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THE NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET

GREAT EVENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA HISTORY

HISTORIC HILLSBORO,

BY

FRANCIS NASH.

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THE NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET.

GREAT EVENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA HISTORY.

VOL. III.

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"CAROLINA! CAROLINA! HEAVEN'S BLESSINGS ATTEND HER!
WHILE WE LIVE WE WILL CHERISH, PROTECT AND DEFEND HER."

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PREFACE.

The object of the North Carolina Booklet is to erect a suitable memorial to the patriotic women who composed the "Edenton Tea Party."

These stout-hearted women are every way worthy of admiration. On October 25, 1774, seven months before the defiant farmers of Mecklenburg had been aroused to the point of signing their Declaration of Independence, nearly twenty months before the declaration made by the gentlemen composing the Vestry of St. Paul's Church, Edenton, nearly two years before Jefferson penned the immortal National Declaration, these daring women solemnly subscribed to a document affirming that they would use no article taxed by England. Their example fostered in the whole State a determination to die, or to be free.

In beginning this new series, the Daughters of the Revolution desire to express their most cordial thanks to the former competent and untiringly faithful Editors, and to ask for the new management the hearty support of all who are interested in the brave deeds, high thought, and lofty lives of the North Carolina of the olden days.

Mrs. D. H. Hill.

HISTORIC HILLSBORO.

By FRANCIS NASH,

Of the Hillsboro Bar and Member of the American Historical Association.

The progress of settlement in Orange county presented the usual phases—first, the Indian trader; next, the hunter and pioneer, and then the settler, with his pack-horses, his sturdy helpmeet and five or six children, his axe, his strong health and dauntless self-reliance. A clearing is made, a log cabin is built, and there in that home in the wilderness, free from all artificial restraints, he and his—nature's children—thrive on what she provides. Neighbors come to partake with him of this freedom, and continue to come until Lord Granville's agents, with their surveyors, enter upon the scene, and grants must be sued out and quitrents paid. As the settlements grow more numerous, civil government appears—first in the form of the tax gatherer, and then in those of the Justice and his Constable. Soon a new county must be formed and a central location for the county-seat selected. There a town must be laid off and given a name. To it come the merchant, the lawyer, the tavern-keeper, the artisan and the court officials, adventurers, all, in the perennial pursuit of gain. Rude in its beginnings, the town is, however, the emporium for the trade and the headquarters for the politics, the news and the fashions of all the country

about it, and to it great crowds come at the quarterly courts for a holiday—a holiday that partakes of the strenuous character of the people themselves. The best shot of one community pits himself against the best shot of another; the cock of the walk of Haw River must try conclusions with him of Little or Flat River, while the friends of each look on, restrained from indulging in a free fight themselves only by their interest in the main event, and so on, wrestler with wrestler, runner with runner, race-horse with race-horse, and game cock with game cock—a strong, free people, as yet but half-civilized, unconsciously preparing itself for a great career. Meantime the stock of drinkables at the various taverns is growing smaller and smaller, and the self-important Justices are sitting in the court-house trying minor offenses or settling minor disputes between man and man, and puzzled occasionally by some astute lawyer referring, in hope of enlightenment, but in a helpless way, to Nelson's Justice, Cary's Abridgment of the Statutes, Swinborn on Wills, Godolphin's Orphan's Legacy, Jacob's Law Dictionary, or Wood's Institutes—books required by law to be upon the court table.

