

Cumberland County, North Carolina Historic Overview

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## Cumberland County

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Cumberland County is located in the southern midsection of North Carolina. The county has a land area of 635 square miles. Its population in 1992 was 277,322. According to the office of state planning the population in 1998 was 283,650. It is made up of several towns and one major city, Fayetteville ( population 121,338). The towns in the county are: Hope Mills (pop. 10,734), Spring Lake (pop. 8,542), Stedman (pop. 651), Wade (pop. 450), Falcon (pop. 338), Linden (pop. 168), and Godwin (pop. 71). Fort Bragg, one of the world's largest military installations is also located in Cumberland County. This base, while not included in the population statistics above, greatly contributes to the actual population of the county. The defining physical feature of the county is the mighty Cape Fear River. Along it's banks the first European settlers first broke ground.

During the first decade of the 18th century the first prominent settlers began to arrive in what is now Cumberland County. This settlement began in the lower Cape Fear after the Tuscarora War of 1712. The Native American inhabitants had been crushed opening the area for settlers to move in. In the early 1720's powerful families from the South Carolina colony received land grants in the lower Cape Fear Region. Then in 1725, Brunswick town was settled at the mouth of the river, this set the stage for later exploration up the Cape Fear.

In 1729 North Carolina became a colony. England bought the lands from their lords proprietors. George Burrington, who was governor at this time, was very interested in the Cape Fear region. He constructed roads and gave land grants to encourage

settlement. His successor, Gabriel Johnston, was even more interested in the area. He was of Scottish descent and encouraged Scottish migration to the region. During the first months of his governorship, in 1734, the initial settlements of the upper part of the river began.

In 1734, the royal government named the backcountry of the Cape Fear settlements the Bladen precinct. This included all the area that is present day Cumberland County. The formation of this new district prompted settlement. The 1730's were significant years for this area.

Scattered Scottish settlers had already found a home in the upper Cape Fear as early as the 1720's. The first large group of Scottish immigrants departed from Cambellton, in Argyllshire: aboard a vessel named the Tristle, on June 6, 1739. They arrived in the lower Cape Fear on September 23, 1739. There are conflicting accounts as to the number of settlers that arrived. Some accounts say there were as many as 350, while others say that there were only about 150. Along with the Scottish, there were people from the north and the west, known as the Scotch-Irish. These were lowland Scots whose ancestors had fled to Ulster in Northern Ireland. There were also newcomers from the old Albermarle and Craven precincts. Irishmen, Welsh, and Pennsylvanian Quakers also came along with a smaller number of Europeans - French, Swiss, and German.

Cumberland County was officially formed in 1754. The colonial government named the county after William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland. Who at the time, was leader of the English military and a most popular public official. The lists of residents, called "taxables", are the primary statistic measuring population. From 1754 until the beginning of the revolution 21 years later, the county population grew steadily. During colonial times North Carolina was among the fastest growing places in North America. People came from all directions to take land grants or to buy land. Most of this new population was farmers looking for a good place for their crops. This population also included millers and forestry workers hoping to cash in on the county's abundant forests.

At first, settlement focused largely on river and stream areas; those positioned for good trade. Ever increasing influxes of Scottish migrants, especially in the 1760's and 1770's created settlements along the farther reaches of the Cape Fear River valley. The flatlands near the river possessed very fertile soil and made for great farms and pastures. Nearly 250 years later, this area still remains Cumberland County's most important farming district.

The most notable settlement in colonial Cumberland County was on the banks of the Cross Creek. The settlement is thought to have taken its name from the creek. By

1760 Cross Creek was attracting the attention of the governing councils of the colony. Pressure was being placed on them to create a town in the area where government regulated warehouses could operate safely. Petitions proposing locations of the town were received in 1760. In one session of the assembly separate bills were introduced. One named Cross Creek as the best place for the town, and the other named Rockfish Creek. To decide, the 1761 assembly named a committee to view each proposed location. The committee rejected both locations. Instead, a 100-acre tract of land was decided on just south of the Cross Creek settlement. The owner of the land was John Russell who died in 1761. He left the land to his minor sons John and William.

On November 3, 1762, the assembly, in New Bern, passed an act establishing the official town. They named it Cambellton, after an influential planter/politician and friend of the colonial governor, John Campbell (1700-1781). The court of Cumberland County was directed to move business to the new town.

In the following years Cross Creek's population exploded in comparison to that of Cambellton. The new town continued to exist but never matched the established settlement a mile away. Soon there was a petition to move the county government to Cross Creek. Eventually this was done and Cross Creek was named "Upper Cambellton". The town would later change names again, to Fayetteville (in honor of the Marquis de Lafayette).

The Antebellum era saw both stability and change in Cumberland County. During the 70 years from the beginning of the United States to the Civil War, farming was the chief occupation. It was also the most defined social characteristic. The economy of Cumberland County in this period is most noted by the growth of cotton as the major cash crop and Fayetteville's unsuccessful struggle to become a commercial metropolis.

