

Mrs E. E. Moffett

VOL. IV

JANUARY, 1905.

NO. 9

THE
NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET.



GREAT EVENTS IN
NORTH CAROLINA HISTORY

SOME CHANGES IN THE NORTH
CAROLINA COAST SINCE 1585.

BY
PROF. COLLIER COBB



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VOL. IV.

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"CAROLINA! CAROLINA! HEAVEN'S BLESSINGS ATTEND HER!
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SOME CHANGES IN THE NORTH CAROLINA COAST SINCE 1585.*

BY COLLIER COBB, F. G. S. A.,

(Professor of Geology. University of North Carolina.)

From earliest times the coast of North Carolina has been the dread of mariners. All students of our history are familiar with the *fac similes* of DeBry's map of "The Arrival of the Englishmen in Virginia, 1584," from Hariot's "Account of Virginia," in which a wrecked vessel marks the entrance to every inlet. Wrecks are characteristic features of all the early maps of our coast, with only two exceptions; viz., that made by John White, artist to the Raleigh Colony, in 1585, now in the Grenville Collection in the British Museum; and DeBry's map of Lane's expedition. Hardly an August or a December passes that the papers do not tell us of stately ships and ocean steamers stranded on the Inner Diamond Shoals, or gone to the bottom of "Hell's Hole" in this "Graveyard of American Shipping." And numerous smaller sailing craft and fishing sloops go down within the bars that mark our outer coast-line.

Through which inlet the English adventurers of 1584 entered the sounds of North Carolina, has been the theme of much discussion from the days of our earliest historians. Among men who have studied the question solely from an historical point of view, the writings of George Bancroft, Francis L. Hawks, and John Wheeler Moore, are worthy of

* Names in italics indicate the spelling on old maps whenever that differs from present day usage.

consideration; as well as later communications to learned societies from, and magazine articles by, William L. Welch, of Boston, and the late John D. Davis, of Beaufort, who arrived at very different conclusions. Mr. Welch, however, is the only student of our history who has made a serious attempt to note any of the changes that have taken place in our coast line since 1584, his interest in these changes dating from a month of military service at Hatteras Inlet in 1864. In a communication to the Essex Institute, of Salem, Mass., in 1885, he brings forward the evidence that the present Hatteras Inlet was opened by the great gale of September, 1846, which was so severe on our southern coast.

The present writer has spent several seasons during the last two decades in a study of sand movements along our entire coast, and has reported his investigations and presented the results of his studies before the Geological Society of America and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He has gathered all the maps of our coast, in originals, photographs or tracings, from John White's map of 1585, which he copied in the British Museum, July 3d, 1895, to the Coast Survey charts of the present day, and has tramped the "Banks," as these sand-reefs are called, and sailed much in all the sounds. He has also examined ships' logs, and records of light houses, life saving stations, and Weather Bureau signal stations, and has conversed with the life-savers, captains and surfmen, and recorded conversations and kept correspondence with the more noteworthy citizens of this sandstrip. The data thus obtained have been compared with information in possession of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, beginning with the manuscript "Report

by William Latham on Survey of the Coast of North Carolina from Cape Hatteras to Cape Fear, 1806."

Having located a number of old inlets from their ancient channels in the sounds, and from the topographic outlines and structural features of the adjacent sand reefs, I turned to the Colonial Records seeking to correlate the geological and historical records. Leaving to the historians all questions of the inlet entered by the English, it is my purpose to point out such changes in our coast line as are recorded in our human documents or in the earth itself.

John White, as his water color sketches and map studies made in Virginia (Carolina) show, was an accurate observer and an artist of no mean ability. His map, drawn in 1585, shows a wide open inlet where Caffey's Inlet now is. He calls the strip of sand bank to the South of it *Croatamung* and the water between this Bank and the mainland *Teripano*. To the north of this two slight inlets are indicated; while to the south and just below the Kill Devil Hills opposite Colleton Island (which is unnamed) a small and shallow inlet is indicated. Just below this slight indication of an inlet is the word *Etacrewac*, which probably indicates the prominences about Nag's Head. Next to the south is a well marked wide-open inlet marked *Port Ferdinando*, due east of the southern extremity of Roanoke Island (called here *Roanoac*), and a picture of a ship is nearly opposite, sailing away from the inlet. Below this inlet comes *Hatorask*, evidently the name of the sandstrip to the north of the great elbow jutting out into the sea; and the sandstrip to the south as far as the present Ocracoke Inlet is called *Paquiac*. There is no break in the Banks from *Port Ferdinando* (near site of present Oregon Inlet) to *Onoaconan*, which I identify with

