with an occasional intermission, from that day until the present.

To the Assembly, which met in January, 1773, Chatham again sent Isaac Brooks, and as his colleague sent William Grave. To the session of 1774, it elected Richard Parker, who had for some time been one of the Justices of the Court, and Captain Stephen Poe. The latter died before the convening of the Assembly.

William Hooper, the first County Court Clerk, served from April, 1771, until November, 1772, when he was succeeded by Joel Lane. The latter was a prominent citizen residing at Wake Court House; was owner of the land upon which the State capitol was located, and was most active in public affairs throughout his life. He resigned the clerkship in December, 1773, and William Alston⁵ was appointed to this position.

Mr. Alston, who was the first Clerk of the County Court to reside in the county, served until May, 1776.

⁴ Isaac Brooks (About 1730 – 1825). Per Ida Brooks Kellam, in *Brooks and Kindred Families* (1950), Isaac Brooks was active as a Regulator, fought in Battle of Alamance, served in the General Assembly. In the General Assembly he introduced a bill to build a road through Chatham County, beginning at the Dan River and running through Guilford County, Chatham County, and ending in Cambellton (now Fayetteville). The road is what became US Route 421. Kellam states (pages 147-148) "In March 1781, General Green with his army marched through Chatham County, following the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. Gen. Green was pursuing Lord Cornwallis and his army, and Green's army camped near the Isaac Brooks home. Col. William Washington slept in the house that night; presumably he was a friend of the family as Agnes Terrell, an aunt of Ruth (Terrell) Brooks, had married Robert Washington. The Grist mill owned by Isaac Brooks, ground meal for the soldiers all night, and Mrs. Brooks (Ruth Terrell) and her servants cooked bread for them. On one occasion the Tories went to Isaac Brooks' home to arrest him. He ran upstairs and fastened the stair door behind him. The Tories knocked one of the panels out of the door with the butts of their guns and followed him, only to find that he had climbed out of the second story window and made his escape. At another time the Whigs came to his home with a young fellow by the name of Emerson. They intended hanging him to a limb of a large oak tree in the yard. Isaac Brooks persuaded them to release the young man as he was very young and he considered him harmless."

⁵ William Alston was the son of Captain Joseph John Alston and Elizabeth Chancey, and the half-brother of Joseph John (Chatham Jack) Alston.

Elisha Cain, the County's first Sheriff, served from 1771 until November the 8th, 1776, when he was succeeded by Col. Jeduthan Harper.

As the amount of taxes collected for the first years of the County's existence may be of interest, the record of Sheriff Cain's settlement for the year 1771 and 1772 are herewith given:

“1771 To 1158 taxables @ 2 shillings – 118 pounds, 10 shil.
By 90 insolvents 9 pounds
By Commissions – 8 pounds, 15 shillings, 1 pence
Net receipts – 100 pounds, 14 shillings, 1 pence”

There follows a list of disbursements, giving a list of the names of the parties to whom the Sheriff had paid different sums, aggregating 108 pounds, 12 shillings and ten pence, leaving a deficit for the first year of seven pounds seven shillings, and eleven pence.

For the year 1772, the net receipts, after deducting for insolvents and allowing commission for collection, were 74 pounds, 8 shillings and seven pence, but strange to relate, the county this year lived within its income, paid the deficit of the year before and closed with a surplus of seven pounds, eight shillings, and seven pence.

At the August term of the County Court, which convened on the 8th day of August, 1775, the proceedings recorded, begin as follows:

“At an Inferior Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions begun and held for the County of Chatham at the Court House thereof, on the second Tuesday in August in the fifteenth year of His Majesty's reign and on the 8th day of the same month, Anno Domini, 1775, etc.”

Each preceding term had in similar manner set forth the year of the King's Reign, but beginning with the November term, 1775, and thereafter, all mention of the king and his reign is omitted. By the action the people of Chatham renounced the sovereignty of George III, more than seven months before the adoption of the Declaration of American Independence. The presiding Justices at this court, which thus patriotically removed Chatham from British control, were Ambrose Ramsey, Alexander Clarke, John Thompson, and Balaam Thompson, and the Clerk recording the minutes first showing this omission was William Alston.

During the period extending from its organization until its formal severance of relations with Great Britain, Chatham's Justices were Richard Parker, Robert Rutherford, James Sellars, Francis Drake, Abner Hill, Jeduthan Harper, Joab Brooks, Isaiah Hogan, Matthew Drake, Mial Scurlock, Samuel Stewart, Alexander Clarke, John Thompson, and Balaam Thompson.

The first lawyer to move to the county and make it his place of residence was James Williams, who was very prominent during the county's early days. He lived somewhere near Haw River and an old ford in that stream perpetuates his name. In those times, lawyers came from Hillsboro, Wake County, Guilford Court House, and some from as far south as Wilmington, and practiced in the Chatham Courts. On the dockets from 1771 until 1775, appear the names of attorneys having cases in the court. They include, besides James Williams, the first resident lawyer, William Hooper, Bromfield Ridley, John Kinchen, Alfred Moore, Ralph McNair, Alexander Gray, Henry Gifford, John Rand, Thomas Burke, and perhaps others. John Rand, who lived in Wake, was the prosecuting officer of the court, designated as the “King's Attorney.”

At the August term, 1774, the record shows that it was ordered:

“That William Dillard be allowed one pound and five shillings for making a clerk’s table and chair for the King’s Attorney.”

At the February term, 1775, there was made in the minute docket of the County Court the following entry:

“Alfred Moore, Esq., came into Court and produced a commission from His Excellency, the Governor, empowering him to practice as an attorney in the several courts of this Province, thereupon he took several oaths by law directed and subscribed the test.”

He was a native of Brunswick County and was later to become a gallant soldier in the Revolution, and one of the State’s most eminent lawyers, serving as Attorney General of the State, and later as a Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

In Colonial days and for some years after independence, there was a law in force in North Carolina providing that any person convicted of the crime of perjury should be punished by having his ears chopped off by the common hangman. For subornation of perjury the convicted party suffered the loss of one ear only. Such persons as were so unfortunate as to lose an ear or ears by means other than having them removed as a punishment for crime would come into court and have an entry made of record to such effect. In the minute docket of the court for the August term, 1773, appears a typical order of this kind:

“Drewey Banks came into court and moved that an entry be made that he latterly had a fight with one James Roe and had the misfortune in the engagement to have his right ear bit off by the said Roe; it is therefore ordered that the same be admitted to the record of this court.”

Another Colonial law, long since repealed, but which might, with beneficial results to the public, be re-enacted, provided that all inns and taverns, then denominated “Ordinaries,” be required to obtain license from the county court; that the proprietors of such institutions furnish bond with ample security, and the courts fixed the prices which they were permitted to charge. At the August term, 1774, our County Court made the following order:

“The rates of the several Ordinary Keepers in this County shall be as follows:

	Shilling	Pence
West India Rum, per pint.....	1	
New England Rum, per pint.....		8
Good Peach Brandy, per pint.....		8
Apple Brandy, per pint		8
Whiskey.....		6
Crab Cider, per quart		6
All other kinds of Cider.....		4
Bristol Beer, per bottle	2	
Madeira Wine, per gal.	16	
Tencerife Wine, per gal.	14	
Oats or corn, per qt.		2
Stablage, per night, with fodder		1
Hot Dinner with Beer or Cider	1	4
Cold Dinner		8
Breakfast		1
Lodging in good feather bed, per night		4”

Our ancestors in “The brave days of old” must have been little inclined to the doctrine of Mr. Volstead and were evidently less interested in meat than drink.

While before the year 1770, the Indians had long since moved their habitation to the westward, and no longer wandered over the hills of Chatham, certain sections of the county were still “wild and woolly,” for at the August term, 1774, the minute docket contains this entry:

“Ordered that Daniel Murphy be allowed for five wolf scalps as per certificate filed according to law, and that William Murphy be allowed for one wild cat scalp as per certificate so filed.”

These allowances were made in obedience to a provision of law, which offered a bounty of the destruction of wild cats, wolves, and other noxious wild animals. Like Nimrod of old, the Murphy brothers must have been mighty hunters.

~ End of Chapter II ~

Chapter III.

Events Preceding the Revolution -- Chatham Sends Delegates to the Provincial Congress -- County Military Officers -- First Legislators and Local Officers Under Constitution.

To what is known as the First Provincial Congress, which met at New Bern, on August 25th, 1774, and was North Carolina's first assemblage independent of royal authority, Chatham sent none of her citizens as Delegate, but the journals show that the County was represented by Richard Caswell and William McKinnie.

While North Carolina historians have generally recorded Chatham, like the counties of Wake, Edgecombe, Guilford, Hertford and Surry, and the Boroughs of Salisbury, Campbellton, Brunswick and Hillsboro, as sending no delegates to this gathering, they are in error, insofar as Chatham is concerned.

Why Colonel Caswell, who was a citizen of the County of Dobbs, and Mr. McKinnie, who was a resident of the town of New Bern, should have served as delegates from Chatham the records do not disclose. However, it is assumed that our people had become favorably impressed with Col. Caswell, when a judge commissioned by the royal governor, he had some time before presided at a Special Court of Oyer and Terminer and Gaol Delivery held at Chatham Court House, that they were willing to have him represent them at this historic meeting. Whatever may have prompted his selection, the choice was a most excellent one, for he was most ardent in his attachment to the cause of liberty was at this congress along with William Hooper, our former Clerk, and Joseph Hewes, elected a delegate to the Continental Congress. As the State's first Governor under the Constitution, and as a soldier in the field, he rendered the State such excellent and faithful service that his name will ever be held in affectionate memory.

At the second Provincial Congress, which met at New Bern on April the 3rd, 1775, Chatham does not appear to have been represented, but this fact is no indication that her people were not most loyal in their devotion to the American cause, for the County Court had formally refused to endorse any recognition of the royal authority, as evidenced by a resolution adopted by the Wilmington Committee on Safety on May the 20th of this year. This significant resolution is as follows:

“RESOLVED: --

That a paper containing the reasons of the Magistrates of Chatham County not signing the association to them presented by one Dr. Pile is hereby approved by the committee, and is ordered to be published in the Cape Fear Mercury.”

The man mentioned as presenting the association in behalf of the royal government, was Dr. John Pile, a prominent citizen and physician, a staunch loyalist, who was commissioned by the Colonial Governor, Josiah Martin, “To raise the King's Standard in Chatham,” and a Tory who was destined to take an active part in the tumultuous times soon to follow.

When the Third Provincial Congress met at Hillsboro on August the 20th of this year, Chatham was represented by a large delegation composed of her most prominent and substantial citizens. The spirit of revolution was now rife in the land and at this assembly every county and every borough town was fully represented, there being 184 delegates in attendance. The people of our county must have been

thoroughly aroused and enthusiastic, for Chatham sent ten delegates to this Congress, of which Connor,⁶ in his *History of North Carolina*, says:

“No abler body of men ever sat in North Carolina. More than half of them had served in the Assembly or the first two Congresses. Among them were Johnston, Caswell, Howe, Hooper, Burke, Hewes, Harnett, and Willie Jones.”

Our county’s representatives were worthy of the members of this distinguished gathering. They were Elisha Cain, the High Sheriff of the County, long a Justice of the Court and later to serve as a member of the House of Commons, besides holding many other positions of public trust; Richard Kennon, soon to become the county’s first Public Register, and afterward a member of the General Assembly, and in his generation the wealthiest man in the county; Matthew Jones, a man of high character, splendid natural ability and great personal popularity. He was a Justice of the Court, a brave and excellent officer in the Revolutionary Army, and later a legislator and county officer. Jeduthan Harper, another delegate, besides having served long and faithfully as a Justice, was soon to be elected Sheriff of the county, and was by the Congress commissioned Lieutenant Colonel of the Militia and was to represent Chatham in the House of Commons. Moving to Randolph soon after the close of the war, he was sent to the legislature by the people of that county.

John Birdsong, also a delegate, was to be a member of the Convention which adopted the Constitution of the State and the Bill of Rights; was to serve as Sheriff of the County and as a legislator, and to render the most faithful and efficient service in other positions of trust, while Ambrose Ramsey, another, had long been a prominent factor in county affairs, became a Colonel of the Militia, served in the Congress of 1776, was eleven times elected to the State Senate and held many other important positions. Messrs. Joshua Rosser and John Thompson were to be members of the succeeding Congress, and to hold other official positions in the county, while Robert Rutherford and William Alston, other delegates, were to achieve local prominence.

When this Congress assembled the royal Governor had fled, all hopes of a reconciliation with the mother country had ended and preparations were now made for war. Besides orders that two regiments be raised, provisions were made for each district to recruit ten companies of fifty men each, to be called “Battalions of Minute Men,” and that a committee of safety be appointed for each District, County and Town.

Upon the Committee of Safety for the Hillsboro District, there were appointed from Chatham, Ambrose Ramsey, Mial Scurlock and John Thompson.

This Congress also made provision for the organization of a Militia force in each county and appointed Field Officers for the same. Those appointed for the County of Chatham were:

- Ambrose Ramsey, Colonel;
- Jeduthan Harper, Lieutenant-Colonel
- Mial Scurlock, Major
- Elisha Cain, Second Major

⁶ Robert Digges Wimberly Conner (1878-1950) *History of North Carolina* published 1919.

For some reason, Sheriff Cain did not qualify and Matthew Jones was commissioned in his place. How loyally these patriotic men of Chatham performed the duties imposed by the acceptance of these appointments, our county's heroic record in the struggle that followed, attests.

