

History
Bath Town, North Carolina

By

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The site of North Carolina's oldest incorporated town, Bath, is located on the north shore of Old Town, or Bath, Creek at its junction with Back Creek, on a bay feeding southward into the Pamlico River. The earliest extant map on which this general vicinity is given a name is John White's 1585 "Map of the East Coast ...from Drawings for Raleigh's voyage, 1585."¹ He calls the area Seco, probably because it was part of the territory belonging to the Secotan Indians, a tribe who occupied the peninsula between the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds and the land at the mouth of the Pamlico River. The Secotans were part of the Algonquin group which extended from Canada downward into North Carolina.

The second mapmaker to associate a specific name with the Bath Town area was Gerhard Mercator Hondius, whose 1606 work, "Virginiae Item et Floridae..." calls the location Cotan, the name of a village of the Secotan Indians.² However, Willem J. Blaeu on his 1640 map "Virginiae partis australis et Floridae..." identifies the same area as Secotan.³

John Farrer, who in 1651 sketched a portion of North Carolina on his "Map of Virginia discovered to ye hills...." depicted an Indian village in the general location of Bath Town; he labelled it Secotan, the name which Mercator Hondius had applied to the southernmost shore of the Pamlico River.⁴ A map by Theoderic DeBy identified the same general area as Cotan.⁵ Thus, there is a general consensus among these early cartographers that the Secotan Indians were living on the north side of the Pamlico River and that there was an Indian village in the general vicinity of Bath Town.

According to historian H.R. Paschal, there was much hostility between the Secotan Indians and the Pamouik, or Pamlico, tribe whose territory extended to the south and west of the Secotans. By the fourth quarter of the seventeenth century when explorers and fur traders began to extend their efforts into the land

along the Pamlico Sound and its tributaries, they found that the Secotans had vanished and that the land belonged to the Pamlico.⁶ Ogilby on his 1672 map of "Carolina" labels the Bath Town area "Old Feild."⁷

In 1681, when Seth Sethel patented 12,000 acres along the north side of the Pamlico River, an Indian village called Pamplough Town was in the vicinity of what later became the site of Bath Town.⁸ The precise location of the Indian village is unknown. As word spread about the advantages offered by the pleasant climate, long growing season, and the rich land of Carolina, settlement quickly spread southward into the area along the Pamlico. An epidemic among the Indians, presumably smallpox, referred to as "a great Mortality" by Governor John Archdale⁹ quickly decimated their population, thus opening up more land to the increasing flow of white settlers.

By 1696 the number of settlers had multiplied until most of the area between the Albemarle Sound and Pamlico River was designated a political entity, Bath County, in honor of a Proprietor, John Lord Granville, Earl of Bath.¹⁰ Bath County was permitted to send two delegates to the legislative assembly.¹¹

Among the earliest settlers in the Bath County area were French Huguenots who came from Nanakia Town in Virginia, at the invitation of Dr. Coxe, to settle on his patents in Pamlico. Their immigration was induced by the prospect of favorable land and climate and the economic opportunities offered by settling previously unclaimed land.¹² This Huguenot settlement converged along the Trent River. Later immigration by Swiss and Germans created the town of New Bern.

Settlement, primarily by Englishmen, spread toward the site of the old Indian village, Pamplough Town. In 1705 Surveyor General of the Colony John Lawson, Joel Martin, Sr., and Simon Alderson, all of whom owned plantations in the vicinity of Old Town Creek, purchased a sixty acre portion of a larger tract

/from David Perkins, who had been granted it by Governor Thomas Cary. On March 8, 1766 they incorporated their purchase and made it a town. They called it Bath Town in honor of the Earl for whom their County was named.

Land was surveyed and set aside for a church and glebe, public buildings, a market, and a town common which was for public use as a park, pasture, and woodlot.¹³ The town consisted of seventy-one 1 acre 4 pole lots, the numbering of which is depicted on the 1807 copy of the 1766 Bath Town Plan. Water Street, running north to south and paralleling Old Town Creek, intersected with Front Street, which ran east-west and bordered the water's edge to the south. Water Street was paralleled by King Street, on which fronted the town common. Carteret Street, which ran east to west, connected the two.¹⁴ All streets were, by law, intended to be one hundred feet wide.

From the time Bath Town lots were available for sale, transactions proceeded vigorously. One individual, Nathaniel Myersdale, purchased a lot on February 11, 1766, a month prior to Bath's Act of Incorporation. The deed of sale refers to a former owner, Jacob Conrow (Carrow), a French Huguenot from Manskin Town.¹⁵ However, the first sale of lots after the Act of Incorporation occurred on September 27, 1766 when 30 lots were conveyed by Town Commissioner John Lawson to numerous individual owners. It should be noted that among these first owners was a second French Huguenot, Dr. Maurice Llewellyn. An examination of these early deeds of conveyance demonstrated that lot sales were numerous in the first quarter of the eighteenth century and that the individual lots changed hands many times, perhaps indicating that they were bought speculatively.

Bath Town, from its inception, was thought to present great promise. Situated on a navigable waterway in a readily defensible location, the town was well supplied with game, shellfish, fish, fowl and other natural resources capable of supporting an expanding population. So great was Bath Town's promise that in

1700, five years before its incorporation, Dr. Thomas Bray, the founder of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Anglican Church's organization whose mission was supplying clergy and libraries to the Colonies, assembled a massive 1,000 volume library valued at 50 £, intended for the inhabitants of St. Thomas Parish in Bath County. These books were to provide both a parochial and a "Layman's" library.¹⁶ The library's volumes were neither housed nor utilized as originally intended.