the present Ocracoke Inlet. *Wococon*, which by some writers has been identified with Ocracoke, was more probably Whalebone Inlet, which is now closed. Between this point and Cape Lookout three other inlets are indicated; but no inlet is marked on White's map between Cape Lookout and Shackleford Banks, though there is an inlet just to the north of the cape and opposite Harker's Island. A large ship sails seaward from what I identify with Cedar Inlet, closed since 1805.

DeBry's map, already mentioned, with its wrecks marking the entrance to every inlet, shows Trinity Harbor (Caffey's Inlet? closed in 1800), two inlets to the north of it, and two inlets opposite *Roanoac* Island, that opposite the southern extremity of the island being marked, *Hatorasck*, though the name may apply to the land to the south as in White's map, rather than to the inlet. *Fac similes* of this map may be readily consulted by any readers of the Booklet. It is worthy of note that the region of Kitty Hawk Bars and Colleton Island is mapped very much as it is to-day, with no inlet opposite the island.

The next map we have is found in "A Brief Description of the Province of Carolina," a pamphlet published in London, in 1666 for Robert Horne. It is entitled "Carolina Described, 1666." The Library of Congress has the anonymous pamphlet, but without the map. The map is reproduced in *fac simile* in Hawks II, 42. This map, which is clearly less accurate than either of the preceding, gives *Coratuck*, an inlet evidently near the present site of Currituck Light House; *Roanoak Inlet*, opposite the southern extremity of *Roanoak I[sland]*; *C. Hattorasch*, and six inlets between that point

Cape Lookout, here called *C. Hope*, the last being immediately north of Cape Lookout.

The map entitled "A New Description of Carolina by order of the Lords Proprietors [A. D. 1671.] James Maxon, scul.," gives *Caratuck Inlet* in essentially the same position as the foregoing, *Musketo Inlet* (Caffey's) *Roanoak Inlet* opposite Roanoke Island, three inlets between that point and Hatteras Island, and an inlet between *Cape Hatteras* and *Ocock* (*Ocracoke*), evidently much nearer to the Cape than the present Hatteras Inlet. Whalebone Inlet is indicated, but not named, and there are two others between this and *Cap Lookout*.

"Carte General de la Caroline Dresse sur les Memoires le plus nouveaux Par le Siena S*** A Amsterdam Chez Pierre Mortier, Libraire, Avec Privilege de Nos Seigneurs les Etats." [1671?], gives old *Caratock Inlet*, *Nouveau Passage* (Caffey's Inlet), and *Vieu Passage* opposite *Colleton Island*, at the mouth of *Albemarle River*. It shows *Passage de Hatteras* north of its present site, *Wosston* (*Ocracoke*), Whalebone Inlet, and an inlet just north of Cape Lookout.

The next "Map of the Inhabited Parts of N. Carolina, prepared by Ion Lawson, Surveyor General of N. C., 1709," shows *Currituc Inlet*, *Colleton I.* with no inlet opposite, *Roanoke Inlet* and the three Inlets to the South separating successively *Cow I.*, *Body I.*, and *Dugs* from the large Island with its projection marked *Cape Hatteras*. *Hatteras Inlet* is indicated somewhat to the southwest of its present position containing an island of some size and *Ocacock* is a broad inlet with two important islands. *Drum Inlet*, opposite *Cedar Island*, connects *Corantug Sound* with *The Western Ocean*,

and no other inlets are indicated until *Topsail Inlet* is reached.

Wimble's map of 1738 gives *Currituck Inlet* on the line between Virginia and North Carolina with 6 feet of water; *Nag's Head Inlet* opposite Roanoke Island, with a depth of 24 feet, and *Hatteras Inlet* somewhat to the north of its present position. The charts of Mouzin 1775, Atlantic Neptune 1780, and Lewis 1795, are simply copies of Wimble's or some other older chart.