The Fourth Provincial Congress met at Halifax on April the 4th, 1776. To this Assembly Chatham sent the following delegates: Ambrose Ramsey, Jeduthan Harper, Elisha Cain, John Thompson and Joshua Rosser.

This Congress passed a resolution, which is the basis for the statement of Bancroft,⁷ the great American historian, that

“North Carolina was the first Colony to vote explicit sanction to Independence.”

The resolution to which he refers, and which should be read with pride by every patriotic North Carolinian, is:

“RESOLVED

That the delegates from this Colony in the Constitutional Congress be empowered to concur with the delegates of the other Colonies in declaring Independence and forming foreign alliances, reserving to the Colony the sole and exclusive right of forming a Constitution and laws for the Colony, and of appointing delegates from time to time to meet the delegates from other Colonies for such purposes as shall hereafter be pointed out.”

In accordance with a resolution or ordinance of the Council of safety for the Colony, an election was held in the various counties and borough towns of the State on the 15th of October, 1776, to elect delegates who were to assemble at Halifax on November the 12th of the same year, for the purpose of framing a Constitution and establishing a permanent government for the State. In certain sections, this election appears to have been conducted amidst great excitement and considerable rioting, but so far as the records disclose, Chatham held its first popular election in a quiet and orderly manner. It may be of interest to know that though the area of the county was much larger than at present, the mode of travel most primitive, and the roads few and unquestionably bad, there was but one voting place in the county, all electors having to journey to the Court House to cast their ballots.

The delegates chosen by the electorate of Chatham at this election were Ambrose Ramsey, John Birdsong, Mial Scurlock, Isaiah Hogan, and Jeduthan Harper, leading men on the county.

While all our delegates were faithful in their attendance upon the duties of the Congress, the journals showing that they were all present throughout the entire deliberations, Messrs. Birdsong and Hogan, both of whom served as members of the Committee to draft the Bill of Rights, appear to have taken a more conspicuous part than their colleagues from Chatham.

This Congress, besides adopting a Bill of Rights and a Constitution for the State, passed a number of ordinances looking to the immediate organization of an immediate form of government.

An ordinance ratified December the 23rd, 1776, named those who should serve as Justices for their respective counties. Those appointed for Chatham were, Alexander Clarke, Robert Rutherford,

⁷ George Bancroft (1800-1891) A History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent. a multi-volume set published between 1834-1875.

Matthew Jones, John Thompson, Balaam Thompson, Charles Matthews, John Ramsey,⁸ James Sellars, Richard Kennon, Samuel Stewart, John Nall, and Gray Barber.

A subsequent ordinance provided that the Justices of the different counties at the first meeting held after their appointment and qualification should elect a Sheriff and Clerk for their respective counties. Under this authority, the Chatham Justices at the May term, 1777, which appears to have been the first court held after their qualification, appointed Isaiah Hogan Sheriff of the County, and Mial Scurlock Clerk. The predecessors these officials, Elisha Cain, Sheriff, and William Alston, Clerk, must have been agreeable to this action and acquiesced therein, for each of them became a surety upon the official bond of his successor.

At this Court John Thompson was appointed Public Register, succeeding Richard Kennon, who had occupied this position since the creation of that office.

Under the Constitution adopted by this Congress, Richard Caswell became the first Governor⁸ of the State of North Carolina, taking the oath of office and assuming his official duties as Chief Magistrate at New Bern on January the 16th, 1777. The first General Assembly to meet under the Constitution, organized at the same place on April the 11th of this year.

To this General Assembly Chatham sent as Senator, Col. Ambrose Ramsey, and as members of the House of Commons, Major Mial Scurlock and John Birdsong, Esq. Soon after the beginning of the first session, Major Scurlock resigned to become County Court Clerk, and Alexander Clarke was chosen his successor in the Commons, serving throughout the second session.

Rather severe laws were enacted against all persons disloyal to the new government, and our County Court appears to have enforced them with rigor, for we find at the following August term this significant entry:

“Ordered that Henry Bagley and Moses Stegall, who were cited to appear before the court as suspected persons under the Act of Assembly, and refused to take the oath prescribed, depart and leave this state within sixty days from this day agreeable to the directions of said act and that they be in the custody of the Sheriff until they give bond and security, 1000 pounds for Bagley and 100 pounds for Stegall.”

Deserters from the army also found a poor asylum in Chatham, as James Walked discovered, who

“Upon being examined upon suspicion of having deserted from a South Carolina regiment is ordered committed to the public gaol, to be dealt with as the law directs, and have the gun in his possession lodged with Major Scurlock.”

In the enforcement of the law this Court seems to have been no respecter of persons, for James Sellars, one of the Justices of the Court, upon being charged with “having spoken words inimical to the United States of America,” was brought before the court for trial, and after hearing the evidence, do the record reads,

⁸ Col. John Ramsey (About 1745-1801), brother of Brig. Gen. Ambrose Ramsey of the Chatham County Militia & Capt. Matthew Ramsey of the Continental Line, is listed in the Revolutionary Army accounts many times as Commissioner of Chatham County in 1780 & 1781, acquiring supplies for the Militia. The Ambrose & John Ramsey Co. leased a fleet of wagons to the Whig Government for supplying the Militias. John Ramsey smuggled on supply wagons letters to Whig Gov. Burke about what the Tories were up to in the Chatham County/Deep River area, and signed them John Ramsey, Intelligence, Deep River.

“It was solemnly adjudged by the Court that he was Not Guilty.”

No doubt this verdict was most pleasing to “Judge” Sellars and a relief to his fellow members of the court.

~ End of Chapter III ~

Chapter IV.

War For American Independence – Part That Chatham Played in the Struggle – British Troops in the County – General Green at Ramsey’s Mill

In the War for American Independence, the people of Chatham, as in every subsequent struggle, did their full duty. While the county had no organized company or companies in the Continental Army, a large number of our citizens were enlisted in the regular service, and from the Pension Roll of the Soldiers of the Revolution, which was published in 1835, proof is abundant that Chatham soldiers were in every engagement from Moore’s Creek Bridge to Yorktown.

The bold depredations of the Tories in this section was a menace to the American cause throughout the entire conflict, and this constant danger necessitated a thorough organization of the county militia. All able-bodied males between the ages of 18 and 45 were enrolled in this service, and especially during the latter years of the Revolution, they were kept most actively engaged.

In addition to the higher grade militia officers of the county, who were appointed by the Provincial Congress and whose names have been heretofore given, at the August term, 1778, of the County Court, the following Captains were named, viz: Alexander Clarke, Abner Hill, John Nall, William Goldston, Thomas Hill, John Birdsong, Presley George, James Kendrick, Joseph Crump, Edward Edwards, James Herndon, and Josiah Rogers.

The Provincial Council and its successor, the “War Board” frequently made requisitions upon Chatham for both men and supplies and the records indicate that they were invariably honored.

On July the 30th, 1779, Col. Jeduthan Harper writes the Governor of the State that Chatham has raised forty-seven troops, its quota required under the latest draft, and asks that the bounty, which the State was then paying for enlistment, be sent to them.

On September the 18th, 1780, The War Board sent to Col. Ramsey, commanding officer of the county, an order to raise and equip for service against the Tories a Company from Chatham, the loyalists being then active and quite threatening in this section, as the beginning sentence of the order discloses:

“From the representations of Col. Lutterhell, Mr. William Kinchen and others, it appears that the Tories are grown insolent to such a degree as to demand an immediate check. It is said that fifty horses have been taken within a few days; that they have the audacity to assemble in the day time and have taken eight or more horses from the Wilcox Forge.”

Frequent orders were made by the Court in reference to supplies and clothing for the different military companies, and no doubt that County Militia were kept so organized and equipped that Col. Ramsey had little difficulty in furnishing the troops and supplies requested.

Not only were the authorities of the County careful to faithfully maintain the Militia on a war basis, but they were alert and vigilant to seek out and expel from the confines of the state all persons suspected of disloyalty, and in May, 1778, the court made an order authorizing the therein named “To administer the oath by the act of the Assembly prescribed, to the people in general in their respective districts and make a list of all who neglect or refuse to take the same.”

The Court was also diligent in the enforcement of the confiscation acts, against all who adhered to the British Government, John Ramsey, Mial Scurlock and John Nall having been appointed commissioners to take in possession the confiscated estates of the county.

While no notable battles of the Revolutionary War were fought by the regular armies in Chatham soil, several minor skirmishes between American troops and the Tories occurred within its confines. And as both the British Army under Lord Cornwallis and the Continental Army under General Nathaniel Green marched through the county, Chatham saw much of the great armies, besides being the scene of much violence and havoc wrought by the Tories under the cruel, and pitiless, though bold and resourceful David Fanning.

Soon after the battle of Guildford Court House, which was fought on March the 15th, 1781, and which resulted in a decisive victory for neither the American or the British forces, Lord Cornwallis began his retreat toward Wilmington. On the night of March the 22nd his army reached Cane Creek at Dixon's Mill, then in Chatham, but now in Alamance County. Here the British Army camped for two days, Lord Cornwallis making his headquarters at the dwelling of Mr. Dixon, who owned the mill, which is still the property of the Dixon family.

A member of this family, Hon. Joseph M. Dixon, a lineal descendant of the owner of this property, has served as a Representative in Congress, a United States Senator, Governor of Montana, and is now Assistant Secretary of the Interior under the present National Administration.

Upon leaving Dixon's Mill, the British Army marched to Chatham Court House and camped. While there Lord Cornwallis made his headquarters at the dwelling house of Major Mial Scurlock, who had recently died. The tradition is that the British Commander treated Mrs. Scurlock and her children with great consideration, though she was outspoken in her devotion to American Independence, and was the widow of an officer in the State Militia and the mother of a soldier in the Continental Army. Her property was not permitted to be molested and all her possessions were protected.

From the Chatham Court House, the British army marched to Ramsey's Mill, where the present village of Lockville is located, and camped in what has long been known as "Glascock's Old Field," the headquarters of the British General in command being the ancient building still standing, which was long used as the Lockville hotel.

For two days the British army remained in camp at this place while a bridge was being constructed across Deep River. During their stay here several foraging parties were sent out to different sections of the community for the purpose of securing provisions and supplies. These parties were in some instances not very peacefully received, and several English soldiers are said to have been killed by Thomas Riddle and a few other intrepid sons of Chatham, who concealed themselves on the south side of Deep River.

While the British army was hastening the completion of the bridge over which it might cross the river and continue the retreat toward Wilmington, General Green, who had now taken the aggressive and was pursuing, rather than being pursued, was leading his army by a more direct course from Guilford Court House to Ramsey's Mill, and consequently the American army passed through the western section of the County, crossing Deep River at what was known as Rigdon's Ford, about three miles down the river from Gulf. Upon reaching this ford, Green hesitated to cross, not knowing whether the British forces would cross Haw River and go down the east bank of the Cape Fear, or cross Deep River and go down the west bank.

On the early morning of March the 28th, Green left Rigdon's Ford in pursuit of the British army, which had just crossed the river on the bridge that had been erected, and when the American army reached Ramsey's Mill the enemy had escaped.

The American army, under Green, evidently remained in Chatham for several days, for in a dispatch from General John Butler, dated at Ramsey's Mill on April the 11th, and addressed to General Jethro Sumner, the following statement appears:

"General Green marched the main body from this place on Friday last. He went by way of Wilcox's Furnace on Tick Creek, but as to the route from thence I am not advised. I am ordered to remain at this point with part of the militia of the state and collect provisions and withal to collect the scattered militia and send them on to headquarters."

On the 13th of the same month, General Butler, who was still at Ramsey's Mill, sent to General Caswell the following dispatch:

"Yesterday Colonel Roberson, of Bladen County, brought in fourteen prisoners, to wit, five British and nine Tories, taken near Elizabethtown."

In addition to the detachment then at Ramsey's Mill, there appears to have been a considerable body of American soldiers at Chatham Court House, for on April the 13th, Major Pinkney Eaton in a dispatch from there and addressed to General Sumner, says:

"I this day received of Colonel William Leston one hundred and seventy men, who are turned over into the Continental Service."

While unquestionably the largest body of American troops ever assembled in Chatham was Green's army, in September of the previous year, after the battle of Camden, considerable bodies of both Continental and Militia troops were mobilized in the county.

On September the 3rd, 1780, General Jethro Sumner writes Governor Nash from Ramsey's Mill:

"Nearly one third of the soldiers are under the disagreeable necessity of being employed in beating out wheat at different farms for the sustenance of the camp; not a beef secured, the sole dependance is taken from the wood or farms near camp.

"No Commissary immediately employed to look to for these gross neglects. Mr. Mallett has drawn from this Brigade near three hundred beaves (Col. Seawell informs they are Tory property), and had not left one for the camp. I wish your Excellency would give some order to the Commissary Department that a more proper arrangement might take place among soldiery. I intend moving the camp on the other side of the River to-day, if possible, and as there is little provision to supply us on the march, for there is not a supply yet for three days' use."

The Commissary Department must soon have relieved the necessities of the General's troops, for two days later he addresses another communication to the Governor, this one written from Chatham Court House. It is as follows:

"I make use of the opportunity of this express to inform your Excellency of our coming this far; I have given orders for marching off early in the morning, and will proceed with all speed to Salisbury."

The body of troops moving through the county at this time was a large one, for on the date of the above communication, Colonel Mountflorencia, from the Camp at Ramsey's Mill, advises the Governor that he had on Sunday previous, joined General Sumner, and just before his departure,

which was to take place immediately, General Caswell with his troops had joined the forces at the camp.

