

Christoph von Graffenried's Account of the Tuscarora War ^[1]

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By 1710, English settlements in the coastal plain region had overgrown their original bounds. The expanding settlements and settlement of new towns -- namely New Bern -- exacerbated the increasingly tenuous relationship between the Tuscarora tribe and the settlers.

When the town of New Bern was settled in 1710 at the meeting of the Trent and Neuse rivers, the native town of Chattoka was displaced. The Tuscarora attempted to find refuge in Pennsylvania, but were ultimately unsuccessful. In response to the loss of land, enslavement of native peoples, and ignoble trade practices, the Tuscarora tribe kidnapped John Lawson - the Surveyor General of North Carolina -- Baron Christoph von Graffenried, and a slave as the three traveled up the Neuse River in September of 1711. Following the death of John Lawson, small groups of Tuscarora raided plantations near the Pamlico River, and what became known as the Tuscarora War had begun.

The Tuscarora War refers to the conflicts between native peoples and settlers that took place between September 1711 December 1712. Read excerpts from Von Graffenried's retelling of the causes and events of the war between settlers and the Tuscarora tribe below.

Now Follows the Indian War

What caused the Indian war was firstly, the slanders and instigations of certain plotters against Governor Hyde, and secondly, against me, in that they talked the Indians into believing that I had come to take their land, and that then the Indians would have to go back towards the mountains. I talked them out of this and it was proven by the friendliness I had shown them, as also by the payment for the land where I settled at the beginning (namely that upon which the little city of New Bern was begun), regardless of the fact that the seller was to have given it over to me free. I had also made peace with the same Indian inhabitants so that they were entirely satisfied with me. Thirdly, it was the great carelessness of the colony. Fourthly, the harsh treatment of certain surly and rough English inhabitants who deceived them in trade, would not let them hunt about their plantations, and under this excuse took away from them their arms, munitions, pelts or hides, yes, even [beat an Indian to death](#). This alarmed them very much and with reason.

The Indians kept their design very secret, and they were even then about to take counsel in an appointed place at the time that I happened to travel up the river.

... The carelessness of the Carolinians contributed not a little to the audacity and bold actions of these Indians, because they trusted them too much, and for safety there was not a fortified place in the whole province to which one could retire; also in case of any eruption or hostility no arrangements were made and much less were there the necessary provisions of food and war supplies. This was carried so far that [in these times of unrest, whole shiploads of corn and meat were carried away and exchanged for sugar, molasses, brandy, and other less necessary things](#). In short, everything was carelessly managed. [Instead of drawing together into one or two bodies of well ordered soldiery in order to drive the enemy from the boundaries of the settlements, every one wanted to save his own house and defend himself](#). This was the cause that finally the Indians or savages overpowered one plantation after another, and soon brought the whole province under them. My idea was that in case the savages would not act in accordance with the agreement made with them, and could not be brought to a good treaty, to divert them with the peace I had made, to [procure](#) ^[2] a truce, and meanwhile, with the help of my people to establish myself in some place and, provided with all necessary munitions and food, by this means to make a greater and more vigorous resistance, or else entirely to destroy the savages. But there was nothing to be done with these wrong-headed Carolinians, who, even if some were more courageous than the others, took the matter up so heedlessly and clumsily, got around behind the Indians who were much stronger in numbers, good shots, and well provided with everything, so that this small handful of Christians immediately had to get the worst of it. Yes, without the help of the Palatines and Switzers they would have been destroyed, as is to be seen in the first account. In the same account there is to be seen from a letter with the date and salutation, how the troops who were in Bath Town, a little village on the Pamtego River, about 150 in number, would not go according to their word and the sign which they had given to them, and did not have the heart to cross the river to help their neighbors, in such urgent need; but rather, after they had eaten up the corn and meat of the inhabitants of this district, leaving us on the other side along the Neuse River in the lurch, they went home again.

... After I had [srongly](#) represented to Governor Hyde and the General Assembly that we should make better arrangements than had previously been made, otherwise we were in danger of all being killed by the Indians, we got to work, and never in my life should I have thought to meet such awkward and faint-hearted people.

First of all it was of importance to find where provisions were to be obtained, for it was impossible to go to war, and yet these improvident Carolinians were so foolish as to sell grain and meat out of the country. For this reason I urged

Governor Hyde immediately, to publish a sharp command forbidding the exportation of certain things.

Secondly, to find out what grain there was in the country, and to take measures accordingly. It was found that there was not enough by far, to carry on such a tedious war. Hereupon arrangements were made with the neighboring provinces which had plenty, to procure some.

Thirdly, [to provide powder, lead, and firearms, with which the province was not at all supplied, and of which the individuals had very little.](#) Hereupon it was decided to send for it among those from other places. But no one wanted to give the money for this purpose, nor did the province which was then in bad credit, find means, and so I had to try to effect something with the Governor in Virginia.

Fourthly, Suppose that all the above things of which the people had need were ready, there was still labor. [We could with the greatest difficulty make out scarcely 300 armed men, and there were among them many who were unwilling to fight. They were mostly badly clad and equipped.](#) With reference to this, commission was given to me to seek for help in Virginia. When, finally, Governor Spotswood, acting in the Queen's name, promised them this with the stipulation that the provisions and soldiers' pay should be returned, they did not want it, unless the Governor would send the soldiers and the provisions at the expense of the Queen, asserting that they could not pay back such sums, which was absurd. Why should the Queen have the expenses of the colony since the Lords Proprietors draw the revenue? This gave occasion for several to go to the Governor of Virginia to sound him to see whether he would take upon himself the protection of Carolina. [But this the Governor refused, for good reasons.](#)

Fifthly, it was proposed that we fortify some place in the province to be used in case of need as a retreat, in which to keep ourselves in safety. But this did not succeed.

