

HOW COME SURRY COUNTY AND HOW HIT GOT ALONG

By Herself Who War Borne and Raised Thar

To the reader-----

This short history is fur them that can't understand Jesse Hollingsworth's "History of Surry County" - you probably can't git a-holt of one of them nohow - and Mr. and Miz Frank Carter's "Footprints in the Hollows". Hit is also fur them that don't read much and they is a heap of them.

Now enybody raised in Surry County can understand ever word of this story. Furriners, they might have a mite of trouble. But all they got to do is ax and we should be proud to oblige. If we can't we orto be ashamed of ourselves having heared this kind of talk all our lives.

By Herself

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In 1663 the King of England, Charles II, give to eight of his friends who help him git his job back as the king of the Old Country acrost the Big Water (atter his father, Charles I, got hisself executed) some land in this new world. These friends was called the Lord Proprietors. These friends named this here new land Carolina after the King.

Surry County was in the northwestern part of Carolina and it was give to one of them Proprietors named the Earl of Granville whose younguns and grand younguns holt on to it until we tuk hit back from them in our Revolutionary War--about 1778 when we done that.

All kinds of tales come out as to how Surry County got hits name, but the truth is that nobody persactly knows. Some says hit was called attter one of these here British lords, the Earl of Surry; others claims hit was named attter a place named Surry in the Old Country whar Lord Tryon come from. Take your pick.

Surry County first tuk in all of Stokes, some of Forsyth, Yadkin, Surry County and a little bit of Ashe and Allegheny. Folks first aimed to start a count in 1770 but they didn't git hit done until 1771. The first county seat was on Gideon Wright's place down on the Yadkin River in Forsyth. Then him and some of his friends fell out and in three years they tuk the county seat to Martin Armstrong's place near thar. They called it Little Richmond. That place was so rough that people allers used to say that if anybody wanted to go to hell they needn't go no further than to Richmond. Anyway, a cyclone come and blowed hit off the face of the earth. No tellin whar it is now.

Then Stokes and Forsyth, they broke off from Surry. This war in 1789. That left Surry and Yadkin. (The other Little counties what had just a little piece of went off little by little.) ^{we} We built us a county seat down at Rockford on the Yadkin River right square in the middle of the county. The first courthouse, lik a regular building, was on Richard Horn's place down on the Yadkin River. He later on sold the place to William Polk Dobson. It is now knowed as Dobson Hill.

Now, Mr. Dobson he war a clever man and he had a first cousin named James K. Polk that kilt a deer in William's front yard. Somebody has still got the antlers. Anyway, the first cousin, James K. Polk, he was so clever that he got to be president of the United States. So did Andrew Jackson who was give his law license down at Little Richmond. Andrew, he come up to Rockford when they had court. They said that he was kindly rough. Aaron Burr, another of these here lawyers, 'pears to ' have stopped at Rockford too. Some says that Andrew Johnson passed that too.

Thar at Rockford the county seat stayed until Yadkin broke off in 1850 and left Surry all to hitself. Rockford was 'way out in the country a fur piece from everthing so people allowed they'd build a new county seat whar people could git to hit better. So they picked a place right in the middle of the county right whar four roads come together, built a big red brick courthouse thar, and named the place Dobson atter the William P. Dobson what I done tole you about. Thar the county seat is now except that they built a new courthouse in 1916. In that courthouse is all the records from 1770 on--1770 is when we was first knowed as a county. All the lawyer fellers look up records thar and the courthouse folks would be mighty proud to see you if you was a mind to look up anything.

This is how Surry County got started. I will tell you now some of the other things like whar the people come from, about their schools, their churches, and sich like.

Most of our early settlers come from Furginny. It war too fur a piece from the eastern part of the state for our people to come from. The Furginny folk theirselves come from the Old Countries, that is England, Scotland, or Ireland. And we tuk atter them people. That is why most of us had, and still have, blue eyes and light hair. Not many furriners from other states uster come to this county.

We didn't take to book larnin much. We was too busy scratching fur a living to mind about going to schools. Mr. Jesse Franklin--he war governor in 1820 and 1821--favored the state paying for public education for everbody, but he didn't git nowhere much with hit.

Of course some of the quality folks went to school but they had to pay forhit theirselves. Mr. Richard Gwyn of Elkin, he built a schoolhouse right in his back yard. Although hit was his'n he let all his neighbors what wanted to come, to come to his school. And^t sence thar was nary a church thar neither he let anybody who was a mind to to use it for preaching.

As I said, most people in the old times didn't go to no school. Them that did went to schools that they paid for theirselves. They was called subscription schools. They was mostly for boys--ther girls had enough to do around home. In 1818 a school was supposed to have been about whar Rockford Street School in Mount Airy is; another was at Old Hollow near Mount Airy. They was said to have been schools at Rockford, at Siloam, at Westfield, and probably at other places I don't know about. (As I done tole you people from Surry County warn't much of a hand at keeping records; even now it is hard to get folks to tell you what they know.)

