

Guilford County

A BRIEF HISTORY



GUILFORD COUNTY BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION
in cooperation with the school units
of High Point, Guilford County, and Greensboro

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Front Cover Description

Statue of Gen. Nathanael Greene at
Guilford Courthouse National Park.

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FOREWORD

This monograph is one of seven prepared for the Guilford County Bicentennial Commission. During the summer of 1970 several fourth grade teachers and a school supervisor were employed by the commission to write a resource unit on Guilford County to be used as the first unit in the fourth grade social studies. This team also began to do research for the seven monographs which were completed in the summer of 1971. An attempt was made to write the monographs on a fourth grade level, so they could be used as reference materials by pupils doing research on the Guilford County Unit.

The team of teachers who did the research and writing did not consider themselves writers -- even amateur writers -- but they thought that this was an opportunity to do something that would be helpful to boys and girls in Guilford County.

NOTE:

The war between the Confederacy and the Union (1861 - 65) is called by some historians the War for Southern Independence and by others, the War Between the States. It is most commonly known as the Civil War. Since students will hear the latter name most frequently, it is used in this series of monographs. Please point this out.

GUILFORD COUNTY A BRIEF HISTORY

Did you know that Indians and wild animals were once the only inhabitants of our county? Did you know that one of the most important battles of the Revolutionary War was fought here? Did you know that for a few days Greensboro was the capital of the Confederacy? This monograph will give you this and other information. Perhaps it will make you want to find out more about your county's history.

INDIANS IN GUILFORD COUNTY

The Indians were the first natives of Guilford County. These people had no written language so they left no written history. We get most of our information about them from artifacts and relics from their burial places. Some travelers and traders wrote about the Indians who lived in this area.

There were two Indian tribes who lived in the original Guilford County. They were the Saura in Rockingham and the Keyauwee tribes in Randolph County. Both of these counties were later cut off from Guilford. These tribes spoke the Siouan language. The Indians lived in village communities. One village had a population of about 500 people. They were hunters and farmers. They cleared land and grew peas, beans, corn, and some fruits. Buffalo, deer, bear, and small game made good hunting. Indians hunted with bows and arrows and spears.

The Indians of Guilford County were friendly to the white settlers. The Quakers bought land from the Sauras. The Sauras left this region and moved on to South Carolina. The Keyauwees moved away also and were lost to history. Both tribes left because they were attacked by stronger tribes and by trading parties.

The Indian tribes which lived in Guilford County had some very interesting and unusual customs. They carefully saved the bones of the animals they ate, and then burned them. They believed that if they failed to do this the game would leave and they would not be able to get meat for food. Most Indian men of other tribes pulled their whiskers out one at a time. But the Indian men of the Saura and the Keyauwee tribes wore whiskers or mustaches. They painted themselves with red ore which came from neighboring mountains.

The Indians of the area gave names to rivers, mountains, and other places. The Uwharrie Mountains and the Carraway River to the south were named by the Keyauwees. The name of the Saura tribe was given to Saura Town to the north.

EARLY SETTLERS

The English had used trading paths through the area of Guilford County for about 100 years before the first permanent settlement. In 1744 the Germans began the settlement of the eastern part of present Guilford County. Part of this territory is now Alamance County. About six years later the English and Welsh Quakers began to move into the western section. In three more

years the Ulster Scots, sometimes called the Scotch-Irish, purchased land and settled the middle part of the county.

The first settlers arrived in big covered wagons like the one in the Greensboro Historical Museum. They came down the Bison Trail or the Shenandoah Valley Trail in Virginia. They came from Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland and Virginia. The wagons were hitched to three-or-four horse teams. The mother in the family often drove. The wagons were loaded with household articles, crude furniture, feather beds, and children. The families brought with them the Holy Bible. The livestock followed the wagon. The father carried his gun in case any game was spotted. The father, his sons, and three or four dogs kept the hogs and cows together. Everyone in the family wore homespun clothes and handmade shoes. Many times the children were barefoot.

When the family arrived, they set to work almost immediately clearing land and building a log cabin for a home. The settlers helped each other build homes and clear land.

Land for pioneers seeking homes was cheap and plentiful in these early days. The people who settled this area wanted more than land. The Germans came for religious freedom and a better life. The Ulster Scots came to escape the many hardships placed on them by the British government. The English and Welsh Quakers came to find freedom to worship and to live in peace. Most of the settlers came with ambition, hopes for freedom, and a dream of building a new country.