Hillsboro, as Hillsboro, began to exist November 7, 1766. It had been, at that time, a town for more than twelve years, but its growth had been very slow and its history uneventful. Since 1764, though, it had been an improving place. A number of young, energetic, able adventurers had located there between 1761 and 1764. Edmund Fanning came in 1761. He was born in 1737, in Connecticut, son of Colonel

Phineas Fanning; graduated at Yale, 1757; studied law in New York, and came to Hillsboro, then Childsburg, as above said. In March, 1763, he qualified as Register of the county. It is generally thought that extortion in this office made him rich. As a matter of fact, his income from that office was small. His income from his law practise was, however, very large. He was the best equipped lawyer in the province, appeared on one side or the other of every litigated case—even the Regulators employing him—and there was much litigation. Besides this, he speculated in real estate and was a partner in a mercantile establishment until 1769, when he sold out to William Johnston. Thus he grew rich rapidly, and this, concurring with his haughty manners, made him many enemies. He built himself a fine house and was instrumental in the erection of a commodious store and a handsome church, and secured a parson for that church—Rev. George Meiklejohn—and a school-master for the town. And it is believed that it was through his influence with Governor Tryon, and Tryon's influence with the Earl of Hillsboro, that the clock that still keeps the time and strikes the hours was obtained from the King. He had a good library, and was, too, liberal in the loan of books to his neighbors. He returned to New York in 1772, after the Regulator troubles, paid a short visit to North Carolina in 1773, was Colonel of Loyalists during the Revolutionary war, Governor of Prince Edward Island, 1794; made an LL. D. by Yale in 1803; General in the British army, 1808; removed to England in 1815, and died in 1818. There has

been no man so harshly treated by our historians as this man.

In late 1762, or early 1763, two young Virginia lawyers came across the line to Childsburg—Abner and Francis Nash. Abner removed soon after to Halifax and New Bern, though he continued for many years to own property in Hillsboro and to practise in its courts. Francis qualified as Clerk of the County in March, 1763, and continued to reside in the town until his death. They came of a substantial English family, that in the time of the Commonwealth espoused the cause of Cromwell, and at the Restoration removed to Pembrokeshire, Wales, and located near Tenby, in that shire. John, son of Abner, of this family, about 1730, came with his wife, Ann Owen, to Virginia, purchased an estate, called Templeton Manor, in the fork of the Bush and Appomattox rivers, and afterwards became quite prominent in the minor political history of that province. There Abner, the third son, and Francis, the fourth, were born—the one about 1740, and the other about 1742.

Of the merchants of that period were James Thackston, a partner of Fanning, and John Dowell, a partner of Francis Nash, in mercantile ventures.

With the coming of these young, energetic and ambitious men, the town took on new life. At Governor Tryon's suggestion, probably, its name was changed to Hillsboro, as compliment to the Earl of that name. In 1767, Rev. George Meiklejohn, a tall, dark, raw-boned Scotchman, with harsh features, slow, deliberate manner, and the broadest of dialects, came as minister in charge of St. Matthew's parish.

A market-house was built over the intersection of King and Churton streets, with wagon-ways through it. A handsome church was completed soon after, and in 1768 or 1769 the wealthy Scotch merchants, William Johnston and Ralph Macnair, became residents of the place. Much more commodious residences were erected, and, though the men outnumbered the women, there was with the new stock of goods some show of dress and fashion. Mr. Fanning was notoriously careful of his person, and his raiment was of the most expensive material and the newest fashion. In this little society he was the model (and envy) of the lesser beaux. There was some culture, too. Besides, Mr. Fanning, Mr. Johnston, Mr. Macnair and Mr. Thackston were all educated gentlemen, well acquainted with books other than their day-books and ledgers. Mr. Francis Nash is said to have been handsome, and, though high-spirited, singularly gentle, generous and warm-hearted, and was educated as the well-to-do Virginia planter educated his son. Out in the country, but near enough to form part of this society, was Colonel Thomas Hart (he of whom Captain Smyth writes so admiringly in his "Travels in America"), with his bevy of handsome daughters. And Mr. Meiklejohn, with his abundant but cumbrous classical learning, his Scotch fondness for strong drink and his Scotch capacity for resisting its influence, must not be forgotten. To be able to drink steadily and freely with all the guests, without getting drunk, was a great accomplishment in those days. Says Waightstill Avery, passing through Hillsboro about that time: "The

evening was spent with a great crowd of lawyers and others. *I narrowly escaped intoxication.*"