The Reverend John Umstone, in correspondence with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1711 termed Bath "the most obscure inconsiderable place in the country."¹⁷ He again complained in July 1714 that "the gentry of Bath would make waste paper of their books rather than that the clergy should have them."¹⁸ He further indicated that the books "will in all probability serve as a Bonfire to the Indians."¹⁹ While that was not, literally, to be their fate, through scattering and disuse, over the years the library dwindled to only one extant volume.²⁰

William Gordos, who visited Bath Town in 1709, wrote that "it consists of about twelve houses and is the only town in the province...I must own it is not the unpleasantest part of the country, nay, in all probability it will be the center of a trade, as having the advantage of a better inlet for shipping and surrounded with the most pleasant of savannahs, very useful for stocks of cattle."²¹ This optimistic view, however, was never truly realized. The Tuscarora War struck Bath Town a reeling blow from which it never fully recovered.

In mid-September 1711, while on a trip of exploration, John Lawson and his friend, the Baron Christopher Degraffenreid, were captured by Tuscarora Indians. During their period of captivity the Indians revealed to Degraffenreid their intention of waging a large scale war in North Carolina, to be directed against the white residents along the Pamlico, Roanoke and Trent Rivers and Core Sound.

The Indians hoped to drive out the white settlers from their lands and to retaliate for the accumulated atrocities dealt them by some whites who had captured and enslaved their children as well as the white traders who had regularly sought to cheat them. Degraffenreid promised not to fight against the Indians if he were released and the people of New Bern were spared attack. John Lawson, however, was not so fortunate. He got into a quarrel with one of his captors and was executed along with one of his two negro servants.

At dawn on September 22, 1711 the Indian attack commenced on schedule and many brutalities were perpetrated. Hardest hit were the outlying plantations. Their inhabitants fled to Bath Town, New Bern and the Brice Plantation on the Trent River. William Brice and his men, who attempted to resist the massive attack, received no support from the men in Bath, who remained in garrison. They pressed forward briefly, but fell back again to his fortified plantation on the Trent.

North Carolina Governor Hyde appealed to Virginia Governor Alexander Spotswood for aid, writing that the Indians had been led to believe that the white settlers were "vagabonds" who would not be assisted by their own kind.²² Spotswood replied that he could not offer assistance unless Virginia's troops could be provisioned by North Carolina.²³

Aid, however, was forthcoming from South Carolina. Captain John Barnwell with an army composed of 33 whites and 495 Indians arrived in North Carolina in early January 1712 to the immense gratitude of the white settlers. Marching toward Bath Town while attacking the North Carolina Indians and burning their houses, Barnwell arrived at his destination on February 10th "to ye incredible wonders and amazement of the poor distressed wretches there, who expressed such extremity of mad joy that it drew tears from most of our men."²⁴ He later commented that about 300 widows and orphans had gathered there.²⁵

In July 1712 the residents of Bath County sought exemption from quitrent fees, claiming that they were "sorely worn down from the war."²⁶ Christopher Gale left his wife and brother and the rest of his family "in garrison at Bathtown."²⁷ F. H. Cooper, writing in 1916, claimed that the remains of this fort could still be seen on the land of Joseph Benner.²⁸

The Tuscarora War proved to be of long duration. Many of Barnwell's troops eventually deserted him, though North Carolina men joined with him in the offensive. Barnwell, however, ultimately returned to South Carolina in the late Spring, smarting from the criticism of the North Carolina government who censured him for not destroying the Indians.

Governor Hyde, succeeded by Thomas Pollock, attempted to supply the garrisons in Bath County. South Carolina again dispatched troops, this time under Colonel James Moore, who attempted to crush the Indian enemy. Finally, by June 1713, the strongest resistance had been quashed and Moore returned to South Carolina. In the eighteen months which followed, small bands of hostile Indians roamed Bath County, making isolated incursions. However, on February 11, 1715 these Indians agreed to sign a peace treaty and withdrew to a reservation in Hyde County.²⁹ Even after the truce had been consummated, an occasional isolated incident occurred, such as the kidnapping in 1718 of Mr. Worsley's son, daughter, and two servants, all of whom were later recovered.³⁰

The close of the Tuscarora War presented Bath Town with what was probably its darkest hour. Homes and crops destroyed, the nearby plantations burned and the Bath County population largely decimated by war and disease, there was little encouragement for the surviving inhabitants. The Reverend John Umstons of Chowan, whose caustic comments had been previously directed to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel regarding the misuse of the Bath Library, again described Bath with biting sarcasm: "We expect to hear that famous city of Bath, consisting of nine houses, or rather cottages, once styled the metropolis and seat of this Government,

will be deserted."³¹ J.B. Homans on his map "Dominia Anglorum in America" shows more settlement west of Bath Town than at the town site per se.³² Despite these formidable obstacles, the removal of the Tuscarora menace and the strengthening of governmental authority stimulated a period of growth and progress at Bath Town.

Shortly after Governor Charles Eden took the oath of office in 1714, new roads were cut through the wilderness; inter-colonial trade revived. It had been essentially destroyed during the Indian Wars and the Cary Rebellion, a religiously inspired conflict between two polarized denominations, the Quakers and the Anglicans. This upward economic trend was encouraged by pilotage laws, enacted in 1715, which required that shipping channels be maintained, marked, and buoyed.³³ Another primary impetus in the acceleration of trade was the declaration of Bath as an official port of entry for the collection of customs.³⁴

On August 1, 1716 Governor Eden, who then resided at Bath Town, was petitioned by Bath's inhabitants to declare it a seaport town. The petitioners asserted that it was "the most proper place within the province to take in masts, Pitch, Tar, Turpentine, and other Naval Stores" and also considered that "great Tracts of Land lye contiguous to Bath Town which may afford great quantities of Naval Stores."³⁵ Accordingly, naval stores began to appear commonly in lists of North Carolina's exports as they became a recognized resource.³⁶

Records show that two Bath citizens, Isaac Ottihwell and Stephen Gould, served as collectors of customs during this period.³⁷ Until 1736 Bath Town functioned as one of North Carolina's few customs inspections. At that time an inspection station was opened on Ocracoke Island as well, due to the increase in smuggling. It was recommended that the stations at Bath, Roanoke and Currituck be discontinued. It was felt that inasmuch as Bath Town was about seventy miles passage from the ocean, shippers could enter, make previous stops, and circumvent customs inspection of their cargo. Bath, however, continued to maintain her customs inspection facility.³⁸

Probably because of the easy accessibility of Bath Town, yet its almost inland location, in 1717 Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard, elected to make the Bath Town area his headquarters after he was run out of New Providence. He located across Bath Creek at Plum Point. From that convenient location his sorties harried the coast from Maine to Florida.³⁹ As Bath County was sparsely inhabited, Teach frequently went ashore without restraint. He was on familiar terms with Tobias Knight, Secretary of the Province and collector of customs for the port of Bath.