PIONEER LIVING IN GUILFORD COUNTY

The pioneers in Guilford County had to be satisfied with very simple living. Their farms, the forest and streams around the farms, had to support the family. The log cabins they built were crude. Sometimes they were two-story double houses with the chimney in the middle. The homes were built near springs and streams. The furnishings of the home were made by hand and were very plain.

The Guilford pioneers planted crops of corn, wheat, and flax. All the clothing was made in the home. A log building for church and schoolhouse was built soon after they arrived. This building was the center of the social life of a pioneer community. The families gathered together for corn huskings, quilting parties, and for building houses, barns, and other buildings.

The early settlers of Guilford County worked hard. They often began work at 4:00 o'clock in the morning and worked until late at night. The men were proud of their physical strength. They often held friendly fights to test themselves. The older men in the community even wrestled occasionally. On Saturday evenings the men and boys gathered at a mill or crossroads. Two men would step into a circle drawn on the ground and fight. They laughed at hard knocks and black eyes.

LOVERS OF FREEDOM

In the beginning Guilford was a part of two larger counties, Orange and Rowan. The county seats for these counties were a long distance from the Guilford

settlers. The settlers had to travel to the county seats to pay taxes and take care of other business. Their taxes were very high and had to be paid in money. The court officials charged the pioneers high fees. Sometimes the men in the courts were dishonest and cheated the settlers. The people were unhappy and organized a group called the Regulators. For a time they acted in a peaceful way. They asked Governor William Tryon to help them. When he did not change the laws, the Regulators tried force. The Battle of Alamance was fought just over the Guilford County line in Alamance County between the Regulators and the soldiers of Governor Tryon. The Regulators lost the battle but won a victory. To satisfy the people of the Piedmont, Orange and Rowan Counties were divided to form Guilford and three other counties. The date of the founding of Guilford County is January 16, 1771.

Part of the agreement for forming the counties was that they be named for someone in England, the mother country. Guilford's name was picked to honor Lord Francis North, the first Earl of Guilford, whose son Frederick was then Prime Minister of England. Guilford County did not stay its original size. In 1779 the southern part was cut off to form Randolph County. Rockingham County was created in 1785 from the northern part of Guilford County.

The Robert Lindsay homeplace on Deep River was the first county seat. Three years later the county commissioners bought land and built a courthouse. The county seat was named Guilford Courthouse. In 1785 Martinville became the county seat. This small town was started

by Alexander Martin on land at Guilford Courthouse. The county seat remained at Martinville until 1809. The county seat was moved to Greensboro in that year.

Guilford County citizens had fought in two battles for freedom on or near their own area. The Battle of Alamance was the first. The second was the Battle of Guilford Courthouse during the Revolutionary War. By retreating, General Nathanael Greene, the leader of the American Army in the South, had managed to keep away from Lord Cornwallis' British troops. He led Cornwallis farther and farther away from his supplies in South Carolina. General Greene knew the land around Guilford Courthouse. Many new soldiers had enlisted in his army. He decided to fight Cornwallis at Guilford Courthouse. The general placed his troops and was ready for battle on March 15, 1781. General Greene's soldiers fought furiously. Cornwallis wrote later: "I never saw such fighting since God made me. The Americans fought like demons." (Blackwell P. Robinson, The North Carolina Adventure. Durham, 1969, p. 105.) The Americans lost the battle, but won a great victory.

Guilford Courthouse was the turning point of the war. The British lost one-fourth of their army and were too weak to fight again. Cornwallis retreated to Wilmington, North Carolina. Six months later he surrendered to General Washington at Yorktown. America was free.

One of the heroes of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse was a huge man named Peter Francisco. He reportedly killed about a dozen British soldiers with his great broadsword.

The Quakers in the New Garden Community nursed the wounded soldiers of both armies. British and American dead were buried together in great square graves behind the New Garden Meeting House. At least one Quaker, William Armfield, joined the fighting at Guilford Courthouse. He was very angry because Cornwallis' troops had burned his crops and taken his livestock. He took his squirrel gun and told his family he was going hunting. When the battle ended and he returned home at the end of the day, he reported to his family that the game he killed wasn't worth bringing home.

One of the most tragic stories of the war in Guilford County is the one about James Gillies, the bugler boy for General "Light Horse" Harry Lee. James was only 16 and his job as bugler was to keep communications open between the commander and his troops. Bugler Gillies had lent his horse, one of the finest in the outfit, to another soldier to look for the enemy. When the soldier did not return with his horse, Bugler Gillies borrowed a flea-bitten pony to look for him. The bugler was unarmed. During his search James ran into Tarleton's Dragoons, a part of Cornwallis' army. They had stopped to eat and were fairly drunk. The boy tried to escape from the soldiers, but they shot him and left him where he was murdered. General Lee and his men scattered and hunted down the British Dragoons. They killed 18 of them for murdering the boy. Quakers probably recovered the body of the slain bugler. He is buried across from a monument at the present day Summerfield School.