These were some of the men whom the Regulators proposed to regulate. I can deal with that disturbance in a summary way only. That the people had just cause of complaint against officials is true beyond doubt. A loosely drawn and ambiguous fee bill gave an opportunity for each man to put his own construction upon it; and, as human nature was the same then (only more so) that it is now, the officials construed it liberally in their own favor, and the agitators construed it strictly against them. Of course calculations made upon such a totally different basis resulted in a difference that could not be reconciled. It was easy to convince a people always sensitive to the encroachments of any man or set of men upon their rights, that these officials were all rogues, fattening and growing rich upon what they had extorted from their own hard earnings. And history is in this regard constantly repeating itself. The ignorant but free masses, when there is a real grievance, always respond to the appeal of the artful agitator and hate the real or imagined oppressor with an intense if not savage hatred—a mad passion that we deplore, while we respect the spirit that inspires it. It is a racial instinct, inbred in their nature, that when wisely controlled by education and enlightenment, makes them a great people. It is, it seems to me, admiration for this spirit that has made some of the historians mistake the nature of the Regulator troubles and insist that the Regulation was the beginning of the Revolution. In truth, it was

never directed against any existing political institution. They expressly disclaimed any quarrel with King or Parliament or Assembly. They demanded that dishonest public officials should be removed and punished; and Governor Tryon not complying with the demand so summarily as they desired, they, inspired by hatred and revenge, proceeded to administer this punishment themselves. So they were an organized but irresponsible and uncontrollable mob—not a great people in the first throes of a struggle for independence. Fanning they hated with a cruel and relentless hatred. His haughty carriage, his pugnacious nature, his bull-dog tenacity, his rapid accumulation of wealth and his undisguised contempt for them maddened them. In March, 1768, they lay in wait for him to kill him, along the Salisbury road. In April, 1768, one hundred of them came to town, forcibly took from Sheriff Tyree Harris a horse upon which he had levied, tied the Sheriff himself to a tree, terrorized the citizens of the town and fired several shots through Fanning's house, he being at the time absent. In 1769 they caught Sheriff John Lea in the country, tied him also to a tree and trounced him soundly; and in September, 1770, they broke up the Superior Court, whipped John Williams, Thomas Hart, Alexander Martin, Michael Holt and others, and would have whipped John Gray, Thomas Lloyd, Francis Nash, Tyree Harris and others had they not "timorously fled." Judge Henderson, that night about 10 o'clock, with his thoughts still "much engaged on his own protection," stepped out a back way and made his escape, leaving "poor

Colonel Fanning and the little borough in a wretched situation." They first severely whipped and then made a prisoner of Fanning—like a huge tiger cat, with its prey, keeping him over for the morrow to make more sport for them before they should devour him. They stopped short of this, however, contented themselves with disgracing him further, destroying his furniture and wrecking his house, and drinking or spilling his wines and liquors.

Then came the Johnston bill, the battle of Alamance, the return of the army to Hillsboro, the trial of the prisoners, the execution of six of them, and the departure of Governor Tryon and Edmund Fanning to New York—events that must be passed over with the mention.

With the end of the Regulator troubles came renewed prosperity to Hillsboro. Several valuable citizens were added to its population. Among others, Nathaniel Rochester and Thomas Burke. Rochester was a man of decided parts, afterwards became a prominent man and patriot, going to Maryland in 1783, thence to New York, where the city of Rochester was named for him. Thomas Burke was a son of Ulick Burke and Letitia Ould, born about 1747 in Galway county, Ireland. Some family trouble made him, in 1764, come to Accomac county, Virginia. There he studied medicine and probably practised it for a while, but soon gave it up for the law. He came to North Carolina in 1772, and, after some hesitation between Halifax and Hillsboro, settled at the latter place in March of that year. He had married Miss Mary Freeman of Norfolk in 1770. He "was

of middle stature, well formed, much marked by the small-pox, which caused the loss of his left eye." His was a short but very remarkable career. As a lawyer and statesman he ranked with the ablest before he was thirty years of age. He was, too, an energetic, zeal-inspiring patriot—a man of fine executive ability, having the thorough confidence of the people of the State. With all these solid qualities, he was very high-strung, very susceptible to external impressions, a good deal of a humorist and something of a poet, as well as orator. In short, he was an Irish genius, with great virtues and serious faults, brilliant success and woful failure, excessive joy and heart-breaking grief, laughter and tears, side by side all through his life.