So far as local records are concerned, the citizens of Chatham, like the inhabitants of Saragossa, when the enemy was at its gates, continued the even tenor of their way amidst all these martial movements. The only reference to General Green's army, which appears in our county records is in the inventory of the estate of Peter Duncan:

“One ticket for two heifers General Green's army took.”

Lieutenant Colonel William Webster, an officer under Cornwallis, and a brave and daring British soldier, who was the hero of Whitsell's Mill, died at Chatham Court House from wounds received at the battle of Guilford Court House.

Had General Green reached Ramsey's Mill a day earlier, doubtless a battle would have ensued between the American and British armies that would have made this Chatham hamlet as distinguished as Moore's Creek, King's Mountain, or Guilford Court House, but the English having safely crossed the river before the approach of the American army were allowed to proceed undisturbed to Wilmington, while Green marched his forces into South Carolina, where he soon succeeded in driving its invaders from that State. Lord Cornwallis, after reaching Wilmington, soon marched his army by way of Halifax into Virginia, where at Yorktown, some time later, he surrendered to the combined American and French forces.

General Green, who was commander-in-chief of the American army that marched through the county, was a brave and skillful officer, and next to Washington, the greatest captain of the Revolution.

Though our enemy, and in a hostile country, it should be said to his eternal credit that Lord Cornwallis was a soldier of superior ability and undaunted courage, and that while in Chatham, as was true of his conduct everywhere throughout the war, he was most humane in the treatment of his foes, and his army left behind no smoking ruins nor train of woe, such as did the Federal Armies in the great Civil War. This great English captain's last action North Carolina was to order the hanging of two British soldiers, who had been guilty of criminal outrage, contrary to his Lordship's positive orders.

While our county suffered little from the invasion of England's principal army, it was less fortunate in the Tory uprising, which occurred when the regular troops had withdrawn from this section of the State. The blood encounters of the Whigs and Tories, the cruelties and inhumanities practiced by the Tory leader, David Fanning, and the horrors that were enacted within the confines of Chatham during these direful days will be the subject of another chapter.

~ End of Chapter IV ~

Chapter V.

David Fanning – Tories Capture Chatham Court House – Battle at Col. Phillip Alston’s in the Horseshoe Bend-- Conflict at Lindley’s Mill – Other Bloody Forays in the County.

The Tory chieftain in this section, and the most successful, most daring and most cruel marauder of the State, was David Fanning, who resided with John Rains, a noted Tory, whose home was on Brush Creek, near the dividing line between the present counties of Chatham and Randolph.

Fanning was a native of the County of Johnston, where he was born about the year 1754, and in early life, he is said to have been apprenticed to a carpenter or loommaker, but on account of the alleged ill-treatment of his master, he left him and fled to the State of South Carolina, where he engaged in trafficking with the Indians. Upon the commencement of the War of the Revolution he allied himself with the adherents of the English government and became a most active Tory. In South Carolina he was engaged in many predatory adventures and soon acquired the reputation of being a bold, enterprising and daring, but unscrupulous, treacherous and inhumane partisan of the guerilla type.

After the fall of Charleston, in May, 1780, he came to Chatham and seems to have demeaned himself as a law-abiding citizen, quiet and inoffensive, until the early spring of 1781, when with a few followers, he entered upon a career of rapine, murder, and predatory warfare that was to place upon him the stigma of being the most diabolically wicked and thoroughly despised man who ever dwelt in Chatham.

Sometime in June, 1781, a meeting of the loyalists was called at Cox’s Mill and by this meeting Fanning was chosen Colonel. He immediately set off for Wilmington to receive his commission from Major James H. Craige, the British officer in command of that military post. The certificate of appointment issued to him was as follows:

“By James Henry Craige, Esq., Major in His Majesty’s 82nd Regiment, Commanding a detachment of the King’s Troops in North Carolina:

To David Fanning, Esq.:

These are to appoint you to be Colonel of the Loyal Militia in Randolph and Chatham Counties, who are directed to obey you as such in all lawful commands, whatsoever; and you are authorized to grant commissions to the necessary persons of known attachment to His Majesty’s person, and Government, to act as Captains and subalterns to the different companies of the militia aforesaid. As Colonel, you are hereby fully empowered to assemble the militia, and lead them against any Rebels or others, the King’s enemies, as often as necessary; to compel all persons whatsoever to join you – to seize and disarm and when necessary to detain in confinement, all Rebels or others, acting against His Majesty’s Government; and to do all other acts becoming a king’s officer, and good subject.

“given at Wilmington, this the 5th day of July, 1781.

J. H. CRAIGE, Major Commanding the Kings Troops.”

Fortified with the authority conferred by this document, Fanning returned to the Deep River settlement on July the 12th and ordered a general muster of the Tories residing in the counties of Chatham and Randolph. He made his headquarters at Cox’s Mill, a point on the western side of Deep River, and in Randolph County, about five miles from the Chatham line. To this place quite a number of men whose sympathies were with the royal cause, came, and were enlisted into companies, whose officers were named and commissioned by himself.

One of the first exploits of Fanning's newly organized troops was an attack upon Chatham Court House, which occurred on July the 16th, 1781. There has been considerable confusion among historians of our Revolutionary period as to whether this event occurred when the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions was being held, or at a militia court martial, but the overwhelming weight of authority sustains the latter theory.

Fanning, in "The Narrative of Colonel Fanning Written by Himself," says:

"The Rebels on the same day held a general muster at Chatham Court House, about twenty-five miles from where I had assembled, and the day following were to call a court martial for the trial of several Loyalists, who had refused to bear arms in opposition to the Government. Upon receiving this intelligence I proceeded to the Court House 17 miles that night, with the men I had named, and the morning following by seven o'clock, I arrived there. I surrounded the place where they were. I expected to find members of the Court Martial, but they had dispersed the evening before and were to meet at 8 o'clock. I then posted pickets on every road, and within the space of two hours took 53 prisoners – among them, the colonel, major, and all the militia officers of the county, except two, who had not attended; also one Continental Captain, with their delegates to the General Assembly. I immediately marched them to Cox's Mill and paroled all except 14, who I knew were violent against the government. These I conducted to Wilmington and delivered to Major Craige."

Among those captured were the most prominent citizens of the county. The members of the General Assembly for that year were Col. Ambrose Ramsey in the Senate, and James Williams, popular attorney of the county, and James Lutrell in the House of Commons. These gentlemen, as were the militia officers taken captive, were evidently the leading men of the county.

On July the 22nd, while en route for Wilmington, to which place they were being conducted, those who had not been paroled at Cox's Mill, addressed the following letter to Governor Burke:

Camp at McFall's Mill, Radft Swamp
22nd July, 1781

"Sir:

On Tuesday last we were captured at Chatham Court House by a party under command of Col. David Fanning. We have been treated with the greatest civility and with the utmost respect and politeness by the commanding officer, to whom we are under the greatest obligation.

"We expect to be delivered to Major Craige at Wilmington, in two or three days, entirely destitute of money or clothes. How long we shall remain so, God only knows.

"Your Excellency's most obedient servants,

Gen. A. Ramsey	Joseph Hine
Matt Ramsey	W. Kinchen
John Birdsong	James Williams
Matthew Jones	Thomas Scurlock
James Herndon	M. Gregory

"P. S.

Simon Terrel is paroled to carry this letter and return to Wilmington."

The friends and relatives of the prisoners were prompt in their efforts to relieve their distress, for on July the 26th, John Ramsey, a brother of two of the captives, addressed a letter to Governor Burke in which he asked permission to go to Wilmington under a flag of truce and carry some money, clothes, etc., to his brothers and friends. In this undertaking he must have been successful, for on August the

22nd, James Williams, one of the captives, who was then in Chatham on parole, wrote the Governor as follows:

“Sir:

I returned from Wilmington on my parole to Chatham county, which prevents my waiting on your Excellency in person. I am desired by the prisoners to acknowledge the receipt of yours by the flag and to thank you for your promised attention to them. Their case really merits it. Every article sold in Wilmington at three times as high, for hard money, as usual. It cost me in three weeks there, for board and some few clothes, 32 pounds sterling, for which I am indebted, as they all are, more or less. They desired me to solicit you for a passport for as much tobacco or any other article as will discharge their debts. If this should fail they will be in a very disagreeable situation. Their credit will stop and they must inevitably suffer. We are very unhappy there. There has been no news in Wilmington, either by land or water, these six weeks. We hope to be exchanged shortly.

“I am your Excellency’s most obedient servant,
James Williams.”

The prisoners were disappointed, both in their efforts to secure a shipment of tobacco and their hope for an early exchange. The Governor advised that an act of Congress forbade the granting a passport for the purpose of sending any commodity to persons in the custody of the enemy, and all efforts to secure an exchange having proved unavailing, they were incarcerated until the cessation of hostilities.

Fanning’s next important exploit after the capture of the Chatham Court House, was an attack made upon the home of Colonel Phillip Alston, who lived in the Horseshoe Bend on Deep River. In this engagement, which occurred on Sunday, August the 8th, 1781, the Tories were met with a most stubborn resistance and sustained considerable loss before compelling a surrender of the Alston home.

Col. Alston, a man of considerable wealth and high social position and Commander of the Militia in the Deep River section, had, a few weeks prior, encountered Fanning and a detachment of his plunderers on one of their predatory raids, and had driven them over into the hills of Randolph. Smarting under the recollection of this defeat, the Tory chieftain had been awaiting an opportunity to be revenged upon this daring patriot. Knowing that, sooner or later, his habitation would be attacked by the Loyalists, Colonel Alston kept sentinels posted outside his dwelling. But these were either captured or driven inside the building at the first onslaught, which occurred before sunrise on the quiet August Sabbath morning. Fanning’s force numbered twenty-four, while the defenders were twenty-six, exclusive of Mrs. Alston and several children.

No sooner were the defenders inside the house than the doors were barricaded and the force distributed through the different parts of the two-story frame building. Mrs. Alston, who was sick, remained in bed, while the children, in order that they might be protected from musket balls, were placed in tables in the fire places of the brick chimneys. The Tories sheltered themselves behind trees and fences, and for hours a continuous firing was kept up on both sides. A British officer, who was with the Tories, suggested that the invaders rush from cover, batter down the doors and thus effect an entrance to the house. In endeavoring to carry into execution this plan, its originator, Lieutenant McKay, with a number of men, crossed the fence surrounding the house, but before reaching the door, he was instantly killed, and his men fled. A Negro, a member of the Tory party, now attempted to approach from the rear and fire the house, but he was shot down and disabled in his dastardly attempt.

From dawn until near nightfall the defenders held the invaders at bay, but Fanning, ever alert with strategy, loaded an ox-cart with hay and setting it on fire, made ready to have it pushed against the

house. Had the building been ignited nothing would have been left but an unconditional surrender. At this juncture, Mrs. Alston, leaving her sick bed, opened the door, and with a flag of truce in her hand, asked for a parley. Firing from both inside and outside ceased, and Fanning called to her to meet him half way. As they met, she said:“ We will surrender Sir, on condition that no one shall be injured, otherwise we shall make the best defense we can, and if need be, sell ourselves as dearly as possible.” To this Fanning agreed and all the party defending the house were paroled. Fanning says that four of the Alston party were killed and all the survivors except three were wounded. He makes no reference to his own losses, though it is known that more than one was killed and several wounded.

Fanning’s most daring exploit and that which stands out as his most important military achievement, occurred on September the 12th, 1781, when he and Colonel Hector McLean, in command of about eleven hundred Tories, marched to Hillsboro then the capital of the State, put to flight the Whig forces that were guarding the town, killing fifteen of their number, and captured more than two hundred prisoners, among them, being the Governor, his Councilors, and other prominent military and civil officials.

In his statement concerning this eventful occasion, Fanning says:

“On the morning of September the 12th, we entered the town in three divisions and received several shots from different houses; however, we lost none and suffered no damage, except one wounded. We killed fifteen of the rebels and wounded twenty, and took upwards of two hundred prisoners, amongst them the Governor, his Council, and part of the Continental Colonels, several captains and subalterns, and seventy-one Continental soldiers out of a church. We proceeded to the gaol and released thirty loyalists and British soldiers, one of which was to have been hanged on that day.”

After plundering the town and committing many depredations, the Tories started toward Wilmington with their captives. In the meantime, the news of this daring raid spread through the settlements, and General John Butler hastily gathered nearly three hundred militiamen, and with this force under the command of himself and Major Robert Mebane, intercepted the Tory forces at Lindley’s Mill, on Cane Creek, in Chatham, and made a valiant, but unsuccessful effort to release the prisoners and crush their captors.

The Whig commanders had wisely chosen a strong position, and Col. McLean, the wily, but brave old Scotchman, would have sought safety by retreat, but upon being taunted with cowardice by a fellow Highlander, he gave the order to advance, and moving at the head of his men, he went down at the first volley, his body being pierced with many bullets. Again and again were the Tories led to the attack, but each time the murderous fire of the brave militia men from Chatham and Orange withstood the assault, and it began to appear that the enemy would be destroyed, when the resourceful Fanning, always equal to a desperate emergency, with a portion of his men, crossed the creek at a ford and attacked the Whigs in the rear. This so confused the militia that General Butler gave orders for an instant retreat. This order, Major Mebane countermanded, and facing a part of his men to the rear, repulsed the attack of Fanning, and held in check the force advancing from the north. Though greatly outnumbered, the gallant Mebane held his ground, and continued to pour a most scathing line of fire into the double line of Tories until his ammunition was exhausted. When powder and bullets could no longer be obtained, by a flank movement, he retreated, and was not followed by the thoroughly discomfited Tories.