Although Blackbeard had taken an oath in 1717, declaring his renunciation of piracy, he shortly fitted out a sloop as a common trader and cleared for a trip to St. Thomas. In a few weeks he returned with a French ship in tow. He claimed to have found it adrift at sea and was allowed to go through custom inspection.⁴⁰

Although undoubtedly accounts of piracy are intermingled with those of smuggling, piracy was a serious problem to the eighteenth century North Carolina shipping industry. Several prominent North Carolina officials were alleged to be sheltering the pirates, specifically, Seth Sothel, John Archdale, and Governor Charles Eden. Therefore, due to the lack of responsiveness by the North Carolina government officials, an appeal for help was sent to Virginia Governor Alexander Spotswood. Spotswood, discreetly avoiding Virginia's sympathy for the pirates, outfitted two sloops with crews from British men of war which were anchored in the James River. He placed them under the command of Lt. Robert Maynard.⁴¹

On November 18, 1718 Maynard's men confronted and engaged Blackbeard near Ocracoke Island. Although the battle at first seemed to favor the pirates, when Blackbeard charged aboard Maynard's craft at the head of a boarding party, British sailors, concealed below deck, rushed out and engaged them in hand to hand combat. Blackbeard and half of his crew were killed. The nine surviving pirates were

transported to Virginia where they were tried and executed.⁴²

Collusion between North Carolina officials and the pirates was confirmed when a recent and cordial letter written to Blackbeard by Tobias Knight, including a memorandum of goods received by him from Blackbeard, was found on the pirate's corpse. Knight wrote, "My friend, If this finds you yet in harbour I would have you make the best of your way up as soon as possible. I have something more to say to you than at present I can write. I expect the Governor (Eden) this night or tomorrow who I believe would be likewise glad to see you before you goe. Your real friend and servant, T. Knight."⁴³ Although Knight denied receiving the goods resulting from Blackbeard's piracy, a search of Knight's barn was made by Spotswood's officers and Bath resident Edward Moseley. The search revealed the goods listed in Knight's memorandum.⁴⁴

In spite of this highly incriminating evidence, Governor Eden and his Council publically exonerated Knight, thus confirming in many people's eyes, suspicions that the Governor, too, was aligned with the pirate.

Moseley and Maurice Moore demanded to inspect Knight's records of office. Denied this public right by the Governor, Moseley and his men broke into Knight's house where the records were stored. The Governor retaliated by issuing a warrant for their arrest. Moseley strongly denounced him for this action and claimed sedition on the part of the Governor. In the course of judicial process, the Court declared Moseley guilty and sentenced him to pay a 100 £ fine and to be ineligible to hold any public office for three years. Governor Eden died before Moseley's sentence was fulfilled.

Shortly after Eden's demise, George Burrington became Governor. He soon aligned himself politically with Moseley. Chief Justice Christopher Gale, a lifelong resident of Bath Town, led the opposing political party and fought many of Burrington's policies. A man of violent temper, Burrington was so intolerant

of Gale as the embodiment of his opposition, that he threatened to "slit Gale's nose, crop his ears, lay him in irons...and blow up his house with gunpowder."⁴⁵ Gale made a successful appeal against Barrington to the Lords Proprietors; he was subsequently removed from office. It is interesting to note that during this early period, Hoseley and Gale owned neighboring lots in Bath Town, whereas two other principals in this political drama, Tobias Knight and Charles Eden, also resided in the community.

Additional examples of the temperament of the times is revealed in court records. One Bath Townsman, William Doyle, was charged with stealing goods from William Barrow. In retribution on August 4, 1722 Doyle was "tied to the tale of a cart and whipped on the bare back with thirty-nine stripes through Edenton and Bath."⁴⁶

A year later, a Bath Town spinster named Mary Cotton was convicted of stealing "two white cotton linnen sheets, two linnen shirts, one window curtain, a chest of drawers, and white homespun damask cloth." She was "to receive thirty-one lashes on her bare back at the whipping post, post 100 ~~£~~ sterling for her good behavior and court costs" with the additional penalty that should she fail to comply with payment of bond and fees, that she "should be sold to the highest bidder who would transport her out of the colony."⁴⁷

In still another episode, the volatile former Governor George Barrington, then a resident of Edenton, was accused of assaulting Bath Town resident Roger Kenyon with a firearm.⁴⁸ It is perhaps relevant that Roger Kenyon by then lived in the home formerly occupied by Barrington's hated adversary, Christopher Gale.

By 1740, according to St. Thomas Parish's resident clergyman, the Reverend John Garzia, in spite of his many baptisms, Bath Town still had "deeply rooted adultery, incest, blasphemy and all kinds of profaneness."⁴⁹ The jail in which some of Bath County's alleged sinners would have been incarcerated and the court-

house in which they would have been tried, were located on Water Street, according to Sauthier's 1769 map. However, by 1766 the Assembly had noted that the Courthouse and prison were in "great decay and so ruinous a condition that the courts cannot be held therein nor prisoners detained....the lot being very low, sunken, and inconvenient."⁵⁰

It is interesting to note that the first courthouse had not been constructed on lot 62, which in 1705 was designated as the site of that proposed facility. It is also of interest that Water Street lots 30 and 31 were sold to the St. Thomas Parish churchwardens years after lot 61, next to the courthouse, had been designated as church property and later became the church site.

