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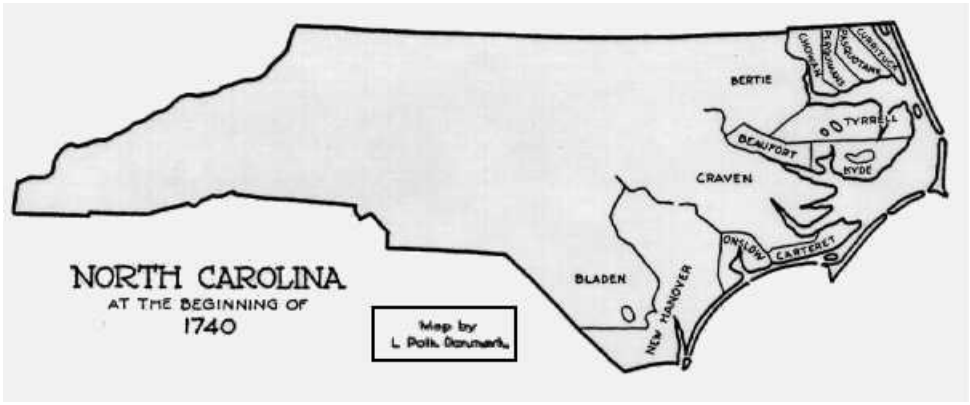
Bladen County in the 1700s [1]

Bladen County in the 1700s

by Jason Bordeaux, 2010.
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Attempts were made in 1732 in the General Assembly to provide two new precinctsOnslow [3] and Bladen, from the larger precinct of New Hanover [4]. Bladen Precinct was erected on 31 October, 1732, but at this time, a controversy arose over constitutional authority to erect new precincts. Further attempts made in 1733 were also unsuccessful. When the matter was brought before the Council in Edenton [5], it was again refused. The Council stated that “in Bladen there are not over three freeholders, Nathaniel Moore, Thomas Jones, and Richard Singletary, and not over 30 families, including these freeholders”. The proposal, however, was finally passed and Bladen Precinct [6] was officially recognized on 11 November, 1734. All precincts were re-labeled as counties in 1739.

The bounds of the original Bladen Precinct were described as follows: “Beginning at the mouth of Livingstone’s Creek and bounded by the said creek to the head thereof; then by a line West, to the bounds of government; and that the said precinct be bounded to the Northward by Black River, as follows; viz, beginning at the mouth of said river, and bounded by the Main River up to the fork, and that then the Westermost Branch to be the bounds to the head thereof.”



North Carolina at the beginning of 1740.

[2]Bladen was named in honor of Martin Bladen (1680 – 1746), Lord Commissioner of Trade and Plantation [7].

What little is known of the Native Americans living in the area was described byJames Sprunt [8] in Chronicles of the Cape Fear River 1660-1916 [9]: “In reference to the Woccon, Saxapahaw (*Sissipahaw*), Cape Fear, and Warrennuncock Indians, we find it stated: Of the NC tribes bearing the foregoing names almost nothing is known, and of the last two even the proper names have not been recorded. The Woccon were Siouan; the Saxapahaw and Cape Fear Indians presumably were Siouan [10], as indicated from their associations and alliance with known Siouan tribes; while the Warrennuncock were probably some people better known under another name, although they cannot be identified. Unfortunately the identity of the Cape Fear Indians has not been revealed, and it may ever remain a mystery. The name was first bestowed, by the early colonists, upon the Indians who they found occupying the lands about the mouth of the Cape Fear River, and more especially the peninsula now forming the southern part of New Hanover County [4]. It is also possible the term “Cape Fear Indians” was applied to any Indians found in the vicinity, regardless of their tribal connections. The area was frequented by numbers of different tribes."

An excerpt by S. A. Ashe within James Sprunt’s book states the following: “The Indians on the lower Cape Fear are said to have been Congarees, a branch of the Old Cheraws. Soon after the settlement, they were driven away. In 1733, Governor Burrington [11] mentioned that the small tribes that had resided near the settlements had entirely disappeared.”

The modes of transportation and communication were determining factors in the settlement, growth, and development of Bladen County. In the days of the settlement of the county, rivers were the only means of transporting goods to any great extent; therefore, the settlers occupied the lands along the Cape Fear River and South River. The Cape Fear, a much larger river, attracted more of the early settlers, yet along both rivers homes were built and plantations were developed. It was said that those who lived quite some distance from the rivers lived in the “backwoods”.

Lawrence Lee described the progress of settlement in*The Lower Cape Fear in Colonial Days*[12]: “As late as the winter of 1724-25, according to General Burrington who was there, the Cape Fear region was uninhabited. Sometime between then and the spring of 1726, the settlement had begun.; The earliest known resident was Maurice Moore, who was there on 30 April, 1726. It is unlikely that Moore was there alone, but the number and identity of his neighbors are not known. By the end of June, 1726, Moore had laid out Brunswick Town [13] in the new settlement and had sold the first Lot.”

“Because many of the small groups were related by blood or marriage, they became known as the family. In addition to Maurice and Roger Moore [14] and their brother, Nathaniel, the recipients readily identified as members of the group were Eleazar Allen [15], John Porter [16], Edward Moseley [17], John Baptista Ashe [18], Samuel Swann [19], John Swann, John Davis, John Grange, Edward Hyrne, Thomas Jones, Edward Smith, and Mosely Vail.”