Governor Martin came to Hillsboro July 2, 1772, with his household and suite, to spend the summer. The citizens of the town and section made the most of this visit, met him in grand cavalcade on his approach, escorted him to his lodgings, entertained him and his suite most royally, dined and wined them to satiety, and witnessed their departure, the latter part of September, with regret.

While here the Governor visited the Regulator settlements, had interviews with James Hunter and others of their leaders, and assured them of his earnest desire to serve them. James Hunter says of this visit: "This summer our new Governor has been up with us, and has given us every satisfaction we could expect of him. * * * I think our officers hate him as bad as we hated Tryon, only they don't speak so free." In the same letter he says: "Morris Moore

and Abner Nash have been up to see me, to try to get me in favor again, and promised to do all they could for you" (William Butler), "and I think they are more afraid than ever." Both parties were evidently trying to gain the favor of the Regulators, with the advantage decidedly with Governor Martin. It is possible, also, that the Atticus letter was written soon after this visit, for its authorship was by many at first attributed to Abner Nash.

Until 1775 the life of the town presented no striking or unusual incidents. There was a quiet attempt to put the militia of the county upon a better fighting basis, and there was an independent company organized in the town, and it was assiduously drilled by an old British corporal—an unostentatious preparation for eventualities that they were willing to meet, but hoped to avoid. Late in 1774, Mr. James Hogg, a Scotchman of wealth and culture, came with his family to reside at Hillsboro. He himself was of the same stock as the Ettrick Shepherd, and his wife, Miss Alves, was second cousin to Sir Walter Scott.

The first provincial Congress (the third convention) convened at Hillsboro in August, 1775, and held its sittings in the handsome church that stood near the site of the present Presbyterian church. This was the first instance of the use of Hillsboro for a place of meeting for any general representative body. This great Congress—great in *personnel* and great in results—has recently been described in the BOOKLET, so I will pass it by. Its time was kept by the same clock that is striking the hours as I write—then in the tower of

the church, and now in the cupola of the court-house. The members were entertained very hospitably by the residents of the town and its environs; and, though some from the east, all high livers, suffered from a change of climate and water, and one died, on the whole they found their stay pleasant. Governor Caswell was in bad humor when, some years later, in the midst of a similar epidemic, he called it "an infernal place."

At the beginning of the Revolutionary war, society at Hillsboro had improved distinctly. There were fewer bachelor dinners, less dining and wining, and more family life. Edmund Fanning, with his fine gentleman manners, his show of wealth and expensive habits, had gone. Mr. Macnair had married Miss Hall, so it is thought, and was living one mile east of town. Francis Nash had married Miss Sally Moore, and was living just west of the church. Thomas Burke, with his handsome but unmanageable wife, resided near town on his farm, and they were visited occasionally by her somewhat gay sisters. Mr. James Hogg, with his family of sons and daughters, was living within a stone's throw of the east line of the town. Colonel Hart was still living and active, and one of his daughters had married Jesse Benton, and another John Taylor. Colonel Thomas Lloyd, south of town, was growing old and feeble, but one son-in-law in Orange, John Hogan, and another in Rowan, Adlai Osborne, were as prominent, socially and politically, as he had been. And ten miles west of town were the Mebanes, always prominent in the social and political life

of the section. Nine miles west of town, too, was Winindale, the summer residence of Mr. Samuel Strudwick, noted for its good cheer and hospitality. He would come up from Stag Park each summer with his French wife and two young sons, the older of whom was in a few years to have his romance that ended in a tragedy.