With things as we knew they were, what was to be done? Mean-time the Indians continued their depredations, became bold with such poor defense, and overcame one plantation after another.

The last resource was to send hastily to South Carolina for help, which we also obtained, otherwise the province would have been destroyed. So the Governor of South Carolina sent 800 savage tributaries with 50 English South Carolinians, under the command of Colonel Barnwell, well equipped and provided with powder and lead. The [theatrum belli](#) was not far from New Bern. Only when these arrived did the Indian war begin in earnest, and these South Carolinians went at it, when they came to the Tuscarora savages, in such a manner that they awakened great terror among them, so that the North Carolina Indians were forced to fortify themselves. But our friendly Indians, after they had received their orders at New Bern went against Core Town, a great Indian village about 30 miles from New Bern, drove the King and his Indians out of the same after they had slain several, got into such a frenzy over it that they cooked and ate the flesh of one of the Carolinian Indians that had been shot down. To this assistance from South Carolina we detailed 200 North Carolina English with some few of our Indians who were friendly to us, and about 50 Palatines and Swiss under command of Colonel Boyd and Mr. Michel, whom we made Colonel. This small army went further up, to Catechna, a large Indian village, where I and Surveyor General Lawson were captured and condemned to death as has been told in the first account. In this village Catechna, our enemy consisting of Indians of Weetox, Bay River, Neuse, Core, Pamtego, and partly of Tuscaroras, had collected and strongly fortified themselves, and we could accomplish nothing against them; that is to say, in the storm planned against them, the orders were not properly executed, the attack should have been made in certain places. But [Brice's people](#) were so hot-headed that they stormed before the time, many of them were wounded, some were left dead, and so our forces had to withdraw. When the report of this was given to us in the council we were very much busied considering how better to subdue the enemy and how to make better arrangements. By chance I was looking about and saw six or eight [pieces](#) in the yard, lying there uncared for, all rusty and full of sand. [My notion was that two of the smallest should be refitted, sent over, and the fort bombarded with it.](#) At this I was laughed at heartily, and it was represented to me as impossible to take them through morasses, forests, and ravines. But I remembered what Captain Jaccard of St. Croix had told me. Just as he said he had done it before a fortress in Flanders (which made his fortune), each small piece was carried very nicely, as though upon a litter,⁴³ between two horses, the rest disposed further as suited best, and the scheme succeeded well. For when the approaches were made and only two shots had been fired into the fort of the savages along with some grenades which we tried to send in, such a fear was awakened among the savages who had never heard nor seen such things before, that they asked for a truce. Then a council of war was held by our highest officers to decide what to do, and it was decided to accord a truce and to try to make an advantageous peace. The principal cause of this was the Christian prisoners which they still held from the first massacre, who called to us that if the fort fell to us in a storm they would all miserably perish without mercy. Hereupon they surrendered under condition that first of all the captives should be set free. And this was done.

Now when this was past and our troops had marched to New Bern to refresh themselves a little, for the food was getting scarce and scanty, and the response to Colonel Barnwell had not been to his satisfaction, he became impatient that he had not received more honor and kindness. His soldiers also were very badly provisioned. For these reasons, he thought of a means of going back to South Carolina with profit, and [under the pretense of a good peace](#) he enticed a goodly number of the friendly Indians or savage Carolinians, took them prisoner at Core Town (to this his [tributary Indians](#) were entirely inclined because they hoped to get a considerable sum from each prisoner) and made his way home with his living [plunder](#) ^[3]. Whatever before this he did worthy of praise, was flung away by this action.

[This so unchristian act very properly embittered the rest of the Tuscarora and Carolina Indians very much, although heathens, so that they no longer trusted the Christians.](#) Therefore they fortified themselves still more securely and did much damage in Neuse and Pamtego County, yes, the last became worse than the first. This induced us to lay strong complaint against Colonel Barnwell and to write to South Carolina for new help, which followed, but not so strong as the

first. But soon after there arrived a goodly number under the command of Captain Moore, who behaved better. After what could be raised had been brought together they went to this Indian fort at Catechna or Hancock Town and at last this was successfully stormed, set fire, and overcome. The savages showed themselves unspeakably brave, so much so that when our soldiers had become master of the fort and wanted to take out the women and children who were under the ground, where they were hidden along with their provisions, the wounded savages who were groaning on the ground still continued to fight. There were about 200 who were burned up in a [redoubt](#) [4] and many others slain so that in all about 900, including women and children were dead and captured. Of ours there were also many wounded and some remained on the field. From this time we had rest, although some survivors still wandered here and there. It was now a question of providing for the future, for putting ourselves in complete security against the surviving neighbors. Certain of the kings with whom we conferred yielded. The kings are really only the chiefs of a certain number of wild Indians, but still, it is hereditary and is passed on to posterity. We conferred with them and finally brought about a wished-for peace.

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[American Indians](#) [6]

[Christoph Von Graffenried](#) [7]

[Edward Hyde](#) [8]

[history](#) [9]

[John Lawson](#) [10]

[North Carolina](#) [11]

[North Carolina History](#) [12]

[Page](#) [13]

[Students](#) [14]

[Teachers](#) [15]

[Tuscarora](#) [16]

[Tuscarora War](#) [17]

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[20]

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- [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/glossary/procure>
- [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/glossary/plunder>
- [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/glossary/redoubt>
- [5] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/graffenried/graffenried.html>
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