The earliest recorded land grants were made under the Lords Proprietors [20] in 1727. David Donahoe and John Baptista Ashe received grants in 1727. Richard Singletary received a grant in 1728.

The first homogeneous community in the county was the Quakers according to Stephen B. Weeks [21], writing in *Southern Quakers and Slavery* [22]. "The earliest of these meetings in NC seems to have been that at Carver’s Creek in Bladen County. It was named from the founder of the settlement, James Carver, who moved from Pennsylvania. It was begun about 1740, and asked for a Monthly Meeting as early as 1743; in 1746 one had been settled. It belonged to the Eastern Quarter. From 1749 through 1752 some of the families represented are Carver, Clark, Clayton, Benbow, Beals, Ballinger, Chamness, Cox, Kemp, Mayer, Mathews, Sommers, and Wright. Most were from Fairfax Monthly Meeting, Virginia, but others came from Pennsylvania. The meeting continued until about 1797 when some of the members went west and others went to Guilford [23] and Randolph [24] Counties.” Although a majority of the Quakers left Bladen County, some of them remained including Isaac Jones, Hugh McAden [25], James Seames/Sims, George Brown, Neal Shaw, Duncan McCoulskey, Griffith Jones, and the families of Raynor, Baldwin, Granger, Roan/Rowan, Anderson, and Lewis.

Gabriel Johnston [26], who became Royal Governor in 1734, persuaded Highlanders from his native Scotland to come and settle in North Carolina. Several Highlanders came in the early 1730?s. Alexander Clark brought several immigrants in 1736 from the Isle of Jura, Argyll County, Scotland. These men had suffered religious persecution and they were seeking freedom. Dougald McNeill and Colonel McAllister brought another 350 Scotsmen in 1739. In 1767 a ship load of immigrants sailed from the Isle of Jura and arrived in Brunswick on the Cape Fear below Wilmington. Surnames included Clark, McDougald, McLean, Buie, Russ, and Campbell. On 4 April, 1804, the immigrant ship, Minerva, arrived in Wilmington [27] from Greenock, Scotland including Scotsmen with surnames Clark, Sinclair, McBride, Livingston, McGregor, Buchanan, Graham, McLaughlin, and Johnson. Many of the Scotsmen settled in what became Cumberland [28] and Robeson [29] Counties.

Old Bladen County was home to many of the ancestral families of the Lumbee Indian Tribe of NC [30]. They were found on the tax lists and census records variously listed as whites, mulattoes, and mixed bloods. Bound together by a common ancestry, they have survived to this day as a unified group. Their mark has been indelibly stamped on North Carolina’s history. A 1773 petition records the surnames of several members of this community: Ivey, Sweat, Chavers, Dees, Groom, Grant, Vann, Lockelear, and Cairsey.

The General Assembly passed a statute in 1723 requiring that wives and other females in households of free persons of color should be taxable. The policy originated as a result of so many mixed blood people who were moving into the colony and intermarrying with whites. Inter-racial marriages were forbidden by an earlier statute passed in 1715. There is an abundance of evidence available in the records to show that settlers and slaves formed unions and had children. These children and subsequent generations became free persons of color.

Between 1790 and 1800 a number of Sampson [31] and New Hanover County residents from the Coharie Section moved across South River into Bladen County. It was during this era that the State of North Carolina issued many land grants, particularly to Revolutionary War veterans and their families. Research indicates that a number of families made this sojourn, and appear in the 1800 Federal Census of Bladen County.

The harbor at Wilmington and the coast of NC in general was very difficult to navigate in the 18th century. While Bladen was settled by a few immigrants coming into Wilmington, the vast majority of the settlers came from various locations in the colonies at the time. As indicated in *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* by William S. Powell [32], “North Carolina had permanent settlers at a later date than most of the other colonies, and it came to be regarded as a frontier region open to settlement by people from Virginia and South Carolina particularly, but also from Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Others arrived from the crowded cities of England and Northern Ireland, from the highlands and lowlands of Scotland, and from the valleys of the Rhine and the Danube rivers in central Europe.”

Bladen’s first courthouse was erected on the west bank of the North West Branch of the Cape Fear River about 50 miles above the forks and about 3.5 miles from present day Elizabethtown. The location is now known as Courthouse Landing.

The earliest available list of inhabitants for Bladen County is the tax list of 1763. At that time, Bladen included portions of present day Brunswick, Columbus, Hoke, and Robeson Counties. The tax list gives a total of 490 entries with 1,244 taxables. This can be broken down into 577 white taxables and 667 black taxables (376 black males and 291 black females). Given an average family size of about 6, the 1763 population can be estimated to be around 5,000.

The federal census of 1790 gave the total population of Bladen as 5,206. This can be broken down into 837 free white males over 16 years of age, and 830 under 16 years of age; 1,863 white females; 1,676 slaves. Note that Cumberland and Robeson Counties had already been carved from Bladen at this time. Due to the formation of other counties, Bladen was only about half the size it was in 1763.

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"North Carolina at the beginning of 1740." From the North Carolina State Archives [41], Raleigh, NC, USA.

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