In this, the greatest battle fought on Chatham soil, at least one hundred men were killed and a much larger number wounded. The Tories lost by far a greater number in both killed and wounded than the Whigs, and among their killed were Colonel Hector McNeill and Major Raines, a noted follower of

Fanning, while the latter, himself, was severely wounded. Among the Whig killed were Col. John Lutterhell and Major John Nall, both Justices of the County, and most useful citizens, whose untimely deaths were a great loss. Col. Lutterhell lived near Haw River, while the home of Major Nall was near the present town of Bear Creek. The latter has many descendants now living in the county.

Though the capture of Hillsboro was the most famous escapade of Fanning's career in North Carolina, it was not the conclusion, for he continued his acts of murder, rapine, and robbery until months after hostilities had ceased, and long after every regular British soldier had left the State.

In the year 1782, he made an effort to obtain a pardon for his many grievous offenses against the state, and sought the aid of James Williams, Chatham's prominent attorney, and Major Ramsey, another captive of the Court House raid, but all his advances were rejected, and, regarded as an outlaw, he fled the State, never to return. In the "Act of Oblivion and Pardon," passed by the General Assembly in 1783, which offered amnesty, pardon and forgiveness to Tories and Loyalists in general, there was excepted from its benefits, David Fanning, Peter Mallett, and Samuel Andrews.

After fleeing North Carolina, Fanning made his way to Charleston, S. C., and from there departed for Nova Scotia. He continued his criminal course as long as he lived, and not long before his death, which occurred on the island of Cape Breton, in the year 1825, he was pardoned from a sentence pronounced against him for conviction of a capital felony.

Fanning's career has claimed considerable attention at the hands of State historians, and while all paint him as a cruel, vindictive, inhuman and treacherous marauder, it has been generally conceded that he possessed, for the kind of warfare in which he was engaged, talents of high order and that he displayed wonderful boldness and intrepidity on the most perilous occasions and served the cause, which he espoused, though it was a bad one, with unflinching devotion, even in defeat.

Conner says of him:

"As a partisan leader Fanning had no superior on either side in the Carolinas. He had all the dash and daring of Sumter, the fertility and dispatch of Marion, and the resourcefulness of Davie, without possessing, however, those qualities of moral character, which make these men much his superiors. Crafty and treacherous, cruel and vindictive, sparing neither age nor sex, he openly boasts of the brutality with which he destroyed his enemies and desolated this country."

Captain Ashe,⁹ in his most admirable History of North Carolina, says:

"Had he been on the Whig side his fame would have been more enduring than that of any other partisan officer whose memory is so dear to all patriots."

While Col. Moore¹⁰ says:

"No wild beast ever better loved the shedding of blood, and in the catalogue of crimes, there was not one in which he was not adept. He was swift and sly and tireless as a wolf, and beyond all comparison, the greatest villain America has ever produced."

~ End of Chapter V ~

⁹ Samuel A. Ashe (1840-1938), History of North Carolina, a multi-volume set published between 1908-1925.

¹⁰ Probably John W. Moore (1833-1906) History of North Carolina: from the Earliest Discoveries to the Present Time.

Chapter VI.

Other Atrocities of the Tories – Murder of Peaceful Citizens – Chaotic Condition of Society – Depreciation of the Currency, etc.

In addition to those of our countrymen slain by the Tories in the battles and skirmishes that occurred in Chatham and adjoining counties, a number of peaceful citizens were assassinated by the marauders. Colonel Robert Mebane, the hero of the Battle of Cane Creek or Lindley's Mill, was murdered in what is now Williams Township, by Henry Hightower, a Tory, who was subsequently apprehended, and after trial and conviction, was hanged for his crime. A citizen whose name is now forgotten was murdered at Green's Mill, on Rocky River, and in many other sections of the county, men who had no connection with either the regular army or the militia, were foully murdered by the Tory guerillas.

The condition in which the people of Chatham found themselves at this time cannot be better described than in the language of the historian, Connor, who in speaking of this era in our state's history, says:

“The departure of the main armies left North Carolina in the grip of numerous loosely organized undisciplined bands of armed men, both Whigs and Tories, who during the next year carried on in every county, in almost every neighborhood, a relentless civil war. During this period North Carolina was the victim of a carnival of pillage and murder that surpasses that of the Era of Reconstruction. Plantations were plundered, houses were burned, men were murdered and women were outraged.”

The Tories were responsible and inaugurated these outrages in Chatham, and finally a number of the participants were brought to justice and seven expiated their crimes on the gallows at Hillsboro the same day.

In addition to the turbulent state of society that a conflict of this kind brought about, the financial condition of the people was appalling. The most dreadful extent to which the Continental Currency had depreciated is illustrated by an order made by the County Court at its November term, 1781, when it was ordered:

“That James Williams, Esq., be allowed the sum of two thousand five hundred dollars, for a blank book for the Court.”

At the February Term following the low ebb at which the currency still stood is apparent from the following entry:

“It is ordered that Zachary Harmon, Elisha Cain, and James Servant Jones be allowed the sum of 2500 pounds for their trouble as Assessors for the County for the year 1782.”

On the Docket of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, which convened on November the 12th, 1781, appears the following entry regarding the personnel and whereabouts of the Justices of the County, viz:

“A Return of the Situation of the Justices of this County:

PRESIDING

Richard Kennon

Elisha Cain

Thomas Griffith

John Ramsey

Joseph Hinton

Joseph Brantley

Thomas Hill

ON PAROLE

James Williams

John Thompson

James Sellars

Balaam Thompson

PRISONERS

William Kinchen

John Montgomery

Thomas Gregory

John Birdsong

RESIGNED

Abner Hill

Thomas Chapman

Robert Sellars”

Those designated as prisoners or on parole, most, if not all, had been captured at the raid of Chatham Court House, while those marked dead¹¹ had been slain at the battle of Lindley's Mill.

Unfortunately, a full record of the names of those sons of Chatham, who fought in the Continental Army, and those who served with gallantry in the Militia cannot be obtained. However, from the pension rolls of the Revolutionary Soldiers, published in the year 1835, the names of the following Chatham soldiers appear:

Upon the roster for the year 1831:

John Boyd
Thomas Dickens
Joseph Johnson
Reuben Mitchell
Arthur McDaniel
John Pendergrass
David Poe
Joshua Adcock
Jesse Ausley
James Barnes
John Burgess
Rackford Boone
Nathaniel Clark
James Clarke
Richard Drake
Wm. Drake
Daniel Ellington
James Haithcock
Joseph Hackney
Edmund Jones
Herbert Lewis
William Marsh
John Moring
John Mebane

¹¹ None is marked dead in the list in the history written by Walter Siler. However, from his earlier text, the two dead Justices were Colonel John Lutterhell and Major John Nall.

Richard Pope
Charles Roe
Biar Rogers
John Rossen
Abner Lewter
Nathan Yarborough
Joseph Bridges
Thomas May
Josh Foushee

Ten years later, the roster had been considerably depleted, and then the Revolutionary pensioners consisted of the following aged soldier, and widows of soldiers:

William Marsh, Sr., 81
Richard Pope, Sr.
James Barnes, 77
Richard Stokes, 78
James Carter, 77
Herbert Lewis, 82
John Foushee, 82
Joshua Adcock, 79
Moses Merack, 88
Grace Webb, 82
James Dollar, 80
Joseph Yarborough, 83
Thomas Dickens, 82
Andrew Peddy, 83
William Lassiter, 83
Abner Lassiter, 85
Mary Pendergrass, 77
James Kirby, 78
Hardy Lewter, 100
Biar Rogers, 90
John Moring, Sr., 75

Of the pensioners whose names appear upon the roll for this year, William Marsh, Sr., appears to have held the highest military rank, being a Captain in the Continental Army. Captain Marsh lived on Rocky River in what is now Matthews Township, his home being on the Asheboro and Pittsboro road about two miles east of Siler City, and on the farm now owned by Mr. W. Gaston Scott. This Revolutionary patriot lived to a ripe old age and lies buried in the family grave yard a short distance from the present residence. An ancient stone marks his last resting place and chronicles his service to the Continental Army.

While a large majority of the citizens of Chatham were ardent in the cause of liberty and independence and supported with loyalty and vigor the new government, which was established upon the State's separation from the mother country, there was not an absolute unanimity of sentiment, for there were many highly respectable citizens, who adhered to Great Britain, and refused to join what they termed a rebellion against established authority.

So long as open hostilities existed, as might be reasonably expected, there was much bitterness and strife among those who were devotedly attached to ideas and theories so opposed to each other, but when peace had once been established, the rancor and animosities of the struggle soon disappeared, and there was not inflicted upon the Loyalists such ostracism and indignities as marked this period in certain other sections of the State.

It is greatly to be regretted that so little is now known of the personal history of Chatham's prominent citizens during the period now being considered, for the career of many is well worthy of being preserved for the emulation of posterity.

The county's most prominent actor in public life in the county during the Revolutionary era, was Ambrose Ramsey, Colonel of the Militia, and Chatham's highest ranking officer of the citizen soldiery. In addition to his services in the field, he was a Justice of the County Court, and was eleven times selected a member of the State Senate from Chatham, and was always prominent in the militia, having reached the rank of Brigadier General, which he held at the time of his death. He owned considerable property, was a man of great energy and enterprise, owning and operating the mill of Deep River, known for many years as Ramsey's Mill.

John Ramsey, a brother to Ambrose, was for many years a Justice of the County, and served as Clerk of the Court.

Matthew Ramsey, another brother, was Captain of a Company of Light Horse, and was captured by Fanning in the Court House raid. He owned and operated the mill on Rocky River for many years known as Green's Mill, and now the property of Mr. T. B. Bray.

Richard Kennon was a Justice of the County; the first Public Register of the County, besides holding many other places of public trust under the government. He was among the county's wealthiest citizens in his day, and lived, died, and is buried on Rocky River.

Matthew Jones was one of the earliest Justices of the County Court; served as Major of the Militia, and represented Chatham in the Commons. Before the office of State Treasurer was created, a Public Treasurer was chosen for each court District, and from 1779 to 1782, he served in this capacity for the Hillsboro District.

Major Jones was inclined to land speculation and appears to have invested heavily in Pittsboro real estate when the county town was established. His place of residence was on the Pittsboro and

Asheboro road about five miles west of Pittsboro. He died and is buried on his country estate, which is now a part of the Junius A. Alston lands.

Roger Griffith, another Justice of the Court, served for many years as Sheriff, and was also a Major of the militia. He lived just southwest of the town of Pittsboro.

There are many others whose names should be recorded, but inability to secure authentic information concerning them, renders such impossible.

~ End of Chapter VI ~

Chapter VII.

Chatham's Part in the Adoption of the Federal Constitution – Location of the State Capitol – Selection of Site for State University, etc.

When the proposed Federal Constitution was submitted to the states for ratification or rejection, there ensued in North Carolina the most exciting campaign that had been witnessed since the early days of the Revolutionary movement. In fact, this issue gave rise to development of political parties in the nation, those favoring adoption being styled Federalists, while the opposition took name of Anti-Federalists.

In the State elections of August, 1787, the Constitution was the issue, and those opposing ratification were victorious, electing a majority in both the House and the Senate.

By legislative enactment, a Constitutional Convention was called to meet at Hillsboro, on July the 25th, 1788, "For the purpose of deliberating and determining on the proposed plan of Federal Government, and fixing the unalterable seat of government for this state."

The great statesmen of the day were members of this body, among the most prominent being Samuel Johnson, then Governor, and later be a United States Senator; James Iredell, afterward a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States; William R. Davie, renowned in peace and war, and who like Benjamin Williams was to grace the gubernatorial office; John Sitgreaves, to be a Federal Judge; Judge Samuel Spencer, and many others, then or later to become prominent in State and National affairs.

To sit with this galaxy of the State's most learned and patriotic sons, Chatham sent the following delegates, viz: Ambrose Ramsey, James Anderson, Joseph Stewart, George Lucas, and William Vestal.

The paramount question before the Convention was whether or not North Carolina should ratify the Constitution of the United States and thereby become a member of the Federal Union. Six of the eleven days of the session were devoted to a discussion of this subject, at the end of which a vote was taken and the resolution to ratify was defeated by a decisive majority. Mr. Lucas, one of Chatham's delegates, voted with Johnston, Iredell, Davie and other advocates of ratification, while Messrs. Ramsey, Anderson, Stewart and Vestal voted with the opposition.

The position taken by the Chatham delegates on the matter of selection of the permanent seat of government is also interesting. On the preliminary motion that the Convention proceed to ballot for the place at which the capitol should be located, Mr. Lucas voted with the majority, to proceed, while his colleagues from Chatham voted in the negative.

A resolution was adopted providing that the Convention would not fix a permanent seat of government at any particular point, but it would be left at the discretion of the General Assembly, provided that it should be located within ten miles of a point or place determined on by the Convention.

The following places were thereupon placed in nomination, viz: Smithfield, Tarborough, Fayetteville, Isaac Hunter's farm in Wake County, New Bern, Hillsboro, and the fork of Haw and Deep River (after Haywood) in Chatham County. Strange to say, the nomination of the last named place was not made by a delegate from Chatham, but by General Thomas Person, a Revolutionary soldier, who was one of the delegates from Granville County.

The Committee appointed to superintend the balloting reported, through its Chairman, Mr. Williams, a delegate from Moore, that no place nominated had received a majority, and it was ordered that a second ballot be taken. After the second ballot had been concluded, the Chairman reported that Isaac Hunter's farm in Wake County had received the majority of the votes, and was thereby fixed as a place within ten miles of which the General Assembly should locate the capitol. No record appears from the journal as to how the individual delegates voted, nor does the proceedings contain anything to indicate that the tradition that Chatham came within one vote of having the capital located within its borders is authentic.