From the earliest days of the eighteenth century Bath Town had functioned as a meeting place for the Court of Pleas and Quarter sessions for Bath County.⁵¹ Bath County quitrents were also to be paid there.⁵² Bath was represented in the Assembly by two delegates even though it never achieved the sixty family minimum residency requirement.⁵³

Through the years as various Governors resided, albeit temporarily, in Bath Town, political life continued to be a central focus of the community. However, by 1755 the five Commissioners of what was by then Beaufort County were appointed to build a courthouse, pillory, and stocks on the land of Thomas Bonner, Jr., at the site of what twenty years later became the town of Washington.⁵⁴

During the years in which Bath Town served as a center of government the town undoubtedly bustled periodically with activity. County residents and government officials converged upon the town for these occasions, finding lodging with the local residents or in nearby taverns.

One such tavern, Abraham Duncan's, located on the road from New Bern to Bath, was regularly frequented by the Governors of North Carolina and other

civil officials.⁵⁵ An incident occurred at Duncan's Inn in December 1746 and involved some nameless patents signed by the Governor, who was staying there. These patents were "seen in Mr. Griffith's room" who was also lodging at Duncan's. The controversy over these patents extended through three years of litigation.⁵⁶

A Mrs. Howant was also paid for accommodations several times during this period. Thus, the removal of the County Court to its new site was unpopular with many Bath citizens because of its negative economic implications.

During the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century trade and commerce in Bath Town reached its zenith. On December 21, 1729 a ferry was established from Bath Town to Core Point; according to law no other ferries could be located within ten miles of the site.⁵⁷ A French traveler who visited Bath in 1765 complained that the ferryride was three miles long, including one mile up the Creek.⁵⁸ The Bath Town ferry operated throughout the eighteenth century.

That Bath Town was achieving prominence as a viable town is evidenced by its being depicted on numerous eighteenth century maps which are generally devoid of minor detail. A 1738 document, "A New Map of Virginia humbly Dedicated to ye Rt. Honble Thomas Lord Fairfax" by an unknown cartographer, identifies Bath, though it is considerably southward of his main area of interest.⁵⁹ Quite predictably, Edward Moseley, a Bath resident, labelled his home town on his 1738 "Map of North Carolina."⁶⁰ By 1744 Bath appears on a map of "Albemarle and Pamlico Sound" by an unknown mapmaker.⁶¹ Other cartographers working in the mid-eighteenth century, notably Emanuel Bowen in his 1754⁶² and 1763⁶³ versions of "A Map of the British American Plantations extending from Boston in New England to Georgia...." and two unknown cartographers' maps, "Carte des Possessions Francoises et Angloises Dans le Canada et Partie de Louisiana" in 1755⁶⁴ and "A New and Accurate Map of the English Empire in North America" in 1756⁶⁵ specifically label Bath Town

though their maps are not greatly detailed. The updated (1759) version of J.B. Roman's "Dominia Anglorum in America"⁶⁶ shows Bath as does John Collett on his 1770 map, "North Carolina."⁶⁷ Thomas Kitchen's 1783 execution of "Map of the United States in North America"⁶⁸ includes Bath as does a "Survey of the Sea Coast" done in 1798 by an unknown mapmaker.⁶⁹ In 1743 an east-west line, just north of Bath, was run, setting apart the King's land from that of Lord Granville. A Bath resident, Matthew Rowan, made the disbursements for this survey.⁷⁰

One of the two most singularly useful maps depicting Bath Town is the 1800 copy of the February 28, 1766 "Plan of the Town of Bath"⁷¹ which shows each individually numbered lot, labels the courthouse and church lots, identifies each street by name, depicts the wharves and ferry point along Old Town Creek, and most importantly, shows nine structures as being positioned on the individual lots. This, coupled with the early Beaufort County deedbooks, makes it possible to trace the original ownership of almost every lot in Bath Town, from the time of initial purchase. It should be noted that lots fronting on Water Street extended across the street (i.e. lots 5 through 32), whereas those facing Front Street terminate at the street itself. According to the town legislation, waterfront lot owners wishing to purchase the property directly across the street in front of them could do so for ten shillings, provided "that the Principal Streets in the said Town shall be one Hundred foot wide at least and that no person shall Build or Erect any Edifice, house, or Building on the Lands lying before the fronts other than Cellars or vaults whose covering shall not be above Ten foot above the ground that the Prospect of such as build in the said Town may not be incommoded or hindered."⁷² Other legislation reflecting the deliberate intention of making the town attractive required that Bath inhabitants

keep the street of their town clean and clear.⁷³

An examination of Bath's early deeds shows that the fronts of lots were quickly purchased as soon as it was legally possible. Twenty lot fronts were bought immediately,⁷⁴ reflecting, perhaps, their owners' commercial acumen. Occasionally, by the mid-eighteenth century, the fronts of lots were sold separately from their central, more inland portion.⁷⁵

Some real estate transactions refer to the lot fronts as "improved," as does the April 20, 1717 deed of Isabella Lawson, daughter of John Lawson, who inherited lots 5 and 6 from her father.⁷⁶ In contrast, lots 16, 17 and 18 belonging to Maurice Moore were called "not improved." Moore's deed also reflects an important tenet in the planned development of Bath Town, that he "shall erect and build or cause to be built one habitable house on the said lot within one year."⁷⁷ Although that particular stipulation was made, it apparently was not enforced very vigorously, if the various travelers' accounts of Bath Town's maximum total of nine to twelve houses are to be accepted as being accurate. This twelve month construction requirement, however, could account for the large turnover in lot ownerships in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

Although Bath's 1717 legislation governing the construction and maintenance of lot fronts prevented the erection of buildings whose height would obstruct the view from the town, by 1723 this early legislation was somewhat liberalized. Front lot owners were permitted to construct wharves "into the water so far as to the edge of the channel." By 1745, the Assembly passed legislation providing for a fence to encircle the town, with one gate large enough to accommodate carts and another smaller one for men and horses. The February 1766 plat shows the ditch which was the town boundary line to the Town Gate. At the same time the town fence and gate were approved, the construction of warehouses, stores, and other buildings on front lots was also given official sanction.⁷⁸

That ruling was quickly seized upon by lot owners along the waterfront. Occasional deeds refer to an edifice upon a lot, for example, the April 4, 1754 deed between James Calef, merchant, grantor, and John Watson and Alexander Cairnes, merchants, grantees, for lot 6, which lists "a brick storehouse standing on the lot."⁷⁹ Another deed, dated October 8, 1763, conveying lot 9, refers to a building with a double chimney.⁸⁰ However, other waterfront lot deeds fail to indicate the presence or absence of any structures thereon, by totally failing to elucidate or by employing the standard legal jargon "all houses, buildings, waters, orchards, gardens, etc."