GROWTH OF TOWNS AND VILLAGES

When the war was over, the people of the county turned their minds to other things. There were farms to be improved, towns and villages to be built, and boys and girls to be educated.

JAMESTOWN

Jamestown, in southwest Guilford, was settled in the 1750's by a Quaker, James Mendenhall. It was located on Deep River. An inn was built on the Petersburg-Salisbury Pike which passed through this area. The inn was operated by the Mendenhall family. When the road was changed, George Mendenhall bought the land between his inn and the new road. He sold lots to his neighbors on streets which he had laid out and named.

The state's first medical school was conducted in Jamestown. One of the first law schools was in this area also.

Before the Civil War, Jamestown was the leading community in our county. After the war progress at Jamestown stopped. At the end of World War II, the town received a new charter and is beginning new growth.

SUMMERFIELD

Summerfield is a very old community in north central Guilford County. Its first name was Bruce's Crossroads. Charles Bruce was one of the leading citizens of the community. Bruce

helped draw up the first constitution of the State of North Carolina during the Revolutionary War. In 1812 the community was renamed Summerfield in honor of an evangelist visiting in the area during the Great Revival.

GUILFORD COLLEGE

The Guilford College community is named for Guilford College, a Quaker College, which is located there. It is a community whose history goes back over 200 years to the time of the first Quaker settlements there. It was first called New Garden. It is now thickly settled. The community will soon become a part of Greensboro.

MCLEANSVILLE

McLeansville is an old community in Guilford. It was named for Dr. McLean, a leading citizen. The people in the early days were mostly farmers. The first North Carolina Grange was organized here on March 3, 1873. The Jefferson Academy, a well-known school, was operated by Dr. Charles D. Cobb in the community from 1898 to 1913.

PLEASANT GARDEN

Pleasant Garden in southern Guilford is a peaceful town with stores, churches, factories, and a school. Around it is a prosperous farming community. Earliest records of the Pleasant Garden United Methodist Church date back to 1792.

GREENSBORO

The city of Greensboro was created because a majority of the people demanded that the county seat be centrally located. The exact center was not a suitable location so the courthouse site was placed at the intersection of present Market and Elm Streets. The new county seat was named "Greensborough" in honor of General Nathanael Greene who had led the American army at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. The name was shortened to its present spelling in 1895. There were no people living in the area selected for the county seat. It was known as the "Pine Barrens."

The land belonged to Ralph Gorrell. In 1808 he sold 42 acres for \$96. This land on which the original town was laid out is part of the main business district of the city today. The land was divided into lots and sold. In 1809 the county court, including stocks, pillories, and whipping posts, was moved in from Martinville. The first home was built by a Dr. Chapman. The first business place was built where West Market now intersects with Greene. Growth was slow and gradual. Greensboro became a city in 1870 although its population at that time was less than two thousand.

STOKESDALE

Stokesdale is located near the northwest corner of Guilford County. It was once an incorporated town. It is still important in Guilford County's economy. It dates back before the Civil War. It was first called Green Pond.

from the seashore to the mountains. Later the old Plank Road followed part of this trail. A railroad survey is responsible for High Point's name. In 1852 as Captain Gregg drove a stake at the place where the railroad would cross the plank road, he is reported to have said, "This is the highest point along the whole survey so we will mark it High Point." The place where the spike was driven is now the intersection of High and Main streets in downtown High Point.

Settlers had lived in the area for about one hundred years. They were mostly Quakers. The region was a center of trade and farming. The coming of the North Carolina Railroad which ran from Goldsboro to Charlotte, started the growth of the new community. William Welch bought land in this area, divided it, and sold it as lots. In 1859 a charter was granted to High Point establishing it as a town.

JULIAN

Julian is an old settlement but a rather new Guilford County village; however, its history can be traced back to 1790. A colonial trading route crossed near this site. The town took the name of the Julian family who moved into the area from Virginia and established the first church. Julian is located on the Guilford-Randolph county line. In 1963 county lines were redrawn and Julian was taken from Randolph County and is now a part of Guilford.

This was shortened to Pond. The townspeople honored Mr. Stokes, a railroad surveyor at the time the railroad was built. They re-named their town for him.

OAK RIDGE

Oak Ridge is an old settlement in northwest Guilford County. It is believed to be located on the highest point in the county. Oak Ridge is well-known for the military academy located there.