However, it is evident that the Chatham delegation was unalterably opposed to the selection of the place chosen, for the last day of the session a protest to the action of the Convention in locating the capitol was filed by quite a large number of delegates and the entire Chatham delegation joined in this protest.

In this Convention, Chatham was represented by some of her most distinguished citizens. The public services of Col. Ramsey have been mentioned heretofore. Mr. Stewart was elected six times a member of the House of Commons, and served six terms in the State Senate; Mr. Anderson was seven times a member of the House of Commons; Mr. Lucas was a member of the House of Commons for two terms and was a State Senator for many years, while Mr. Vestal was to serve as a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1789.

The Federalists were not content with rejection and no sooner had the Hillsboro Convention adjourned than they began agitation looking to the calling of another. They were much encouraged by the fact that Virginia had now ratified, as had New York, leaving only the states of North Carolina and Rhode Island out of the Union.

The General Assembly, after having rejected a bill providing for the calling of another Convention, reconsidered its action, and a second Convention was called to meet at Fayetteville on November the 16th, 1789.

To this Convention, there were sent as delegates from Chatham the following of her citizens, viz: Robert Edwards, William Vestal, John Thompson, John Ramsey, and James Anderson.

As at the Hillsboro Convention, the year previous, the absorbing question was the ratification of the Federal Constitution. Public sentiment had undergone a complete change and the advocates of ratification had an easy victory, winning by a majority of 118. Messrs. Ramsey, Thompson, and Stewart voted with the majority, while Mr. Edwards cast his vote with the minority. Mr. Vestal appears to have been absent when the question was voted upon.

Of Chatham's delegate to this Convention, Messrs. Stewart and Vestal had served in the previous Convention held in Hillsboro the year before; Mr. Thompson had served in the Provincial Congress in 1776, and was later to serve for many years as a county officer, while Messrs. Edwards and Ramsey were influential citizens in their day, the latter for a number of years being County Court Clerk.

Reverting to the matter of locating the capital of the State, it may be of interest to note that the Legislature at the session of 1779, had selected a committee with instructions to select a location in Chatham, Johnston or Wake counties for a permanent capital. In 1781, the town of Hillsboro was determined upon and the public buildings at New Bern were ordered sold. But in the summer of that year Hillsboro was captured by Fanning, and as the location was deemed too near the seat of war for safety, the next session of the legislature repealed the act making Hillsboro the capital, and the matter finally reached the Convention as heretofore stated.

Despite the action of the Convention of 1788, it was not until the year 1791 that the General Assembly took action looking to the location of a permanent seat of government.

At this session of the legislature a commission composed of Joseph McDowell, James Martin, Thomas Person, Thomas Blount, William Harrington, James Bloodworth, and Willie Jones, was appointed to purchase land and lay off a capital city. After investigation, the commission agreed upon the Joel Lane plantation, and purchased from him a tract of one thousand acres, upon which the city of Raleigh is located. Chatham was represented in the General Assembly which made these provisions by Joseph Stewart in the Senate, and John Mebane and James Anderson in the House of Commons.

The Board of Trustees, named by the act providing for the creation and organization of the University met at Fayetteville on the 15th of November, 1790. The principal business then considered was the question of the location of the institution.

Willie Jones, a member of the Board, offered a resolution to the effect that no particular spot be chose, but that by ballot a place would be named within fifteen miles of which the University should be located.

The following places were then place in nomination, viz:

Raleigh, in Wake County

Hillsboro, in Orange County

Pittsboro, in Chatham County

Williamsboro, in Granville County

Smithfield, in Johnston County

Cyprett's Bridge, over New Hope, in Chatham County

Goshen, in Granville County

The Board proceeded to vote, and on the first ballot Cyprett's Bridge, later known as Prince's Bridge, and located on the high road from New Bern to Pittsboro, by Raleigh, was chosen.

Dr. Battle,¹² in his admirable history of the University, says:

“The choice was a natural one. The fifteen mile radius allowed a range over the wide areas of Chatham, Wake, and Orange, from the highlands of New Hope to the hills of Buckhorn, from Hickory Mountain to the eminences overlooking our capital on the west.”

On the 4th of August, 1792, the Board adopted an ordinance to carry into effect the selection of the site within the circle above described.

To make this selection a Commission composed of one member from each Congressional District, selected by ballot, was named. The commissioners so named were Wm. Porter, of Rutherford; John Hamilton, of Guilford; Alexander Mebane, of Orange; Willie Jones, of Halifax; David Stone, of Bertie; Frederick Hargett, of Jones; William H. Hill, of New Hanover; and James Hogg, of Cumberland.

¹² Kemp Plummer Battle (1831-1919), History of the University of North Carolina.

How this duty was performed, Dr. Battle graphically describes as follows:

“They started from Pittsboro to view the various sites offered for their choice. Great efforts were made for the location at Haywood, in the forks of the Haw and Deep Rivers, likewise a competitor with Raleigh for the seat of government. An offer was made of six hundred and forty acres of land to secure the selection of the Cross Roads in Wake County, near the present town of Cary, where then lived Nathaniel Jones. Ten other places were tendered, mainly in the county of Chatham, but in far-sighted liberality, the men of Chapel Hill and its vicinity exceeded all others.”

Among the proposals or offers made to induce the selection of the site in Chatham, the following extracts from the report submitted by Senator Hargett, Chairman of the Committee, will be of interest:

“November 2nd.

Proceeded to view the Gum Spring, belonging to Phillip Meroney; also Matthew Jones’s, John Minters’ and Matthew Ramsey’s land (near Pittsboro) and received their proposals. Sundry gentlemen of the County of Chatham offered further donations to the amount of four hundred and odd pounds (exclusive of 1,302 pounds offered as a donation to the Board at Hillsboro), provided the University was fixed at the fork of Haw and Deep Rivers; and Ambrose Ramsey, Patrick St. Lawrence, George Lucas, John Mebane, Panthareup Harmon and Thomas Stokes, guaranteed to the amount of 1,500 pounds, provided that the University were established at the aforesaid fork”

“November 3rd.

Proceeded to view Richard Kennon’s place and Lassiter’s Hill, and received proposals of the respective proprietors.”

“November 4th.

Proceeded to Captain Edwards’ and the widow Edwards’ places on the north side of Haw River and received proposals.”

“November 5th.

Viewed the Tignal Jones place, commonly called Parker’s, but no proposals were offered by the proprietors. However, Tignal Jones, Jr., and Robert Cobb offered a donation of 500 acres of land adjoining the place.”

The citizens residing in the neighborhood of Chapel Hill offered what appeared to be the greater inducements than those made by the people of Chatham, and the University was located in the neighboring County of Orange.

It should be said that our people, as has always been their characteristic, acquiesced in the decision, and Col. Edward Jones and other citizens of the county made liberal contributions to the institution.

The people of our county have always been loyal in their support of the State University. From the opening of its doors on November the 15th, 1775, there has not been a year when Chatham was not represented in the student body. In addition, a number of her sons have served upon the Board of Trustees; others have been honored members of its faculty, and her representatives in the General Assembly have usually been ardent in their support of all measures looking to its welfare.

The first student of Chatham to graduate was John Lewis Taylor, who was a member of the class of 1807. While quite a number of others were students, only the following graduated from the beginning of the institution until the year 1825:

1807 – John Lewis Taylor

1809 – John Briggs Mebane

1810 – James Fauntleroy Taylor

1811 – John Ambrose Ramsey

1814 – Charles Manly

1822 – Abraham Rencher

1823 – Samuel Stewart

1825 – Thomas Riddle

Among the early Trustees, Edward Jones, prominent lawyer of Chatham, and for many years Solicitor General of the State, served from 1804 until his death in 1841, and John Briggs Mebane from 1814 until 1819.

~ End of Chapter VII ~

Chapter VIII.

Early Schools – Pittsboro Academy Chartered 1786 – Blakely Academy Incorporated 1817 – Haywood Academy Authorized by the Legislature 1818 – Tick Creek Academy Chartered in 1831 – Pittsboro Academy Authorized to Raise Money by Lottery – Other Educational Institutions of the Older Days

While the territory later to become Chatham county was penetrated by the old-time school masters before its organization in 1771, though the names of these pioneer promoters of education, save that of Rednap Howell, are lost to history, no permanent schools were organized until after the Revolution.

In the year 1786, the General Assembly incorporated the Pittsboro Academy, which was the first school of a permanent nature to be organized in the county.

The preamble to the act states:

“Whereas, the establishing an academy in the County of Chatham for the education of youth will be attended by many advantages, and Pittsborough being a healthy situation, where provisions are cheap and students can be accommodated at moderate expense, etc.”

The trustees named in the act were:

Dr. James White
James Williams, Attorney-At-Law
James Anderson
George Lucas
Matthew Jones
John Montgomery
John Taylor
Patrick St. Lawrence
Dr. John Servant Jones
Ambrose Ramsey

The Pittsboro Academy soon became one of the leading schools of the state, and many eminent educators served as members of its faculty.

The General Assembly of the State in the year 1797, authorized the trustees of this Academy to conduct a lottery for the purpose of raising funds for the benefit of the school. The act provided for a the number of tickets to be sold, the number of prizes, their value, etc., and named as trustees to have in charge of the sale of the tickets, the drawing of the prizes, and general conduct of the business, the following:

John Ramsey
James Taylor
Charles Chalmers
John Henderson
James Brady
John Dabney
William Warden

William Bingham, the founder of the celebrated Bingham School, which has continued to this day, was at one time principal of this academy and, in fact, Pittsboro is regarded as the birthplace of the school, which has been conducted by the Bingham family for more than a century.

Other principals following Bingham were David Caldwell, Jr., a son of Dr. David Caldwell, the famous Guilford County teacher; German Guthrie, Jacob Gillett, Rev. Nathaniel H. Harris, J. M. Lalor, a Mr. Poe, Peter Le Messurier, J. M. Lovejoy and others.

At some times, especially under the supervision of Prof. Bingham, the school was exceedingly prosperous and numbered among its students many pupils from the lower section of the state. James Fautleroy Taylor, afterward Attorney General of the State, Charles Manly, and John Owen, each afterward to serve as Governor of the State; Basil Manly, long a Superior Court Judge, Justice of the Supreme Court,; President of the State Senate and chosen as a United States Senator, and many others who reached eminence in this and other states, were students in this ancient academy.

In the year 1817, the name was changed from that of the Pittsboro Academy to Blakely Academy in honor of Captain Johnston Blakely, who had distinguished himself in the War of 1812, and was lost at sea.

The act of the legislature making this change named as trustees of the new academy, the following:

Edward Jones
John B. Mebane
Roderick Cotton
Charles J. Williams
Winship Steadman
William Scurlock
James Taylor
Zachariah Harmon

The Raleigh Register of June the 10th, 1800, contains the following advertisement:

“PITTSBOROUGH ACADEMY

The Semi-Annual Examination of the students will commence on Tuesday, the first of July next, and will continue three days.

Terms of Tuition

Eight dollars per annum for Reading, Writing and Arithmetic

Thirteen dollars per annum for the Classics, English, Grammar, Geography, the Mathematics, etc.

The price of board, including washing, lodging and mending, Fifty-two dollars per annum.

Any number of students can be accommodated.”

In the year 1818 Haywood Academy was incorporated with the following trustees:

John Farrar

Thomas Hill

Herndon Haralson

Archilarus Corloss

Thomas Farish

Richard C. Cotton

John A. Ramsey

The first principal of this academy was Zacheary Wilson, and under his administration the school became prosperous and flourished for a number of years.

Tick Creek Academy, Pleasant Hill Academy, and other similar institutions were chartered by the general Assembly some few years later and a subsequent chapter¹³ will give further details as to their careers.

~ End of Chapter VIII ~

¹³ If Walter Siler wrote subsequent chapters, their whereabouts are unknown to me.

Chapter IX.

Population As Shown By The First Federal Census – Growth During First Fifty Years of County’s Existence – Legislators, Sheriffs, Etc.

The first Federal Census, which was taken in the year 1790, gives the population of Chatham as 9,221. Of this number, but 1,534 were slaves and less than one hundred free Negroes. At this time there were few residents of the county who owned as many as ten or more slaves, though within the next few decades the slave population was destined to be considerably increased, and the time came when some citizens of the county counted their slave chattels by the hundreds, but at this early date the institution had not found much favor in Chatham.

This census shows the following who each owned ten or more, viz:

George Lucas	68
Matthew Jones	42
Phillip Taylor	36
Thomas Stokes	27
Burwell Williams	20
John Montgomery	18
Sarah Ragland	17
Gideon Goodwin	17
Christopher Kirksey	17
James Taylor	18
William Clark	17
James Anderson	15
Jacob Flowers	15
Sarah Scurlock	14
Presley Cox	13
Joseph Rosser	13
Benjamin Harris	12
Joseph Bridges	12
Francis Jones	12
John Justin	12
Joseph Brantley	12
Isaac Brooks	12
Zachariah Harmon	11
Thomas Evans	11

Elisha Cain	11
Thomas Evans ¹⁴	10
John Minter	12
Wm. Brantley.....	12
Mary Brantley	12
John Taylor	11
Wm. Glossen.....	11
Nathan Stedman	10

By the Federal Census of 1800 the County's population was 11,861; in 1810 it was 12,977; in 1820 it was 12,661, and in 1830 it was 16, 242.