More personal information is to be gleaned from a review of Bath's early deeds, specifically, the occupations of some of the various lot owners. One notes that Nathaniel Blien, owner of a waterfront lot, # 8, was a mariner. John Brown, a butcher, sold lot # 10 to John Merchant, a waterman. Thomas Harding, a shipbuilder, owned lots 14 and 27 in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, whereas Dr. Patrick Maule owned lot 15. Many other lots in Bath belonged to public officials such as Charles Eden, Christopher Gale, Roger Kanyon, Edward Rosaley, Adam Hyde, Thomas Carry, Maurice Moore, Robert Palmer and others.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century the waterfront lots along Old Town Creek increasingly were bought by merchants. John Porter purchased lots 30 and 31 and their fronts in 1717. John Clark, merchant, along with his daughter, Mary, bought adjacent property, lots 27, 28 and 29. John Sidley, another merchant, acquired lots 19, 20, and 21. Lots 5, 6, and 7 changed hands several times among various merchants, Simon Alderson, James Calef, Edward Wencott, John Mallison and J. Clainet, John Watson and Alexander Cairnes, William Race, John Barrow, a Mr. Hill, Matthew Rowan, and Patrick Bouark.⁸¹

Although the 1766 town plan does not show Thomas Harding's shipbuilding business as such, the 1766 French visitor to Bath stated that "there are several

vessels built here, and on other parts of this as well as on New River, but all small on account of the swash; the town is 80 miles from the Bar."⁸² This account implies that Harding's ships were probably lighters, or flat bottomed boats, rather than larger scale ocean-going craft.

Some idea of the appearance of Bath Town with its intermingling of houses and businesses may be gained from this unsigned advertisement in the July 25, 1766 issue of Purdie and Dixon's Virginia Gazette:

To be sold, at Bathtown, in North Carolina, a good Dwelling House, two stories high, with four rooms on a floor, and kitchen and cellars under the house; warehouses, wharf, and about 300 acres of good land adjacent the said town, very convenient for trade, or plantation business. Also three tracts of land with three miles of the other, the greatest part of which is fine swampland...and a saw and gristmill on a very good stream, with 1200 acres of well timbered land running along the stream. 83

Although the advertiser doesn't reveal his identity, the house description readily matches that of the Robert Palmer home, still standing today; the outlying property described, when compared with rural land identified by 1770 cartographer John Collett as being Robert Palmer's acreage, also jibes.

Other Virginia Gazette advertisements also describe the countryside in and around Bath. On February 6, 1772, Thomas Humphries offered for sale "a tract of land...about ten miles below Bathtown...pleasantly situated on the Bay, is a good place for stock and affords plenty of fowl, fish and oysters and the said land is tolerable for cropping."⁸⁴

Another advertisement, placed by Isaac Patridge and run in the April 25, 1777 issue of the Virginia Gazette, describes the appearance of the land directly across Old Town Creek from Bath:


A Tract of Land containing 502 acres...opposite the town of Bath about 100 acres of which are cleared, whereon is erected a commodious two story brick Dwellinghouse with six rooms, a garden, Barn, and other convenient outhouses; also an apple orchard of upwards of 700 bearing trees; about 200 acres of upland is particularly calculated for those valuable Branches of Business the culture of Indigo and Rice, the latter is well watered with a stream, whereon might be erected, at an easy expense, a set of works

for cleansing said Grain for market; and a great Plenty of fish to be taken at all seasons of the year, and wild Fowl in Abundance in their season and an excellent Range for stock of all kinds.⁸⁵

Although Bath Town's setting and climate sounds almost idyllic, the area was occasionally assaulted by tropical storms, such as the September 1769 hurricane which, at nearby Edenton, elevated the tides ten to twelve feet above normal, swept away houses, warehouses, and wharves and tossed ships into the woods.⁸⁶ Records examined revealed no details describing the effects this storm had on Bath Town, although it seems to have been generally devastating to the countryside.

Further insight on the appearance and character of Bath Town may be gained from a careful study of C.J. Sauthier's May 1769 map, "Plan of the Town and Port of Bath in Beaufort County, North Carolina."⁸⁷ This map is one in a series done by Sauthier of various North Carolina towns, such as New Bern, Halifax, Edenton, and Wilmington. On each map he identified by name what he considered significant points of interest.

In the case of Bath Town, Sauthier labelled the church, jail, burial ground, courthouse, and the residence of Robert Palmer. Several lots are depicted as having buildings on them and/or are in some way improved. Wharves are shown as are buildings on the fronts of five lots. Unfortunately, when the 1769 is collated with the buildings shown on the almost contemporary 1766 Bath Town Plan,⁸⁸ it appears that Sauthier's sketch has skewed settlement to the north. As well, certain buildings, somewhat described in deeds, and being owned by merchants along the waterfront, are omitted.⁸⁹

In an effort to gain a better understanding of Sauthier's meaning when he depicted certain types of buildings by drawing a cross-hatched square, , a comparison was made with his other North Carolina maps. One extant building shown on the Bath map without an "x", built of brick and positively identified, was the church; likewise, the courthouse had no "x". The still extant Palmer house, of

frame construction, also lacked an "x". Therefore, the "x"'s are unlikely to denote brick or frame construction. In marked contrast, the gaol was "x"-ed as were several small buildings near the Palmer residence and along the shoreline.