GIBSONVILLE

Gibsonville was named in honor of Joseph Gibson, a Scottish immigrant, who was a leading citizen. He asked that the town be named for him as he had no sons. A charter was granted on February 18, 1871. The first home office of the North Carolina Parents and Teacher Association was in Gibsonville from the early 1930's until it was moved to Raleigh in 1964. Mrs. J.W. Burke was the first secretary and treasurer and was the only treasurer until the late 1960's. Gibsonville is located in the eastern part of the county. Three-fourths of the town is in eastern Guilford County. One fourth is in Alamance County.

HIGH POINT

High Point is located in the southwest corner of the county on the old Indian trail

Pioneers came to other sections of the county and began settlements. These villages and communities have contributed to Guilford's growth and development. They are Whitsett, Monticello, Osceola, Colfax, Alamance Church Community, Deep River Church Community, Climax, Sumner, Kimesville, Sedalia, Sedgefield, and Brown Summit.

WARS .

Most of the people in Guilford were small farmers, so it was not a large slaveholding county. Five or six years after the county was settled there were only a few Negroes. The first census in 1790 listed 818 slaves. There were also free Negroes living in the county. The majority of Friends did not keep slaves. Most of the few who did, freed them. The Friends also helped get Negroes out of the state to freedom in the North. The name Underground Railroad was given to this movement. There were stations in Guilford County and its headquarters were believed to be located in New Garden Community, now Guilford College. Many slaves escaped to freedom with the help of the Quakers.

In 1861 the Southern states broke away from the United States. They formed a new government. The question of slavery was one of the differences between the North and South. Another reason was unfair business laws and practices which favored the Northern states over the Southern states.

At first, Guilford County had not wanted to secede from the Union, but later its men and women served the Confederacy bravely. Guilford County sent about 1,553 soldiers to fight in the Civil War. Many of them were killed in battle. Some died of their wounds or disease. Other Confederate soldiers were crippled for life.

No battles were fought in Guilford County. The churches in Greensboro and High Point were used as hospitals for wounded men from the Battle of Bentonville in March, 1865. The bell from the First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro was melted down and molded into bullets for the Confederate Army.

For a short time near the end of the war, Greensboro was the Confederate capital. Confederate President Jefferson Davis met with his cabinet in a railroad car. They made plans for surrendering. In 1865 thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers were in Greensboro. The Confederate soldiers turned in their guns. They were paroled and sent home.

When the war ended, Guilford County citizens started the job of rebuilding.

WORLD WAR I

The citizens of Guilford County patriotically supported the government in the war. They believed that this was the war to end all wars. The Guilford Grays and other units served in the Army. In 1917 and 1918 the county sent about 3,000 soldiers to the armed services. A great celebration was held when the war ended.

WORLD WAR II

In this war the industries of Guilford supported the war effort. Our textile industries manufactured fabrics for the soldiers. Most large companies worked on defense contracts. School children, housewives and elderly people helped. They collected scrap metal, paper, and clothing. Vacant lots were planted in gardens. The produce that was not eaten was sent to the Allied countries of the United States. Guilford County had over 9,000 combat veterans. The Overseas Replacement Depot, called ORD, was located in Greensboro. This Air Force camp had over 30,000 men. It was first a basic training camp. Later men were sent overseas from this camp. At the end of the war, ORD became a separation center. Soldiers returned to civilian life through this camp. Soldiers were welcomed and treated well in Guilford County. When the war was ended, many returned to Guilford County to make their homes.

A BETTER GUILFORD COUNTY

In all areas of the South up until 1960, Negroes were not allowed to eat at lunch counters which served white people. However, on February 1, 1960, four A & T University students staged a sit-in at Woolworth's variety store in downtown Greensboro. As they sat at the lunch counter on this day and many days to follow, the four young Negroes were joined by many others. The idea of a sit-in as a way of protesting racial discrimination soon spread to other stores and cities. This led to the desegregation of eating places throughout the South. As the birthplace of the sit-in, Greensboro has contributed to the civil rights movement.

Guilford County has done well in its times of trouble. The citizens have faced problems bravely. They have made great progress in industry, agriculture, transportation, education, and race relations. The people of the county support cultural activities.

New problems appear each day. The boys and girls who read this monograph will in years to come have problems to face and decisions to make. The decisions you make will affect the history of Guilford County. It will be your duty to write a bright future.

Note:

In doing this brief history we have used many sources of information. When we found facts that were conflicting, we chose the one that we thought would be the more nearly correct.

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