Sheriffs

In Colonial days the sheriffs were appointed by the Governor. Since independence they have been first appointed by the General Assembly, later they were chosen by the County Court, and since 1829 have been elected by direct vote of the people. From the organization of the county until the year 1829 the following have served the county in this important office, viz:

- April 1771 to May 1776, Elisha Cain
- May 1776 to May 1777, Jeduthan Harper
- May 1777 to May 1779, Isaiah Gogan
- May 1779 to May 1781, John Birdsong
- May 1781 to May 1785, Roger Griffith
- May 1785 to August 1796, Zachariah Harmon
- August 1796 to August 1798, John Howard
- August 1798 to August 1804, Thomas Ragland
- August 1804 to August 1809, George Gee
- August 1809 to August 1812, Bartholomew Lightfoot
- August 1812 to August 1813, Edwards Rives¹⁵
- August 1813 to August 1837, Horace D. Bridges.

¹⁴ Walter Siler listed this Thomas Evans with 10 slaves, and, two persons previously, listed a Thomas Evans with 11 slaves. I am not certain if one of the listings is in error or whether there were two slaveholders named Thomas Evans.

¹⁵ Walter Siler had this man listed as "Edward Rives," but the correct name was Edwards Rives (1775-1840). From the "Deaths" column, The Raleigh Register, 3/6/1840: "At his residence, in Chatham County, on the 2d. of February, in the 65th year of his age, Edward Rives, Esq. In him the citizens of Chatham have lost one of their best, most useful and influential citizens. Such was his devotion to justice and probity, that he was the name of the "honest man" and impartial magistrate; while his generous and liberal soul marked him for the most confiding and enduring friendship."

It will thus be seen that Sheriff Bridges was the last to be chosen by the County Court and the first to be elected by direct vote of the people. He also enjoys the distinction of having held the office longer than any other person has served as sheriff of the county in its history.

An examination of the court records of those early days discloses the fact that the sheriff's office has always been one of considerable hazard, and that not a few were financially ruined as a result of having held the office.

Members of the General Assembly from Chatham

Under the Colonial government, Chatham was represented in the legislative assembly by the following of her citizens, viz:

1770-1771	John Wilcox	Isaac Brooks
1773	Isaac Brooks	William Grave
1774	Stephen Poe	Richard Parker

Under the Constitution of 1776, each county was entitled to one Senator and two members of the House of Commons. The General Assembly convened annually and the following were members from Chatham, viz:

	Senate	Commons
1777	Ambrose Ramsey Alexander Clark	Mial Scurlock John Birdsong
	Scurlock, after the first session, resigned to become County Clerk, and was succeeded by Clark.	
1778	Ambrose Ramsey John Birdsong	Alexander Clark James Williams
	Col. Ramsey resigned and was succeeded by Birdsong.	
1779	Ambrose Ramsey John Lutrell	Jeduthan Harper
1780	Ambrose Ramsey James Williams	Mial Scurlock
1781	Ambrose Ramsey John Lutrell	James Williams
1782	William B. Smith James Williams	Elisha Cain Matthew Ramsey

In this year there was a contest between Smith and Williams as to which had been elected Senator. Both were admitted, and there is no record as to how the contest ended.

1783	Ambrose Ramsey Richard Kennon	Matthew Jones
1784	Ambrose Ramsey Joseph Stewart	Elisha Cain
1785	Ambrose Ramsey Joseph Stewart	Roger Griffith
1786	Ambrose Ramsey Joseph Stewart	James Anderson
1787	Ambrose Ramsey Joseph Stewart	James Anderson
1788	Ambrose Ramsey Joseph Stewart	James Anderson
1789	George Lucas Joseph Stewart	James Anderson
1790	Joseph Stewart John Mebane	James Anderson
1791	Joseph Stewart John Mebane	James Anderson
1792	Joseph Stewart John Mebane	James Anderson
1793	Joseph Stewart John Mebane	George Lucas
1794	Joseph Stewart John Dabney	George Lucas
1795	Joseph Stewart John Mebane	Thomas Scurlock
1796	Lemuel Smith John Dabney	Thomas Stokes
1797	George Lucas John Dabney	Thomas Stokes
1798	George Lucas John Dabney	Thomas Stokes
1799	James Gaines John Mebane	John Dabney

1800	James Gaines John Mebane	James Alston
1801	Lemuel Smith John Mebane	John Dabney
1802	Joseph John Alston ¹⁶ John Dabney	George Dismukes
1803	Joseph John Alston John Dabney	John Mebane
1804	William Brantley Andrew Headen	John Farrar
1805 William O'Kelley	John Farrar
1806	Winship Stedman Andrew Headen	John Mebane
1807	John Farrar Andrew Headen	John Mebane
1808	John Farrar Andrew Headen	John Mebane
1809	Roderick Cotten Chas. J. Kennon	John Mebane
1810	Micajah McGee Nathan Stedman	Mark Bynum
1811	Roderick Cotten John Mebane	Andrew Headen
1812	Micajah McGee William O'Kelley	Mark Bynum
1813	John Farrar John B. Mebane	Bartho. Lightfoot
1814	Andrew Headen William O'Kelley	John A. Ramsey

¹⁶ Joseph John Alston (1767-1841). Known as “Chatham Jack” or “40-Mile Jack,” Joseph John Alston came to Chatham County in 1791, living on land given him by his father, Joseph John Alston, Sr. His father had actively acquired land in Chatham since the 1770s, along the stage coach road between current day Pittsboro and Siler City. By 1800 Jack had 123 slaves, and in 1810 he owned 108 slaves. By 1815 he owned over 2000 acres of land and eventually came to own some 40,000 acres. (Source: *The Architectural Heritage of Chatham County North Carolina*, by Rachel Osborn and Ruth Selden-Sturgill (1991), p.9.

1815	John Farrar William O'Kelley	John A. Ramsey
1816	John Farrar William O'Kelley	Richard C. Cotten
1817	John Farrar John J. Alston ¹⁷	Richard C. Cotten
1818	William O'Kelley John A. Ramsey	Richard C. Cotten
1819	John Farrar John A. Ramsey	Thomas Hill
1820	Thomas Hill Jesse Bray	John W. Bynum
1821	Jesse Bray James C. Barbee	Richard Freeman
1822	Jesse Bray Wm. Underwood	Richard C. Cotten
1823	Robert Marsh A. Ramsey	Wm. Underwood
1824	Robert Marsh Richard C. Cotten	Ambrose Ramsey
1825	Robert Marsh Joseph J. Brooks ¹⁸	Wm. Underwood

¹⁷ John Jones Alston (1792-1842), firstborn son of notable planter Joseph John (Chatham Jack) Alston and his wife, Martha Kearney. Local tradition stating that in 1810 Chatham Jack built a house on Harland's (now Holland's) Creek for his son seems to be confirmed by an 1810 receipt signed by Meleus Broome for brick and plaster work on the house of J. J. Alston. John Jones Alston was a student at the University of North Carolina between 1808 and 1812, served in the state House of Commons in 1817, and in 1822 married Adaline Williams (about 1805 – 1885). Like his father, John Jones Alston became a prominent planter in Chatham County. Chatham Jack's will, probated in 1841, gave him title to the house and 300 acres of land, but he survived his father by only one year. His widow, Adaline, received the residence in her dower partition of the plantation. (Source: *The Architectural Heritage of Chatham County North Carolina*, by Rachel Osborn and Ruth Selden-Sturgill (1991), p.237.

¹⁸ Joseph John Brooks (1780-1837). Per Ida Brooks Kellam, *Brooks and Kindred Families* (page 153), he "was one of the outstanding citizens" of Chatham County. "He represented his County in the North Carolina General Assembly in 1825-28-29-30 and 31. In 1835 he was a member of the House Committee on Education and he is listed among those voting in the negative on the Bill to prevent all persons from teaching slaves to read and write, the use of figures excepted. "He was married to Hannah Harper, a descendant of Travis Harper, brother of Colonel Jeduthan Harper.

Under the old Constitution the position of Councilor of State was one of great honor and dignity, and to this office George Lucas was elected by the Assembly of 1794 and Joseph John Alston was elected by the Assembly of 1800.

~ End of Chapter IX ~

Chapter X.

Early Churches – Pioneer Preachers – Quaker Denomination First to Send Ministers Into County – Organization of Sandy Creek Baptist Association – Baptists First to Establish Churches In Chatham

While the Friends or Quakers were the first to send ministers into this section of the state, this denomination in the early days, as now, was not aggressive and made little, if any effort, to establish churches.

Under the Colonial government the English Church or the Episcopal Church was recognized as the state religion, yet little effort seems to have been made to establish places of worship in the interior, and the Baptists were first to organize congregations and erect church buildings in the county.

From the Sandy Creek Association, which is the oldest in this state and one of the oldest in America, originated the different churches of the Baptist faith in the County.

This Association was organized in the year 1758 and takes its name from the Sandy Creek meeting house, in Randolph County, where the organization was perfected.

For quite a number of years all the separate Baptist Churches in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina were included in this association.

Among the early churches of the Baptist denomination organized in Chatham and affiliated with this Association, are:

BEAR CREEK

Of which an eminent historian¹⁹ says:

“This church is located on Bear Creek in Chatham County, N. C. From 1785 to 1787 they held meetings as an arm of some other church, and met for worship at Powell’s meeting House, Bear Creek, Lick Creek and occasionally at private houses. They were constituted into a church in 1787. Elder Sherwood White was their first pastor. He was succeeded in 1790 by James Younges.”

It appears from the records that the other pastors who served this congregation in the ancient days were John Record, John Hunter, James Beck, and Hezekiah Harmon, the last named serving for many years.

¹⁹ From later text it would appear that this historian, and the author of all the quotations about local Baptist churches appearing in this chapter, was Rev. George W. Purefoy, in his “Centenary Sermon” preached at Love’s Creek Church on October the 3rd, 1858.

As an evidence of how times have changed, it will be of interest to know that the congregation in the year 1796 passed a resolution to the effect that “It is wrong for a church member to retail spirits at a public company.”

It also appears of record that in the year 1789 the congregation refused the application for membership for one who had been baptized by an excommunicated minister, the resolution solemnly declaring that “We will neither receive him nor his works.”

ROCK SPRING

This church is located two miles north of Pittsborough. It was first known as ‘The Haw River Church,’ then as the ‘Old Fork,’ and when moved to its present location, it took the name Rock Spring. It is regarded as the second oldest church in the association, and Bear Creek is the third.”

Basil Manly, the eminent divine and educator, once served as clerk of this church and was by it licensed to preach on April the 25th, 1818.

The church records prior to 1817 seem to be lost, but tradition has it that Elnathan Davis and Rev. George Pope were its most prominent pastors during this period.

Following the year 1816, Robert T. Daniel, George Brown, Hezekiah Harmon, Thomas D. Armstrong, William H. Merritt, and George W. Purefoy served as pastors.

FALL CREEK

“This church is located in Chatham County, near Deep River, and was constituted in 1799. Elder Isaac Teague, who was a member of this church, was its pastor until about 1830. William H. Merritt then became its pastor.

“William Carr, one of the companions of the notorious Fanning, became a member of this church. His widow is now living at the advanced age of nearly one hundred years.” (This was written in the year 1858).

MAY’S CHAPEL

“This church is located in Chatham County, eight miles south east of Pittsborough. It was constituted in the year 1802 by Elders George Pope, William Brantley and William Angel. It was at first called George’s Creek.

“The following constituted its early ministers or pastors: George Pope, William Brantley, Hezekiah Harmon, Eli Phillips, Thomas D. Armstrong, James McDaniel, P. W. Dowd, and William Lineberry.”

The North Carolina Baptist State Convention was once held with this church.

ROCKY RIVER

Rev. George W. Purefoy in his Centenary Sermon preached at Love's Creek Church on October the 3rd, 1858, said of this church:

It is located in Chatham County, N. C., on the waters of Rocky River. It was constituted in 1757, if the statement to that effect in the minutes of the association for the year 1834 are correct. This is no doubt a mistake, for in 1771 it is not in the list of churches that then composed the association. It was then no doubt an arm of the Sandy Creek church, as soon after constituted into a church. Of its early history little is known.

“Daniel Hackney, Sr., and David Teague were perhaps the first deacons; they resigned in 1825, in consequence of old age. Elder Adam Moffitt was pastor for a number of years. Since his retirement the pastors have been T. D. Armstrong, E. Crutchfield, E. Phillips and William Lineberry.”

~ End of Chapter X ~

December, 1931, Marks 161st Anniversary of Chatham County

Has Enjoyed Steady and Phenomenal Era of Progress Since Its Formation in December, 1770

Has Given to World Some of Its Leading and Most Successful Men and Women

A Review of Chatham's History From Formation Thru 1924

By Hon. Walter D. Siler, Pittsboro, N. C

For twenty years immediately preceding the organization of Chatham county, the territory now embraced within its boundaries was a part of Orange. Orange had been formed in the year 1751 from Bladen, Johnston and Granville, and as our county lies within the original domain of the latter, it may be properly termed a daughter of Orange and a granddaughter of Granville.

The act creating the county was passed at the Colonial Assembly, which convened at New Bern in December, 1770, and while its preamble recites as a reason therefor, "The great extent of the county of Orange renders the attendance of the inhabitants of the south-west part thereof to do public duty extremely difficult and expensive," the real purpose of the royal authorities was to so divide the counties in which the "Regulation Movement" was strong that there would be less occasion for the gathering of large crowds at the court house towns in the affected districts. Orange was the birthplace of the movement which culminated in the battle of Alamance, and our county, Wake and Guilford were all created immediately following the uprising, not so much for the convenience of the inhabitants, but as political measures designed to bring about public tranquility. The county was named in honor of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, England's greatest statesman and steadfast champion of the rights of the Colonies in the British Parliament.