In Halifax, the tobacco store, hemp store, and playhouse were "x"-ed, though the gaol and courthouse were not. In Wilmington the stillhouse and tanyard were "x"-ed, whereas in New Bern only the buildings adjacent to wharves were so marked. This has led to the conclusion that the "x"-ed buildings were those of a lower height as opposed to brick versus frame, structurally or functionally significant or not. Sauthier's Bath Town map thus interpreted, shows several single story buildings along the fronts of lots, a feature conforming with the 1715 legislation requiring that structures built there must not obstruct the prospect of the town.

In order to gain a full understanding of eighteenth century Bath Town one must give specific consideration to the significance of commerce, particularly the forest products related industry. In 1709 when John Lawson wrote his History of North Carolina, he commented:

of Pines, there are in Carolina, at least four sorts. The Pitch Pine, growing to a great Bigness...is well used in several Domestic and Plantation uses. This tree affords the four great Necessaries, Pitch, Tar, Rosin, and Turpentine; which last two are extracted by tapping and the heat of the Sun, the other two by the Heat of the Fire. The White and yellow Pine are sawed into Planks for several uses. They make Masts, Yards, and a great many other necessaries there with the Pine being the most useful Tree in the Woods. The Almond-Pine serves for Masts very well. As does the Dwarf-Pine. 90

As was previously observed, the 1716 petition by Bath Town residents to Governor Eden requesting that it be made a seaport town pointed out that Bath was the most logical place for ships to load masts, pitch, tar, turpentine, and other naval stores and also called attention to the large tract of heavily forested land adjacent to Bath.⁹¹ Again, in 1761, officials commented upon "the sandy hills with fastailed or long leaf pine, the best for tar pitch and turpentine."⁹²

In the eighteenth century, seventy percent of the tar, more than fifty percent of the turpentine, and twenty percent of the pitch exported from all the colonies to England came from the pine forests of North Carolina.⁹³ This production was encouraged by Parliament's 1705 Naval Stores Bounty Act which paid 4 £ sterling per ton of tar and pitch and 3 £ per ton of resin and turpentine.⁹⁴

An unusual, but articulate, commentary on the value of exported Bath County naval products appears in Edward Salter's January 6, 1734 will. Salter instructs John Arrington, who is living on his land, to load Salter's brigentine with tar for export, the sale of which was to insure that Salter's son would have the financial capital to become a merchant.⁹⁵

Resin, or crude turpentine, for the eighteenth century manufacture of spirits of turpentine, was obtained by cutting converging channels in a standing green tree. Where these channels met a wooden trough collected the resin which oozed out. Bark was stripped off so that the heat of the sun would accelerate the yielding of the resin.⁹⁶ Crude turpentine had little intrinsic value other than the fact that from it could be manufactured the refined product, spirits of turpentine. Approximately 32 gallons of crude turpentine or resin were required to yield three gallons of turpentine spirits, or more than a ten to one ratio. Eighteenth century customs records for North Carolina show that the number of barrels of crude turpentine being exported far outweighed that of the number of barrels of turpentine spirits being shipped out.⁹⁷

While at first glance the ratio of discarded product to usable yield may appear uneconomical, this was not in fact the case. Negro slaves, once instructed, could readily gather the resin, pour it into barrels and seal them ready for market. It was estimated that one man, overseeing a twelve to fifteen acre area, could produce from 100 to 200 barrels of resin per season. Moreover, turpentine

distillation was not in itself an important industry in North Carolina prior to 1790.⁹⁸

Tar-making required far more sophisticated technique than did resin-gathering. Deadwood was first split and chopped into small pieces, which were piled in the center of a specially constructed kiln, usually about 30 feet in diameter. This kiln had a clay floor with a drain hole in the center which discharged into a pipe leading outside the kiln. Once wood was piled to a height of 13 to 14 feet, flaring outward toward the top, a thick wall of turf was laid over the entire pile. The woodpile within was then ignited through temporary openings in the turf. Throughout the processing of the wood the blaze had to be carefully monitored and the proper amount of ventilation maintained via these turf "vent-holes." Too little aeration could cause the kiln to explode; too much could produce a useless yield.

Once the tar was collected in barrels, it had to be rotated every three to four days for a twenty day period. This would cause any condensed water vapor to rise to the top where it could be drawn off and replaced with more tar. These full barrels were then ready for market.⁹⁹

A second type of tar, called "green tar," was made from trees which were only partially dead and had been stripped of their bark. Often trees which had for many years been used in turpentine production ended their lives by becoming "green tar" wood.¹⁰⁰

The manufacture of pitch was, in comparison, relatively simple. Tar was burned in great caldrons or in subterranean pits. It was frequently stirred and tested for proper consistency by dropping a small quantity into water. Once the tar reached the pitch state, the fire was smothered and the hot pitch packed into barrels. Three barrels of tar would produce about two of pitch.¹⁰¹

Efforts were made by inspection officials to assure that certain standards of quality were met by all naval stores exported from the colony. However, based

upon the complaints to be found in extant records, these regulations were not strictly enforced. The reasons for the production of an inferior product were many and varied.¹⁰² However, inasmuch as the bulk of the work was done by the negro slaves of the colony, it is not remarkable that the British continued, though somewhat disgruntled, to depend upon North Carolina for its naval stores.

Statistics showing North Carolina naval stores exported to England demonstrate that this trade peaked in the period 1750 to 1776.¹⁰³ North Carolina's naval stores were also exported to New England. As well, during the Revolutionary War they were exported to Virginia for use by the State Navy.¹⁰⁴ During these years, Bath Town, while exporting significant amounts of naval stores, did not approach the quantities shipped from Roanoke, Beaufort, or Brunswick.¹⁰⁵ Thus, Bath never quite became as significant in that industry as her original inhabitants had hoped.

It should be noted that many other kinds of forest products besides naval stores were made in North Carolina on a large scale commercial basis in the eighteenth century. Boards, planks, staves, heading, hoops, hogsheds, posts, oars, and masts were produced although only three items, shingles, staves, and sawn lumber were of major importance.¹⁰⁶

A comparative study of mid-eighteenth century exported wood products, conducted by H. B. Merrens, shows that most of the sawn lumber came from the Port Brunswick area in southern North Carolina, whereas more shingles and staves came from the Roanoke and Currituck areas.¹⁰⁷ Almost all sawn lumber was pinewood, readily available in bountiful quantities in the Cape Fear Valley. A few dozen large sawmills, situated on bodies of water which provided a power source and as well, transportation to market, produced most of the lumber exported from the colony by the third quarter of the eighteenth century.

