

Blunt (or Blount), Tom ^[1]

Blunt (or Blount), Tom

by F. Roy Johnson

ca. 1675-ca. 1739

Tom Blunt (or Blount), a head chief and king of the North Carolina Tuscarora Indians ^[2], of obscure parentage, lived in the Upper Towns. During his time these numbered seven and formed one of three confederacies of the Tuscarora nation; they were located in the upper coastal plains on the Tar and Roanoke ^[3] rivers and their tributaries and were frequented by Virginia ^[4] traders during Blunt's boyhood. In a matrilineal society, he rose to political power, as a member of the bear clan, through his mother and her people. Whether because of blood ties or admiration, his name is the same as that of two Englishmen, Thomas Blount ^[5] of Chowan Precinct in North Carolina and Tom Blunt, who from 1691 to 1703 served as Virginia ^[4]'s official interpreter to the Indians south of the James River. Blunt acquired a speaking knowledge of English.

The English of Carolina in particular were indebted to Tom Blunt for minimizing the Tuscarora War ^[6] of 1711-13, by leading the Upper Towns on a neutral course, and for keeping the peace on the frontier for a quarter of a century afterward. By 1711 he was in high repute throughout the Tuscarora nation. The head men of the hostile towns consulted him as to what should be done with Christoph de Graffenried and John Lawson ^[7].

Virginia ^[4] claimed much of the credit for keeping Blunt neutral during the war. His people had become dependent on Virginia ^[4] traders: they had abandoned their bows, and control of their powder supply controlled their take of game for food and skins. After Virginia invoked trade restrictions, Governor Thomas Pollock ^[8] of North Carolina wrote Governor Alexander Spotswood ^[9] of Virginia that Blunt was "very earnest for peace and to have trade as formerly." And de Graffenried, who credited Blunt with saving his life, said that this king and chief was "full of sense" and much inclined toward the English.

Near the end of the Tuscarora War ^[6], Blunt was persuaded to assist the English by bringing in King Hancock, ringleader of the 1711 massacre, for execution and by taking nearly thirty scalps of other leaders and enemies.

Immediately after the Indian hostilities had been crushed, the North Carolina council recognized Blunt for his faithfulness and good service and made him chief of all Indians to the south of the Pamlico River. About three thousand of the Tuscarora had survived the war. Of these, about one thousand subjected themselves to Blunt, and the remainder fled beyond the frontier and began migrating to the North. So reduced in strength, the Tuscaroras under Blunt found themselves exposed and open to attack by the Catawbias and other enemy Indians. In 1717, for greater safety, the North Carolina council permitted them to settle on their old Skanwaknee hunting grounds north of the Roanoke River ^[10] in present Bertie County ^[11]. Here they established two towns, one of which was Resootska, or "to our grandfather," named in honor of King Blunt.

The English treated Blunt as an absolute monarch. The few matters of misconduct of his Indians were taken directly to him, and he acted effectively to preserve the peace. In 1723 he informed the council that a group of northern Indians were expected that fall "to seduce the young men of the nation from him in order to Comit mischief." Following the Indian custom of hospitality, Blunt gave the unwanted visitors food and shelter, and they did no injury to the English of North Carolina.

Within a few years, Blunt, on the threshold of old age, saw his nation weakening. Whites, hungry for land, began to encroach upon his reservation; by 1731 northern Indians had enticed away all but six hundred of his people; and an undetermined number had left to work for the whites.

Blunt was dead before 5 Mar. 1739. At this time the great men of the Tuscarora nation petitioned the North Carolina council to elect a new king.

Of the king's family, we know that his wife and two of his children and a sister's son were captured by the Meherrin Indians ^[12] during the Tuscarora War ^[6] and redeemed for him by the Carolina government.

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