The creating Act provided that after April the 1st, an Inferior Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions should be held for the county on the first Tuesdays of February, May, August and November of each and every year, and that the Justices should meet at the residence of Capt. Stephen Poe on the first Tuesday in May, 1771, take the oath of office and organize the county government. Provision was also made for the levy of a tax of two shillings each on each taxable person of the county, for three years, for the purpose of building a court house, jail and stocks. A committee composed of Edmund Fanning, Mark Morgan, Richard Parker, and Stephen Poe and Richard Clark²⁰ [20] was named to select a site for the seat of government.

On May 6th, 1771, the Court met at the residence of Capt. Poe, and William Hopper, who presented his commission of appointment from the Governor, was duly qualified and became the first County Court Clerk, and Elisha Cain producing a commission from the same authority, was qualified as Chatham's first Sheriff. The seat of government was soon established at the point selected by the committee, viz, on the farm of Mial Scurlock, about one-half mile south of the present town of

²⁰ In the serial version of his history, Walter Siler referred to this man as Richard Cheek, not Richard Clark. I am uncertain as to which was correct.

Pittsboro. This location is said to have been chosen, both for the fact that it was near the geographical center of the county, and that near by was a never failing spring noted for its excellent water.

There was no village or settlement at the first capital of the county, which was known as “Chatham Court House,” the only buildings near by being the residence of Major Scurlock. The seat of government continued at this place until after the close of the Revolution when it was moved to its present location, where the town of Pittsboro was established.

To the first Colonial Assembly, which convened after its organization, Chatham sent as its Representatives Isaac Brooks and John Wilcox, two of its most prominent citizens, both of whom still have many descendants in the county. To the succeeding Assembly, which met in January, 1773, it again sent Isaac Brooks, and as his colleague sent William Grave, and to the session of 1774, it elected Richard Parker and Capt. Stephen Poe. The latter died before the session convened.

William Hooper, the first Clerk, served from May 1771 until November, 1772, when he was succeeded by Joel Lane. The latter resigned in December, 1773, when William Alston was appointed to this position, which he held until May, 1776.

Major Cain, the county’s first Sheriff, served from 1771 until 1776, when he was succeeded by Col. Jeduthan Harper.

A record of the Sheriff’s settlement of taxes collected for the first year of the county’s existence shows that there were 1,135 taxable polls in the county; the taxes levied amounted to 118 pounds and 10 shillings; 1 pound was termed as insolvent and the Sheriff’s commissions allowed for collection were 8 pounds and 15 shillings, the net receipts being 100 pounds and 14 shillings, or a little less than \$500. In a list of disbursements showing the names of the parties to whom the Sheriff had paid different sums aggregating 108 pounds and 12 shillings. It would appear that our early forefathers at this early date had to wrestle with the ever present “deficit.”

The minutes of the County Court, which convened on August the 8th, 1775, begin as follows:

“At an Inferior Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions begun and held for the County of Chatham at the Court House thereof on the second Tuesday in August in the fifteenth year of His Majesty’s reign and on the 8th day of the same month, Anno Domini, 1775, etc.”

Each preceding term had in similar manner set forth the year of the King’s Reign, but beginning with the November term, 1775, and thereafter, all mention of the King and the year of his reign is omitted. By the action the people of Chatham renounced the sovereignty of George III more than seven months before the adoption of the Declaration of American Independence. The Justices presiding at the Court when this patriotic action was taken were Ambrose Ramsey, Alexander Clarke, John Thompson, and Balaam Thompson.

The first lawyer to locate in the county was James Williams, who was most prominent during the early days. Other lawyers came from Hillsboro, Wake Court House and as far south as Wilmington and practiced in the Chatham courts. On the dockets from 1771 until 1775 appear the names of attorneys having cases in our courts. They include, besides James Williams, William Hooper, Bromfield Ridley, John Kitchen, Alfred Moore, Alexander Gray, Ralph McNair, Henry Gifford and John Rand, who was the prosecuting officer of the court, designated as “King’s Attorney.”

Chatham’s citizenship was in complete sympathy with the efforts to secure redress from the wrongs, which the American Colonies were suffering, and to the First Provincial Congress, which met at New

Bern in August, 1774, it sent representatives. Our County Clerk formally refused to endorse the royal authority, and for so doing was commended by the Wilmington Committee of Safety in the following resolution:

“RESOLVED: --

That a paper containing the reasons of the Magistrates of Chatham County not signing the association to them presented by one Dr. Pile is hereby approved by the committee, and is ordered to be published in the Cape Fear Mercury.”

The Dr. John Pile mentioned in the resolution was a prominent citizen of Chatham, and a Tory, who was to take an active part in the tumultuous times soon to follow.

To the Third Provincial Congress, which met at Hillsboro in August, 1775, our county sent a large delegation, and its representatives were worthy members of that distinguished gathering. They included Elisha Cain, then High Sheriff, Richard Kennon, Chatham’s wealthiest citizen, Matthew Jones, Jeduthan Harper, Ambrose Ramsey and John Birdsong, all prominent citizens, who were to later hold many positions of public trust.

This Congress made provision for the organization of a militia force in each of the counties of the State, and appointed field officers for the same. Those appointed for Chatham were: Ambrose Ramsey, Colonel; Jeduthan Harper, Lieut. Colonel; Mial Scurlock, Major; and Elisha Cain, 2nd Major.

On October 15th, 1776, an election was held in the various counties for the purpose of selecting delegates, who were to meet at Halifax on November 12th to frame a Constitution and establish a permanent form of government for the State. There was but one polling place in the county, viz, Chatham Court House, and the following were chosen delegates: Ambrose Ramsey, John Birdsong, Mial Scurlock, Isaiah Hogan, and Jeduthan Harper.

To the first General Assembly under the Constitution, which met at New Bern on April 11th, 1777, Chatham sent to the Senate Col. Ambrose Ramsey and to the House of Commons Mial Scurlock and John Birdsong. Soon after the adjournment of the first session, Major Scurlock resigned to become County Court Clerk, and Alexander Clarke was chosen his successor in the Commons.

Rather severe laws were enacted against all persons disloyal to the new government, and our county court appears to have enforced them with rigor, for the records disclose that in many instances citizens suspected of disloyalty were brought before the court and upon [*illegible; likely* failure to take the oath of allegiance they were made to depart] from the State of North Carolina. Deserters from the army also found a poor asylum in Chatham, as minute docket entries disclose. In the enforcement of the law this Court seems to have been no respecter of persons, for Robert Sellars, a member of the court was charged with “having spoken words inimical to the United States.” and brought before the court for trial, where after a full hearing he was adjudged Not Guilty.

In the War for American Independence, the people of Chatham did their full duty. While the County sent no organized company to the Continental Army, a large number of her citizens were enlisted in the regular service, and the Pension Rolls offers abundant proof that Chatham soldiers were in every engagement from Moore’s Creek to Yorktown.

The bold depredations of the Tories in this section of the State were a menace to the American cause throughout the entire struggle, and this constant danger necessitated the thorough organization of the county militia. All able bodied males between the ages of 18 and 45 were enrolled in this service, and especially during the last years of the Revolution were kept most actively engaged.

In addition to the militia officers, whose names have been heretofore given, in 1778 the following Captains were appointed: Alexander Clarke, Abner Hill, John Nall, William Goldston, Thomas Hill, Philip Siler, Presley George, John Birdsong, James Crump, Edward Edwards, James Herndon and Josiah Rogers.

The War Board made frequent requisitions upon Chatham for both men and supplies, and the records indicate that they were invariably honored.

While no notable battle of the Revolutionary War was fought on Chatham soil, several minor skirmishes between American troops and the Tories occurred within its confines. And as both the British Army under Lord Cornwallis and the Continental Army under General Nathaniel Greene marched through the county, Chatham saw much of the great armies, besides being the scene of much violence and havoc wrought by the Tories under the cruel and pitiless, though bold and resourceful David Fanning.

Lord Cornwallis, on his retreat from Guilford Court House to Wilmington marched his army through Chatham. On March the 22, 1781, his army reached Dixon's Mill in what is now Alamance, and camped for the night. From Dixon's Mill the army marched to Chatham Court House and camped, Lord Cornwallis making his headquarters at the home of Major Mial Scurlock, who had just a few weeks before died. From Chatham Court House the British Army marched to Ramsey's Mill, where is located the present village of Lockville and camped there for two days while a bridge was being constructed across Deep River. During their stay at the last named place, several parties were sent out foraging around for supplies, and in several instances were not very peacefully received, several British soldiers being killed by Thomas Riddle and a few other intrepid sons of Chatham, who concealed themselves on the south side of Deep River.

While the British Army was hastening the completion of the bridge across Deep River, General Greene was leading the American Army by a more direct route from Guilford Court House to Ramsey's Mill. His army marched through the Western section of the county, crossing Deep River at what was known as Rigdon's ford about three miles down the river from Gulf. When the American Army reached Ramsey's Mill, the British made their escape, else doubtless a major battle would have been fought in Chatham.

Though our enemy and in a hostile country, it should be said to his credit that Lord Cornwallis was a soldier of superior ability and undaunted courage, and that while in Chatham he was most humane in his treatment of his foes, and his army left behind no smoking ruins, nor trail of woe, such as did the Federal armies in the great Civil War.

While the appearance of the regular British Armies in the county resulted in little material damage, the depredations of the Tories occasioned much suffering and resulted in several battles and bloody forays in Chatham.

On July 16th, 1781, a body of Tories under the command of David Fanning, made an attack upon Chatham Court House, making prisoners of fifty-three persons, among whom were some of the principal citizens of the county, and carried them to Wilmington as prisoners of war. Among those

captured were Col. Ramsey, State Senator and militia officer; James Williams, prominent attorney; James Lutterell, member of the Commons, and other leading men.

In August of the same year, Fanning's party made an attack upon the home of Col. Philip Alston, who lived on the horse-shoe bend on Deep River, and an all-day engagement ensued between the Tories, who numbered about twenty-five, and the defenders of the house. After four of the defenders of the Alston home had been killed and all the others save three were wounded, they surrendered.

When in September following a Tory detachment under Col. Hector McNeill and Fanning, had captured Hillsboro and made prisoners of the Governor of the State and other prominent officials, the friends of liberty under the command of General John Butler and Major Robert Mebane sought to intercept the Tory troops as they returned toward Wilmington, and at Lindley's Mill, now Sutphin's Mill, in what was then Chatham County, gave them battle. A severe engagement ensued in which more than one hundred men were killed. The Tories lost more in both killed and wounded than did the patriots, and among their killed were Col. McNeill and Major Rains, a noted follower of Fanning, while Fanning himself was severely wounded. Among the Whigs killed were Major John Nall and Col. John Lutterhell, both prominent Militia officers and Justices of the Court. Though the Whigs fought with great gallantry, they were unable to recapture the Governor, and though greatly decimated, the Tory column continued its journey to Wilmington.

Even after the British had surrendered at Yorktown and hostilities had ceased, the Tories continued their marauding in this section of the State, and it was considerable time before peace and tranquility came to the people of the county.

For several years after the close of the Revolution there is very little to record. During the period of comparative silence it can only be inferred that the people of Chatham "pursued the even tenor of their way," seeking to build up their communities and repair the waste places.

To the convention which met in Hillsboro in August, 1788, to ratify or reject the Federal Constitution, Chatham sent as her Delegates Ambrose Ramsey, James Anderson, Joseph Stewart, George Lucas, and William Vestal. Mr. Lucas voted for ratification, while the other members of the delegation voted with the majority for rejection. This Convention also in providing for the location of a permanent [site] for the seat of the State government passed an ordinance to the effect that the General Assembly should locate the capital of the State within ten miles of a point to be named by the Convention. Smithfield, Tarborough, Fayetteville, Isaac Hunter's farm in Wake county, New Bern, Hillsboro, and the Fork of Haw and Deep River, the location of the present village of Haywood, in Chatham, were all placed in nomination. Strange to say, the last named nomination was not made by a Chatham delegate, but by General Thomas Person, a distinguished Revolutionary soldier, who represented the county of Granville. The journal fails to disclose how the delegates voted or how many votes each place received, but the committee which superintended the balloting announced at the conclusion of the second ballot that Isaac Hunter's Farm had been chosen. There is a tradition that on the first ballot Haywood came within one vote of being chosen, but as to this the official records are silent.

To the Convention which met at Fayetteville on November the 16th, 1789, there went as Delegates from Chatham Robert Edwards, William Vestal, John Thompson, John Ramsey and James Anderson. The absorbing question before this Convention was again the ratification of the Federal Constitution, the advocates of ratification winning by a majority of 118, Messrs. Ramsey, Thompson and Stewart voting with the majority, while Mr. Edwards cast his vote with the minority. Mr. Vestal was apparently absent.

In these early days there were men in Chatham alert to the necessity of providing educational advantages for the youth of the community, for on January 6, 1787, the General Assembly passed an act, "For the promotion of learning in the County of Chatham," which provided for the establishment of an academy in the county, and named as trustees Dr. James White, John Williams, attorney-at-law; James Anderson, George Lucas, Matthew Jones, John Montgomery, John Taylor, Patrick St. Lawrence, Dr. James Servant Jones and Ambrose Ramsey.

Under the authority of this act an academy was soon established in Pittsboro, the celebrated William Bingham being its principal for many years. Some years later the General Assembly gave the academy permission to raise money for its use by means of a lottery.

The Federal Census of 1790 shows Chatham's population to have been 9,221. Of this number, 1,632 were slaves. The largest slave-holders in the county at that time being Matthew Jones, Richard Kennon and Thomas Stokes. The Census of 1800 gives the county a population of 11,861.