Relatively little slave labor was required in this industry, although naval

store production was often carried on simultaneously.¹⁰⁸ The manufacture of staves and shingles, however, required actual manual labor, much of which could be performed by slaves. These items were usually made from hardwoods, the type of forestation occurring more commonly as one proceeded northward.¹⁰⁹ The swamp and bottom land produced several varieties of oak suitable for making staves, whereas white cedar and cypress wood were excellent for shingle-making.

Beyond the amount of Bath commerce directly attributable to the forest products industry, Bath did not figure significantly in North Carolina's export business. In Harren's comparative studies of custom records from five comparable North Carolina localities, namely Currituck, Bath, Roanoke, Beaufort, and Brunswick, Indian corn exportation which totalled nearly 17,000 bushels in 1772 included only about ten percent originating in Bath. Other years studied showed Bath well behind her sister communities in this regard.¹¹⁰ Similarly, in studying rice and indigo exportation between 1768 and 1778, Bath's proportion of this trade was inconsequential.¹¹¹ The livestock products industry was a significant part of North Carolina's colonial economy; whenever beef and pork were sold, it was almost always exported northward on the hoof, in large droves, to Virginia and points beyond.¹¹²

Most certainly a number of ships and lighters called Bath Town their home port. In a 1725 court case, John Dowden, who owned a schooner whose home port was Bath Town, alleged that John _____ Phillips, a mariner, had stolen his anchor.¹¹³ An advertisement in the Williamsburg Virginia Gazette of Purdie and Dixon, on May 16, 1766 stated that "the ship Jonny burthen 250 tons or thereabouts, John Thomas, master, now lying at Bath Town, North Carolina, will take in goods, on liberty, for London, or to be let on charter to any port in Britain."¹¹⁴ As was previously noted, several mariners and watermen called Bath Town their home.

North Carolina's extant colonial records indicate that many ships entered

and cleared at Bath during the mid-eighteenth century.¹¹⁵ These records also show that the pilotage laws which required that shipping channels be marked and buoyed needed constant enforcement by the colonial government.

A 1755 entry in the record describes the eighteenth century technique employed for deepening channels, as "ships drawing above 8½ feet of water now can't go to Bath, Edenton, or Beaufort without unloading or loading by lighters."¹¹⁶ The same source indicated that the channel, once deepened, would permit ships with up to 12 foot draft to go inland.¹¹⁷

Although tobacco in colonial North Carolina was generally discouraged by the British government, in 1773 official records state that those persons wanting to ship tobacco from Brunswick, New Bern, and Bath were not able to have it inspected there because there were neither tobacco inspectors nor tobacco warehouses at any of these locations; as a solution to the problem, regular customs officers were empowered to inspect tobacco.¹¹⁸

A year later the records reveal, in a tone of indignation, that contrary to law "negroes and freemen are piloting vessels up rivers to Bath, Edenton, and New Bern."¹¹⁹ Exactly how the authorities solved that thorny problem, the records do not indicate. The records also demonstrate, however, good relations between the races. On July 15, 1775 a negro insurrection was prevented thanks to Merrick, a negro slave of Bath mariner Nathaniel Blinn. At the time Merrick was assisting Captain Johnson of White Haven with a ship of naval stores.¹²⁰

During the years of the Revolutionary War, Bath's shipping trade continued, though many changes took place. New officials replaced the former Royal appointees. Among the people themselves, as everywhere in the American colonies, viewpoints more firmly polarized, as British and American sympathizers squared off for the years ahead. Bath Town's wealthiest citizen and collector of customs, Robert Palmer, unwaveringly loyal to the King, left his American home for England.¹²¹

Government records show that during the war years, the Bath Committee of Safety carried out its duties, the militia drilled, military recruiters constantly sought men, and war stores were transported by ship into Bath Town for the benefit of the North Carolina line.¹²²

On August 2, 1776 the Committee of Safety received salt, ammunition, arms, and other war materiel, in exchange for slaves for the West Indies.¹²³ That same summer, Thomas Respett was authorized to purchase gun powder, lead, sail duck, osenaburgs, coarse linen, shoes, blankets, leather and coarse cloths at Bath for the use of Continental troops.¹²⁴ According to government records, on September 28, 1776 a cannon was shipped into Bath Town and dispatched to Edenton,¹²⁵ whereas Benjamin Hankins in a letter to the Governor on February 14, 1780 stated that 878 stand of muskets had arrived at Bath Town from St. Eustatis.¹²⁶ Kettles were purchased at Bath Town for the making of salt for use by American forces.¹²⁷

Although the above importation records attest to the fact that Bath Town continued to serve as a viable port facility well into the latter days of the Revolutionary War, the records of customs collection officers for 1786 and later demonstrate that Bath Town's water traffic was falling increasingly behind that of Roanoke, Currituck, and Swansborough.¹²⁸ Perhaps some lost commerce is attributable to poorly marked or silted channels. In 1783 Bath's pilots were fired for incompetency.¹²⁹ Others were subsequently hired but were continuously chided to work more diligently.¹³⁰ Shipping records compiled by Paschal state that in the mid years of the eighteenth century approximately thirty ships a year entered Port Bath. By the 1770's this figure had declined to an average of seven or eight a year.¹³¹

Although seagoing travel was undoubtedly the single most significant influence on the growth and development, and subsequent decline, of Bath Town, inland

travel also influenced her growth and well-being. In the early days of the eighteenth century crude trails connected Bath with other sparsely populated white plantations. Later, more distinct roads were opened up as Bath County citizens made their way to Bath Town, their seat of government. The addition of the ferry also greatly facilitated travel. Nonetheless, early travel was difficult and tedious at best. This is attested to by early travelers' accounts as well as by British postal system investigator, Hugh Findlay, in 1774, who complained of the very poor mail service.¹³²