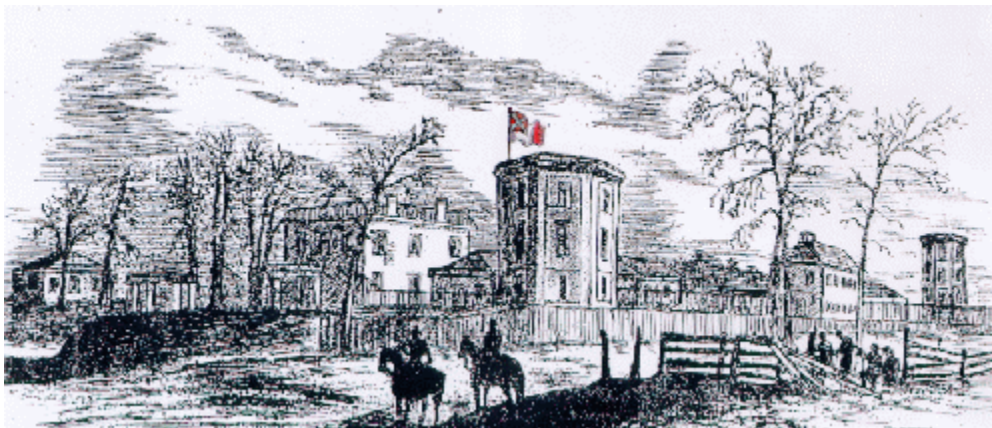
Fayetteville was of modest size, but by North Carolina standards (with most places no bigger than crossroads) it was an important place. It is considered typical of antebellum, southern, town life with a full range of cultural and commercial activities. The town burned twice in the 1800's prior to the Civil War (when it was burned again). It bounced back as a commercial center, and a model of the brief "plank road" age.

Rural Cumberland County changed little during this period. A few large landowners, hundreds of small farmers and their slaves worked to earn a living from the fields and forests. Unique to this area was the county's role as an early center of cotton textile manufacturing. One key event during this period was the selection of Fayetteville as the site of a United States arsenal.

The population trend was erratic due to depression and spurts of industriousness. As cotton slowly claimed its crown as king the slave population grew larger and larger to provide the needed labor. The result is that the free white population increased by only about one and one half times during the entire period when the African American population tripled. In 1790 the first census counted 8,671 ( 26.1 % were non-white). In 1854 Harnett County was annexed from Cumberland. The 1860 census listed 16,389 as the population, of that 41.6 % was non-white.

While small by today's standard the village of Fayetteville was a significant demographic feature of antebellum Cumberland County. Until the civil war, Fayetteville was always the second or third most populated place in the state. The urban percentage of the county population was second only to Wilmington. Fayetteville was home to approximately one-fourth of Cumberland County population during the antebellum period.

In the first days of the Civil War, many people in Cumberland may have been reluctant to leave the Union. When North Carolina finally left you could not measure that by the number of troops that turned out. During the spring of 1861, nearly 700 volunteers were raised. They formed eight companies and were shipped down the Cape Fear to Wilmington. There they were sent by train to Raleigh, to join other regiments. Before the war ended at least one-third of the white men in Cumberland County had served in the war. The arsenal at Fayetteville also played a key role in the war effort. It housed over 37,000 weapons. It also served as a repair shop for damaged weapons.



The most significant incident for Cumberland County occurred when a great force of union troops entered from South Carolina and made a course for Fayetteville. His goal was to destroy the arsenal, which was one of the last remaining in the south. By the second week in March, Sherman had arrived. There is little documentation as to what became of the contents of the arsenal. Some say that the weapons were merely carted

off by the Union troops, but others give some very interesting accounts. One such account is that the bulk of the weaponry was disposed of in the surrounding mill ponds. Two of the cannons were said to have been relics of the Revolution and the War of 1812. The only thing that was documented was that Sherman's army burned the arsenal and most of the town. Two major landmarks, the market house (built in 1832) and the courthouse (built in 1788 which served as the N.C. capitol for some time), were also burned.

After the end of the Civil War, Cumberland County saw major changes that lasted until the time of World War I. In the 1880's, the county was provided with better connections with the rest of the state. This did not have much of an impact on the population. For the remainder of the 1800, Fayetteville remained primarily a village that centered county government. Its population in 1890 was the same as it was in 1860. It took a very long time to recover from the effects of Sherman's march. For the most part Cumberland County remained strictly a farming community. Fayetteville saw an increase in the merchant population during the turn of the century.

Probably the most significant occurrence during this period was visit made to the sand hills of the county in 1918. Two visitors, Col. E. P. King and Dr. T. Wayland Voughand, decided that the area looked like a good location for a new military base. The base was first called Camp Bragg. It was named for Braxton Bragg ( a captain who served in both the U.S. and confederate armies. Fort Bragg as it would later be called would find a permanent home in North Carolina.

After the end of WWII, several things happened in Cumberland County that had a major impact. First of all, the population exploded and the county was transformed from a rural environment to the urban area of Fayetteville and it's surrounding area. Crossroads were replaced by subdivisions, and downtown Fayetteville with it's sidewalk array of stores and shops disappeared as the commercial center. It was replaced with acres of shopping malls and parking lots on what had been soybean fields. The longstanding agricultural economy was replaced by industrial, commercial, and construction activities; the farmer had become an endangered species. In the 1960's, the textile industry began to give way to modern manufacturing. Firms producing tires, synthetic fibers, and automotive parts provided thousands of people with jobs. Also, Fort Bragg began to have a major impact on the economy. It was and still is one of the world's largest military bases. It's tens of thousands of troops have provided a significant income for the county.

Throughout the course of it's history Cumberland County and Fayetteville have seen a little bit of everything. From a small village to small town ravaged during the civil war; to the reconstruction and the development of Fayetteville into a modern urban

area. Cumberland County has just about seen it all. It's rich history is a reminder of that.

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