Dundibbin's chart made in 1764 has no inlet between Cape Hatteras and Ocracoke, and gives 4 fathoms of water on the bar at Ocracoke, and 9 ft. 6 in. shoalest water on the bar inside.

John Collett's Map, London, S. Hooper, 1770, shows three sand hills just below Caffey's Inlet, no inlet at Nag's Head or at Roanoke though the names are there, Gunt Inlet, *Chiconockominock* Inlet, and no inlet between there and *Occacock* Inlet.

It is not known when Nags Head Inlet was closed, or the Hatteras Inlet indicated on the earlier maps. In 1844 an effort was made in Congress to get an appropriation to reopen Nag's Head Inlet, and in 1855 a plan was perfected under the auspices of the State to cut a channel through on the site of this inlet from Roanoke Wharf to the ocean, but the plan was never carried out.

Cole and Price's chart, 1806, based upon actual surveys, shows no trace of Hatteras Inlet, nor does it occur on any of the charts of the State until 1855 when it appears farther to the South than is indicated on any previous maps. Major Cole and Mr. Jonathan Price were associated with William Tatham in a survey of the coast of North Carolina from

Wm Tatham

Cape Hatteras to Cape Fear, under Act of Congress of April 10th, 1806. Tatham's charts were lost in the wreck of the revenue cutter, *Governor Williams*, September 28th, 1806, the very day he completed his investigations and placed his baggage on board for transportation to New Bern. Tatham and his colleagues did not work together, and the charts of Cole and Price were not lost. L

Mr. Tatham, however, made a report to Hon. Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, in January 1807, dealing mainly with the difficulties and disaster of the undertaking. This report has never been published, but is preserved in the office of the Coast and Geodetic Survey at Washington. In this account he mentions incidentally places where inlets formerly existed, gives some attention to the effects produced by the Gulf-stream in counter currents, and makes some really valuable observations on the formation of shoals and islands, the movement and fixation of wind-blown sands, and the blocking up of inlets. Tatham's observation and conclusions remind one of the musings of the Pythagoreans, and examining his report with care is like delving in an ancient scroll of the fifteenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. I have had occasion, in another paper to compare some of these observations with the geological record as it exists to-day.

The map of Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia, compiled by F. Lewis in 1807, for the atlas accompanying Marshall's life of Washington, is merely a copy of the then existing maps, as is also Wayne's map of Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia, published in the same year. But the smaller copy of the same atlas, issued in a later edition, shows the "slew," or creek, on Ocracoke Island just above the site of the present light house, where it still exists in part. None

of these maps show any inlet between Cape Hatteras and *Ocracock*.

The map by Price and Strother, Philadelphia, 1808, gives Currituck Inlet much to the north of its present position, and marks the old inlet on the state line; shows Roanoke Inlet to the north of its later position and another inlet just below the southern end of Roanoke Island. No other inlet is met with on the coast as shown in this map until *Ocracock* is reached.

This map, much improved from later surveys—especially in the interior, was republished in 1820 by H. S. Tanner, of Philadelphia. Tanner's revision Currituck Inlet, Caffey's Inlet (unnamed), Roanoke Inlet (marked "filled up"), New Inlet, *Ocracock* Inlet, and Cedar Inlet, and indicates a series of reefs two to five miles within Hatteras Island (which includes *Chicomacomack* Banks to the north and Hatteras Banks to the south.

The map of North Carolina published by F. Lucas, Jr., Baltimore, 1822, shows Currituck Inlet just opposite the southern end of Knott's Island, but is not otherwise different from Tanner's revision of Strother.

S. A. Mitchell's map of 1832 shows an unbroken stretch of sand from Cape Henry to Oregon Inlet, thence to *Ocracock* Inlet, thence to Cedar Inlet.

The large map, 35x84 in., published by J. MacRae, Fayetteville, 1833, far surpassed in accuracy and in detail all previously published maps. Mr. MacRae was for many years postmaster at Fayetteville, and had excellent opportunities for compiling such a map. Much actual field work was done for the map by Robt. H. B. Brazier, who was an experienced engineer and excellent draftsman; and this was the mother-map of all later maps of North Carolina down

to 1880, though Cook and some others as late as 1857 copied the errors of earlier maps. Cook's map, however, shows the inner reefs of Hatteras cut down to low water. On the MacRae-Brazier map no inlets are shown north of New Inlet above *Chickonocomack Bank*, and none between there and *Ocracoke Inlet*.⁴ Cedar Inlet is marked as closed, and the next inlet indicated is between Cape Lookout and *Shackleford's Banks*.