Two early nineteenth century maps depict the town of Bath, though much detail is lacking. William Latham in his 1807 "Hydrographic Map of Virginia and North Carolina" depicts Bath as having seven buildings, three of which are on the waterfront.¹³³ Two roads feed into town, one from the north and one from the northwest. New Bern and Washington are shown as being considerably larger and more populous. R.H.B. Brazier's 1828 map, "Swamplands Between Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds" shows Bath as a village of only four houses.¹³⁴

The North Carolina State Papers contain an account of one interesting and unorthodox case involving Bath during this period. The Town Commissioners sued Wilson Boyd who audaciously constructed a house on the Town Commons. Acts were cited dating back to 1729, protecting the public sanctity of the Commons. Boyd lost his case and received no compensation for his structure.¹³⁵

An examination of the extant tax abstracts for the nineteenth century does indeed indicate that Bath slipped deeper and deeper into lethargy. Lot values fell, few, if any, water crafts were registered there, and the population became predominately black. Individuals listed in the following table are taxable males, or "polls." The fluctuation in the number of lots listed is possibly a reflection of those for which tax bills were issued.

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year	white	black	lots listed
1832	64	217	55
1833	53	198	39
1834	85	224	-
1835	53	212	57
1836	80	232	55 ³ / ₄
1837	66	225	67
1839	66	225	62
1841	67	267	60
1843	-	-	46
1844	58	238	62
1845	66	239	69
1846	58	259	64 $\frac{1}{2}$
1847	70	236	59 $\frac{1}{2}$
1848	63	277	62
1849	71	252	58 $\frac{1}{2}$
1850	80	275	63
1851	76	275	62 $\frac{1}{2}$
1852	88	278	22 $\frac{1}{2}$
1857	76	24	total value \$10,070, with comment "no ships or boats"

It is interesting to note the sharp drop in black population at the close of the Civil War. Tax records thereafter are sketchy but indicate a general trend of financial duress, as would be expected during that period. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century much Bath Township land was sold for taxes.

It is of special significance that by 1867 no boats or ships were registered at Bath, a town which only a hundred years earlier had been a thriving seaport town bustling with commerce.

Town Point at Bath Town

A careful examination of the February 28, 1766 Bath Town Plan shows that lots 5, 6, 7, and 8 extend across Water Street onto a land form which is labelled Town Point. Lots 5 and 6 belonged to Surveyor General John Lawson and were conveyed to his daughter, Isabella. A 1717 deed for the fronts of lots 5 and 6 refers to the main portions of these lots as "improved."¹³⁷ Thus, according to the requirement that habitable houses be constructed on lots within a year of their purchase, Isabella Lawson may have had a dwelling house in this location by 1717. It has been suggested that a 1729 deed of conveyance between Isabella Lawson's husband, John Chilly, grantor, and John Jackson, grantee, notes the presence of "houses, gardens, yards, etc...";¹³⁸ however this terminology was probably not intended to be taken literally, as it is the standard legal jargon. Other lots in which similar phraseology is employed, according to cartographic evidence, had no structures on them. It should also be noted that John Chilly owned several other lots in Bath Town, including lots 53, 54, 55, and 56 on King Street.

Interestingly, Jackson's 1740 deed to Edward Howcott refers to "one Mansion House, with brick chimney, one kitchen brick chimneyed, one brick storehouse and cellar." The Howcotts attempted to sell the property to William Pace; however the transaction was apparently not successful, for ultimately it was conveyed by them to James Calef, a merchant. Calef, on April 4, 1754, sold the property to John Watson and Alexander Cairnes, also merchants. The Calef deed refers to "a brick storehouse standing on the lot" but makes no reference to a residence or outbuildings.¹³⁹

The property subsequently passed to Robert Palmer and his son, William. It should be recalled that Robert Palmer, at the onset of the Revolution left for England. On April 15, 1786 William Palmer sold the land to Messers Hill and Barrow, merchants,¹⁴⁰ who almost immediately conveyed it to Patrick Rowart.¹⁴¹ None of these latter deeds contain descriptive data on the "improvements" to lots 5 and 6, though the fact that the final years of the eighteenth century found the property passing from merchant to merchant suggests that it may have been in commercial use, perhaps for warehouses, inasmuch as eighteenth century maps fail to show a wharf in this vicinity.¹⁴² While early nineteenth century records indicate that these lots passed through many hands, none of these owners are thought to have resided there.¹⁴³

The early ownerships of lots 7 and 8 are essentially distinct from lots 5 and 6 although the property is contiguous on a relatively small point of land. Lot 7 was first owned by William Fridley who, prior to 1717, conveyed it to Thomas Fry. The latter, in turn, conveyed it to John Fry on March 11, 1722/23. Significantly, John Fry in December 1754 conveyed it to John Watson and Alexander Cairnes, the merchants who only three months earlier had purchased lots 5 and 6. Fry's deed of conveyance refers to William Mace next door, indicating that it was before the Howetts made their second attempt at selling lots 5 and 6. After the Watson-Cairnes ownership, the property passed to another merchant.¹⁴⁵ By March 1770 William Brown had sold the property to Samuel Willis, perhaps the same Willis whose wharf fronted on lot 14, as shown on the 1766 town plan.¹⁴⁶

Lot 8, when first specifically identified, belonged to Phillip Shute during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, at which time it was sold to William Gasie). Soon, it was conveyed to John Brown and subsequently to William Brown in 1769, the merchant who also had just purchased lot 7. In 1770 Brown sold the

land to Nathaniel Blinn, the sealer who dealt in naval stores. Blinn's son, William, sold out to George Langley in 1788.¹⁴⁷

The archaeological remains uncovered during the 1977-78 Bath Town survey are very probably the remains of a Town Point merchant's warehouse. As well, the possible remains of Nathaniel Blinn's naval stores operation, most likely the traces of a pitch-making endeavor, were located.

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