The sons of Hillsboro during the war volunteered freely and served willingly wherever duty called them, but no battle was fought near the town. There, however, troops concentrated, and there they took refuge after the battle of Camden. There, too, a ruthless and hungry and despairing soldiery preyed upon friend and foe alike until Mr. Burge interfered. I have told the story elsewhere, and have not space to retell it here. And after all the trials and deprivations of the fateful year 1780, Lord Cornwallis and his army came in February, 1781. On the 25th, though, he left the town little the worse for his visit, and the streets about the courthouse the better to the present day for the cobble-stones placed there by his soldiers.

General Francis Nash was the only prominent citizen of the town killed during the war. Desperately wounded on October 4th at Germantown, he lingered in excruciating agony until the 7th, attended by Dr. Craik, Washington's own physician. Thus was ended a short but very promising military career. As the chill of death was creeping upon him he said to Dr. Craik: "I have no favor to expect from the enemy. I have been consistent in my principles and conduct from the commencement of the trouble. From the first

dawn of Revolution I have been on the side of liberty and my country."

Thomas Burke was elected Governor June 25, 1781, qualified June 26th and entered at once, energetically and efficiently, upon the performance of his duties. Coming up from Halifax to Hillsboro, he arrived at the latter place on September 7th or 8th, 1781. On the morning of September 12th, a grey, foggy morning, David Fanning with his Tories, and Colonel McNeill with his Highlanders, raided Hillsboro and captured Governor Burke and his suite, and, without any efficient hindrance, carried them safe to Wilmington. In a short time Burke was transferred to Charleston, where he was paroled to James Island. There the Tories attempted to assassinate him, and he appealed to General Leslie, the commandant, for protection, but in vain. After waiting sixteen days, and no notice taken of his appeal, he, on January 16, 1782, broke his parole and made his escape, and after some negotiations through General Greene with General Leslie, that were fruitless, he returned to North Carolina and resumed the reins of government. The criticism of his course by the public, the exultation of some of his foes and ill-concealed contempt of others, and the coldness of some former friends, so preyed upon his mind that he refused to stand for re-election in April, 1782, retired to private life, found temporary relief in ardent spirits, and then, attacked by disease that he had not stamina to resist, succumbed to it on December 2, 1783, and was buried on his farm near Hillsboro. Governor of a State struggling for independence, by

the unanimous suffrage of its Assembly and with the universal approbation of its people, when he was thirty-four; dead of a wrecked life and broken heart when he was thirty-six, and buried in a grave so obscure and unmarked that now probably not a dozen persons know its exact location—surely this was the great tragedy of our Revolutionary history.

I must close, however, with the following, written by him for a lady a few weeks before his death, and when peace, and with it independence, was in plain view:

Let bards who give voice to the clarion of fame,
The worth of our chief and our soldiers proclaim;
Such only can Washington's glory pursue—
Too sublime for our notes, and too bright for our view.

But let softer scenes, which we hope to enjoy
Henceforth, gentle fair ones, our voices employ;
Our husbands, our lovers restored to our eyes,
Our cheeks know no tears, our bosoms no sighs.

No more shall the dread apprehensions affright,
Of soldiers by day and assassins by night;
Secure, bright and cheerful our days shall now prove,
And our nights know no tumults, but transports of love.

To make home delightful henceforth be our care,
With delicate skill the rich feast to prepare,
To converse with variety, freedom and ease,
And, with elegant novelty, always to please.

When mothers, to rear the young heroes to fame,
And infuse the true spark of the future bright flame;
To deck the young virgins with graces refined,
And embellish with sense and good humor the mind.

AUGUST IN NORTH CAROLINA HISTORY.

Manteo was baptized and made Lord of Roanoke on the 13th, 1587; Virginia, daughter of Ananias and Eleanor Dare, and granddaughter of Governor White, was born on the 18th, 1587; Governor White returned from England in 1590 and found the colony gone; Henderson Walker, Governor, 1699; in 1710, Edward Hyde arrived and took possession of office; Provincial Congress met at Halifax on the 20th, 1775; battle of Fort Hatteras, 1861.