

Appendix C:

A Brief History of the Granville District and Land Grants

Before 1729, the British kings repeatedly granted territory in the American colonies to individuals or small groups. Most of the territory that was to become the Carolinas, Georgia and part of Florida was originally granted by King Charles II to repay a political debt to a group of eight of his supporters who would be known as the Lords Proprietors, investing them not only with property but also with gubernatorial authority to administer it. The Province of Carolina¹ was a proprietary colony from 1663 to 1729. Most of the Lords Proprietors began granting land in the Carolinas in 1669, but, unfortunately, most of the land records for the proprietary period have been lost.

Indirect rule by the Lords Proprietors eventually fell out of favor as the English Sovereigns sought to concentrate their power and authority, and the colonies were converted to crown colonies, governed by officials appointed by the King. In 1729, seven of the eight heirs to the original Lords Proprietors sold their proprietary shares back to King George II, and North Carolina became a royal colony. The eighth share belonged to John Carteret,² who refused to sell his share to the crown.

Carteret's share consisted of holdings in what are now North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. In 1742, the king's Privy Council agreed to Carteret's request to exchange these holdings for a continuous area in North Carolina. The northern boundary was to be the Virginia-North Carolina border (36° 30')—the only boundary in the entire province that had been fixed—and the southern line at 35° 34'. These coordinates defined a sixty-mile wide strip of land in the North Carolina colony.

In 1743, the initial portion of the southern boundary line was surveyed by a commission appointed jointly by Carteret and the North Carolina governor Gabriel Johnston. Six and a half miles south of Chickinacomack Inlet, the commissioners took a reading of the latitude and drove a cedar stake on the Outer Banks at thirty-five degrees and thirty-four minutes north latitude. Then they moved to Bath, where Edward Moseley took the latitude as thirty-five degrees and thirty minutes by measuring the height of the shadow cast by an open door. They went north 1,660 poles³ where they set two stakes on the road from Bath to Edenton. These actions were reported to the Privy Council on 4 December 1743. Measurement did not continue until April 1746, when the line was run 103 miles and 217 poles to the west side of the Haw River. In September of 1746, the line was carried 87 miles and 13 poles farther west to Coldwater Creek on the Rocky River.⁴ Finally, in 1753 the southern line was again extended westward. In 1744, Carteret had inherited the title Earl of Granville, and from that time, the district became known as Granville's District or the Granville District.

Almost as soon as the line had been run to Coldwater Creek, the boundaries of Granville's District came into dispute, with a number of other landowners and representatives of the Crown claiming that the line had been run up to thirteen and a half miles too southerly in some locations, for example, at Line Creek, where the Deep River crosses Chatham's current southern boundary. There was some resentment of Granville's District, which amounted to nearly half of the land in North Carolina, because the royal government of North Carolina was responsible for the area but did not receive any revenue from it.

Unlike the early proprietors, Granville owned all unsettled lands⁵ but had no right to govern the area. Earl Granville never visited North Carolina, but appointed agents there as representatives to grant land, collect rents, and conduct his business. The Granville land office opened in 1748. Grants were made in present-day Chatham County between 1752 and 1762. A buyer could purchase as much land as he could afford. The only restriction was that each purchase could not exceed 700 acres.⁶

By 1750, Granville had become concerned about irregularities in the accounts from his agents in the issuance of land grants and he issued explicit instructions about keeping records and executing grants. Despite these instructions, complaints from land holders and prospective purchasers increased throughout the 1750s, particularly allegations of exorbitant fees and corruption.

After Granville's death in 1763, the situation became even more muddled. With the land office closed, settlers were unable to obtain clear title to vacant land. Resistance in what was then Orange County—particularly the parts that were later to become Chatham and Alamance—was strong, leading to the War of the Regulators in the 1770s, in which Chatham citizens played important roles. Granville's son, Robert Carteret, 3rd Earl Granville, considered selling the land back to the crown, but this never happened and the situation worsened as records were no longer being kept accurately. The Granville office closed in 1763, and never reopened. When the younger Granville died in February 1776, the proprietorship of the Granville district was identified with British interests and revolutionary fervor was strong and growing stronger. In 1777, the North Carolina assembly declared the new state as sovereign over all the lands between Virginia and South Carolina. Though it recognized claims to land granted by the crown and proprietors prior to July 4, 1776, it also confiscated all lands of persons who supported the British during the war. Following the war the Carteret heirs were compensated in part for the loss of their lands.

Sources

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Notes:

¹ Later divided into the colonies of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

² 2nd Earl Granville, great-grandson of original Lord Proprietor, Sir George Carteret

³ In the 1600s through the 1800s distance was commonly measured in miles and poles. A pole is sixteen and a half feet. Four poles constitute a chain, or 66 feet. A mile is equal to 80 chains.

⁴ This is not the Rocky River in Chatham County. Rather, it is some distance west, in what is now Cabarrus County.

⁵ Land that had already been granted by the Lords Proprietors or by the Crown was to remain the property of the grantees, but they would pay annual quit rents (a sort of land tax) to Granville.

⁶ To put this in perspective, 640 acres is one square mile.