For some twenty years following the beginning of the nineteenth century nothing occurred in the county beyond the ordinary routine of life in a sparsely [populated] agricultural county. However, in 1812, war was declared with Great Britain and our county was called upon and furnished two full companies, one of them being commanded by Capt. Carney Cotten and the other by Capt. Aaron Evans. While these troops saw but little service, and no Chatham man won distinction in the army, Johnston Blakely, an officer in the Navy, who had been reared in Chatham, achieved great fame for his heroic exploits on the high seas, and the entire nation mourned his tragic death.

The earliest churches organized in the county appear to have been by the Baptist denomination. Before the year 1800 churches of this denomination had been organized at Rocky River, Fall Creek, Bear Creek and Rock Springs, while the church at May's Chapel was organized in 1802, and several others within a few years thereafter.

The Methodist Circuit Riders came into Chatham at an early date and before the year 1780 one of the three circuits of this denomination in the State was New Hope Circuit, which took its name from New Hope creek, which empties into the Haw River, but no houses of worship appear to have been erected in the county by this denomination until after the close of the Revolution. The celebrated Bishop Asbury in his diary mentions having passed through Chatham in July, 1780. Chatham's bad roads seem to have made a lasting impression upon the venerable bishop, for he says: "We came to a desperate creek in Chatham county, where the bridge had been carried away by a freshet; we had to go through among the rocks, holes and logs; I was affrighted, yea, it was wonderful that the carriage did not turn over – I crossed Rocky River about ten miles from Haw River; it was rocky sure enough; such a country close by as no man ever saw for a carriage."

For many years following the close of the War of 1812 the most important issue in the State was the matter of revising the State Constitution of 1776. The people of Chatham were in hearty sympathy with the desires of the western section of the State for a revision, and at an election held in April, 1835, upon the question of whether or not a Constitutional Convention should be called, Chatham cast 885 votes for to 78 against the proposal. To the Convention, which was called and which convened on June the 4th, 1835, our county sent as Delegates Hugh McQuinn and John Ramsey, both of whom took conspicuous part in the deliberations of the body. Both voted for the amendment whereby the Governor of the State was to be thereafter elected by a direct vote of the people, and in most matters in controversy they voted with the delegates from the western section of the State. The amendments adopted by this Convention were submitted to a vote of the people for ratification and Chatham voted 556 for ratification to 200 against.

In the general election held in 1836, the first wherein the Governor of the State was elected by direct vote of the people, Chatham cast 932 votes for Edward B. Dudley, the Whig candidate, to 627 for Richard Dobbs Speight, his opponent.

Though the majority of the people of Chatham usually supported the Whig candidates for President and for State officers, they little inclined to support the policies that characterized the Internal Improvement era, and her representatives elected to the Legislature usually opposed all measures looking to that end, and it is said but for the opposition of the members of the House of Commons from our county that the North Carolina Railroad would have been located on a direct line from Raleigh to Greensboro, traversing the county of Chatham, instead of making the bend that it does through Durham, Orange and Alamance.

However, in matters looking to the establishment of a system of Common Schools, for the entire people of the State, our people took a more progressive stand, and when the question of the adoption of a system of public schools was submitted to a direct vote of the people in the year 1839, our county voted 877 for to 402 for the establishment of the Common Schools. Hugh McQueen, a Commoner from the county, was one of the pioneer advocates of popular education, and in the House and later in the Senate introduced bills for the establishment of a system of free schools

Chatham sent her full quota of soldiers to the Mexican war, and as has been the case whenever called upon to defend their country's honor, they acquitted themselves in a manner most creditable to themselves and reflected glory upon the county.

In the days prior to the Civil War, Chatham sons had filled the following positions of honor and trust in this and other states, viz: Charles [Manly] had served as Governor of North Carolina; Abraham Rencher had served in the National House of Representatives for twelve years; Territorial Governor of New Mexico for four years and as Minister to Portugal for four years; James Fauntleroy Taylor and Hugh McQueen had each served as Attorney General of the State with great credit; Mathias E. Manly had for many years served upon the Superior Court Bench, later was a Justice of the Supreme Court, Speaker of the State Senate and was later to be chosen a member of the United States Senate, but to be deprived of his seat in this body by the Reconstruction Act of Congress; Edward Jones had achieved great fame by his long and honorable service as Solicitor of the State; Nathan A. Stedman had served with distinction as Comptroller; Carney Cotten, a veteran of the Mexican War had served two terms as Adjutant General of the State; John Siler, Consul to Buenos Ayres; George Lucas, Joseph John Alston, Allen Goodwin and David Watson had all served North Carolina Counsellors of State.

The people of the county were for the most part devoted to the American Union, and when the question of a call for a Constitutional Convention was submitted to a popular vote in February, 1861, they cast 1,795 votes against the call to 283 for it and chose three union delegates to represent the county in case the call was ratified, but when President Lincoln had called upon North Carolina to furnish troops with which to overawe the seceding States, our people were of one mind in opposition to the subjugation of their Southern neighbors and strong in their devotion to the doctrine of State rights.

In the Constitutional Convention of May the 20th, 1861, Chatham was represented by James H. Headen, John Manning and Leonidas J. Merritt. In the organization of the Convention all of our delegates supported Governor Graham for President in opposition to Col. Edwards, who was the candidate of the more pronounced Secession element. They also voted with the minority in support of Judge Badger's Declaration of Independence from the United States against the ordinance introduced by Mr. Craige, but upon the failure of the Badger ordinance, as did all the delegates of the Convention, they supported the Craige resolution and it was unanimously adopted.

The most glorious pages in the history of Chatham are those which record the heroic part played by her citizens in War between the States. In this short sketch it is impossible to more than enumerate the companies and detachments that the county furnished the Confederate Armies, and lack of space will render it impossible to recount the many acts of gallantry, heroism and devotion to duty that characterized their splendid service.

The first company organized in the county was the "Chatham Rifles," which left Pittsboro on May 28th, 1861. Its first Captain was Ross Ihrrie, who upon the organization of the Regiment became Lieutenant Colonel; W. L. London, John W. Taylor and W. H. H. Tyson each subsequently served as Captain of the Company, which numbered during the war 188 men of whom three officers were killed and died of disease and twenty-one private were killed and died of disease. The next company organized in the county was the "Chatham Guards," which became Company "E" of the 26th Regiment. The first Captain of this Company was William S. Webster, a veteran of the Mexican War, upon whose resignation S. W. Brewer became Captain. The total number of men belonging to this company was 204, and it lost 63 killed and wounded.

The third company organized in the county was the "Chatham Boys," which became Company "G" of the 26th Regiment. Its first Captain was William S. McLean, upon whose resignation John R. Lane became Captain. Upon the promotion of the latter to the Colonelcy of the Regiment, Henry C. Albright became Captain, and upon [Albright's] being killed at Petersburg, Alston R. Johnson became Captain. This company numbered 175, and lost in killed and death from disease 65.

Company "D" 35th Regiment was another company organized in Chatham, its officers being Captain Hardy J. Lassiter, who was killed at Malvern Hill, and succeeded by Robert E. Petty, who was promoted to Major when G. W. Avent became Captain. Total number enlisted in this company was 143, of which 30 died from wounds or were killed in battle.

Company "G" 48th Regiment, another Chatham organization, the Captain of which was W. H. Jones, lost 43 men by battle and sickness.

The officers of Company "E" 44th Regiment, organized in Chatham, were as follows: Captain, R. C. Cotten; who became Lieutenant Colonel of the Regiment and was succeeded by Charles M. Stedman, who became Major and was succeeded by J. J. Crump. The total number of men enlisted in this Company was 150, of whom forty were killed and died of disease.

Company "B" the 49th Regiment, was organized in April, 1862. Total number of men enlisted 75, of whom 32 were killed. Its first Captain was E. H. Ward, who was succeeded by John Bennett, and upon whose death Young A. Oldham became Captain.

Company "D," the 61st regiment, lost 35 men killed and died of disease. Its Captain was N. A. Ramsey.

Company "E," 5th Regiment of cavalry, enlisted 115 men and lost 13 men by death. The Captain was Thomas W. Harris.

Company "G," 5th cavalry, was another Chatham organization, whose Captain was John B. McClelland. The last Company organized in the county was "H," 70th Regiment. This Regiment was known as "Junior Reserves," being made up of 17-year old boys, and the officers of the Chatham Company were W. H. Carter, Captain, and Carson Johnson, First Lieutenant. The Company numbered 87.

Chatham also furnished many men to companies organized in other counties. Company "I," the 6th Regiment, enlisted fifty-seven men from Chatham. Of this Company R. W. York was first Captain and later promoted to Major. T. M. Jenkins, another Chatham man, was an officer of the company. Seventeen Chatham soldiers of this company were killed or died of disease.

Thirty men enlisted in a battery of artillery commanded by Captain A. D. Moore, and of these six were killed. Twenty joined a company in the 11th Regiment and 10 in the 28th Regiment. Twenty-five sons of Chatham enlisted in Company "D," the 3rd Cavalry, and of them Thomas Brooks was Captain. Fifteen joined Company "I," the 3rd Regiment, and many others served in various commands in the different branches of the service.

Our county sent in round numbers two thousand men to serve in the Armies of the Confederate States. They were in every battle from Bethel to Appomattox, and were literally among those who made the first charge at Bethel, who went farthest at Gettysburg, and who fired the last shot at Appomattox.

One native of the county, Isham Garrott, reached the rank of Brigadier General in the Confederate Army and was slain in battle at the storming of Vicksburg. John R. Lane and Peter Evans became Colonels; Ross R. Ihrle and R. C. Cotten became Lieutenant Colonels; Charles M. Stedman, Richard W. York, and Robert E. Petty Majors; and W. L. London, John W. Taylor, W. S. Webster, W. S. McLean, H. C. Albright, J. J. Crump, A. R. Johnson, W. H. H. Tyson, S. W. Brewer, Hardy J. Lassiter, G. W. Avent, W. H. Jones, E. H. Ware, John Bennett, Young A. Oldham, N. A. Ramsey, Thomas W. Harris, John B. McClelland and Thomas Brooks became Captains.

Though no hostile armies had marched through the county to burn the dwellings and lay waste to the fields of its inhabitants, and our people escaped the havoc that was visited upon many sections of the State, yet the close of the war found all its resources depleted, its people impoverished and more than seven hundred of its young manhood filling soldiers' graves. However, with a consciousness of a feeling that they had fought a good fight in behalf of a righteous cause, they accepted the result in good faith, and set about immediately to rebuild their shattered fortunes. Recovery from the effects of the conflict were slow, but thanks to the courage of those who had fought and bled upon the field, and those who had toiled, suffered and prayed at home, it was steady, and despite a chaotic condition of all business and the loss of their property, the harshness and corruption of the Reconstruction government that was forced upon them, the old county slowly but steadily traveled back toward normalcy, and by 1870 the alien carpet bag and scalawag government had been overthrown and Chatham affairs were again in control of its own people.

In the Constitutional Convention of 1868 Chatham had been represented by John A. McDonald and W. T. Gunter, but this body and the Legislature of 1868 had so outraged the public decency that the alien government was soon to become extinct, and when the Convention of 1875 was called, our county sent as its delegates Hon. John Manning and W. F. Strowd, two of its most prominent citizens.

While Chatham, since the close of the Civil War, has not made the material progress that many of our neighboring counties have achieved, and while its growth has been slow, it has been steady, and not only have the agricultural interests of the county been developed, but manufactories have been established in the various towns that have sprung up in the county; public education has taken splendid strides and our county has developed a road system that considering its scarcity of resources and the character of soil through which we had to build, is nothing less than marvelous.

This article would be incomplete if it did not mention the fact that in the World War, the entire population of the county rallied to the call of country; that men drafted for services in the army, black as well as white, most cheerfully responded to the call and acquitted themselves in a manner worth

of the traditions of their noble ancestors and that the entire population supported the government in its every request to buy bonds, refrain from the use of flour and sugar, or render any other service that might aid in bringing the war to a successful conclusion.

Our population has always been remarkable for its freedom from violence and law-breaking, and but comparatively few serious or atrocious crimes have been committed within the confines of the county. Since its organization, but three white men have suffered death for the commission of crime in Chatham, and two of these were non-residents of the county, one a native of Granville and the other of South Carolina, while the third, who was a Chatham citizen it afterward developed, was entirely innocent of the charge upon which he was convicted and hanged.

Since 1865, our county has furnished to the National House of Representatives the following members: John Manning, W. F. Strowd and John W. Atwater, who each represented this district; Charles M. Stedman, who now represents the 5th North Carolina District; William B. Stokes, who served several terms from a Tennessee District, and Joseph M. Dixon, who has represented the State of Montana in both the House and the Senate of the United States, and who is now Governor of his adopted State.

It has furnished two District Superintendents of the Census, viz: J. J. Jenkins and W. C. Pearson, and the following State officers:

Supreme Court Justice, James B. Manning,
Superior Court Judge, Thomas H. Womack,
Corporation Commissioner, H. C. Brown
Attorney General, Jas. S. Manning

It has furnished to the great Baptist Denomination those two eminent divines and educators, Basil Manly, Sr., who led in the movement, both for the organization of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the establishment of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and William Brantley, one of the great educators of his day. It furnished to the M. E. church Dr. John R. Brooks, a minister of great force, a popular Presiding Elder and an author of several religious books of worth.

Men whose eyes first beheld the light of day on Chatham soil are to be found in many places both inside and outside the State, and whether engaged in professional life or business activities, they are usually successful, and invariably revere the county of their birth and rejoice, which rejoices at their success.