The present Hatteras Inlet was opened by the great storm of September, 1846, and was cut out sometime during the night of Sept. 7-8. Zachariah Burrus, still living at Hatteras in April, 1903, was the first man to cross the inlet, Sept. 8th, 1846. Redding R. Quidley piloted a vessel into Hatteras inlet in January, 1847, where he anchored for the night, leaving next morning and going into Ocracoke. Mr. Quidley was also pilot of the first vessel that passed through into Pamlico Sound, Feb. 5, 1847, schooner Asher C. Havens, Capt. David Barrett, Commander.

A former Hatteras Inlet, about six miles to the southwest of the present Hatteras inlet, was closed in 1839 by the stranding of an English vessel in the inlet, followed by the sanding up of the wreck, and the "making down" of the beach. These facts I have learned by conversation with and letters from Messrs. Redding Quidley, Homer W. Styron, Zachariah Burruss, A. W. Simpson, John Austin, J. W. Rolinson—and several others.

The last chart to show this inlet is Wimble's map, 1838. It is not on Dundibbin's chart of 1764, and no Hatteras Inlet appears again on the maps of the State until 1855.

The same storm that produced Hatteras Inlet opened Oregon Inlet on Sept. 8, 1846, eight miles south of the site of

Roanoke Inlet. It cut through the middle of the base line which J. C. Neilson had laid out in 1843. The inlet had 11 feet of water on the bar in 1882, but is reported to have shoaled greatly since that time. The inlet was named for the first ship that passed out through it, The Oregon, owned by John Fowle, Esq., of Washington, North Carolina.

The present writer has located the sites of the several old inlets on the coast by methods already mentioned. Old Currituck Inlet, New Currituck Inlet five miles to the southward, Caffey's Inlet and the old inlet opposite Colleton Island, at the mouth of Albemarle River, are all distinctly marked to-day by channels in the sounds approaching the Banks and are clearly shown by a low meadow strip across the sand and the arrested dunes. In the case of the Colleton Island inlet the Kill Devil Hills with the fresh ponds below them mark the site and the remnant of the ancient inlet. The sites of many former inlets are marked in this way all the way down to Beaufort Harbor, there being three distinct inlets indicated on Hatteras Island, one above and two below the cape, one on Ocracoke, three between Portsmouth and Cape Lookout and two just to the southwest of Cape Lookout. These were evidently all closed by the sands filling in around obstructions, and new inlets have from time to time been opened by storms. All of our inlets in the region under consideration in this paper are moving steadily southward by the action of the winds driving the dune sands. But this is not the place for the discussion of physiographic process on our coast. That has already been described in detail and fully illustrated by this writer elsewhere. His object here is to study these changes in the zone of early

exploration and settlement as they have influenced the history of the state.

In the Colonial Records, vol. i, Albemarle Sound is called the Carolina River in many of the deeds given by Sir William Berkeley in the second half of the 17th Century. These were all written in Virginia. The Indians had called this sound Chowan River, but the Lords Proprietors in their commission to Governor Berkeley, speak of it as "the river Chowan now named by us Albemarle river." Carlyle Island was granted to Sir Jno. Colleton, Sept. 8th, 1663, and it is described in the deed of grant as "the island hertofore called Carlyle Island now Colleton Island lying neare the mouth of Chowane now Albemarle river." Nag's Head Inlet is also described in a document of the same date. Grants still held on the Banks at various points mention inlets that have long since ceased to be.

The problem of the inlet entered may be impossible of solution. The notes here presented will reveal to the student of our history something of the nature of the problem. The influence of these shifting sands upon the development of our state is an interesting subject for the student of earth science in its relation to man. An acquaintance with the inhabitants of these ever changing sand reefs, fair women and brave men, who live and do for others, life-savers, heroes, will cause one to thank God and take courage for the future of the human race.

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