Of course thar was a fine school at Jonesville, begun in 1818, that most of the Elkin folk who could pay the price and could git thar went to.

Then a f w got to go to college like Salem College and the University of North Carolina. And before the Civil War them that wanted to be a lawyer could go to Richmond Pearson's Law School just acrost the Yadkin River from William P. Dobson's place near Rockford.

The Civil War put what schools they was out of business, but atter the War some of them started up again. Miss Lizzie Gilmer, she started a school for girls in Mount Airy in 1860. In 1897 hit was still a-going. Miss Belle Graves, she had a girl's school thar too. Miss Letta Folger, she had a school in Elkin and Miss Lucy C Journey she had one in Dobson. So some girls got a chanct, now many though.

Atter the War academies sprung up over the counties. Thar war one at Mount Airy, one at Elkin, one at Westfield, one at Siloam, and one at Pilot Mountain. They might have been some others. They was mostly male academies. Then in 1899 the town of Mount Airy voted a school tax on theirselves and started the first gradedschool in Mount Airy. Then other places tuk it up. So now everbody gits an education whether they want one or not.

Some of us thought a heap about going to Heaven and some didn't. The Quakers, or Friends, was the first church people to come to Surry County what got a church started. They come in as missionaries from New Garden, near Greensboro, to Westfield, around 1772, but they kep pretty much to theirselves. They was good people. Some had slaves what they freed because they allowed as to how it warn't right to keep another feller in bondage.

Then the Baptists, they come in around 1790, or maybe a little before. They built them a heap of churches which still stand just about like they was built. Some of these churches still have all day preachings and dinners on the grounds, and foot washings just like they done in the old days.

The Methodists, they come in around 1800 or thereabouts. The Methodists and Baptists they didn't seem to have no time for much except to run each other down. The Methodists, they called the Baptists "Anabaptists" because they didn't believe in baptising babies like they done. The Baptists they did not believe in sprinkling like the Methodists done. But they both liked to shout in church when they felt the Spirit move them, and say "Amen" when a clever preacher said something right. They loved to go to camp meetings in August so that their younuns could get acquainted--they was a lot of sparkin' goin on between the boys and girls. Then the men they liked to talk over crops and walking the Streets of Gold, and the women folks they liked to talk women talk. (The Methodists and Baptists they has since got above their raisins. The Baptists they have musical instruments in their churches now and play theater music, and the Methodists they even dress up little boys in long dresses and light candles even if they is electricity thar.)

The Moravians, they used to think we was kindly rough up here. But they didn't think they was too good to get whetrocks from Pilot Mountain. Before the Quakers or the Methodists or the Baptists ever come up here the Moravians done some preaching up in these parts. But they didn't start no churches until a long, long time after. But the Moravians, they was good folk. They let us settlers from up here get into their fort at Bethabara during the trouble with the Indians when the Cherokees was a-bothering us. They wrote all this down in their books and that is

about the only way we knowed wh t was a-going on then or even that they was many people living up in Surry at that time.

It was not until around 1858 that the Presbyterians got started. They done all right so the Episcopalians, and other church people come in. Now we got just about everthing.

We early settlers used to have some right smart good times. True, we had to work hard. We had to raise our own vittles. We planted corn and made good corn pone on the hearth. We raised buckwheat too for good buchwheat cakes. Some raised wheat for wheat bread. Some raised rye. We growed inions, 'taters, and beans which we could string into leather britches, or just use the shellies for winter. We kept cows for sweet milk, buttermilk, and butter. We had hogs for hog meat as well as chickens. We had our own cherry trees and apples for apple fruit. In the spring we hunted for sallet--lamb's quarters, plantains, poke, cressies, whatever we could find. In the summer and fall we went berry picking and gathered chestnuts, grapes, black warnuts, hazelnuts, and hickory nuts. We raised sorghum for molasses and kept bee gums for honey--they was for sweetenin. Then we could allers hunt and fish. We et good.

We had to build our own houses, the most of them out of logs because that was all we had. Just a few of us had houses of dressed lumber in the early days. Some of us later on kivered our log cabins with dressed lumber after the sawmills got a-goin. There is still some of them around today. We had to weave our own cloth out of flax and wool and dye the threads out of things like barks, warnut hulls, inions, goldenrod, or most anything what would make a color. They is allers people after our old hand wove spreads made like that. We made good corn likker and fine apple brandy. And we raised tobacco to chew and dip. (The men ain't ashamed of chewing tobacco as is the women who still dip. Most of the storekeepers, they put the snuff up near the check-out counters so that a woman who dips can slip it in her bag without anybody seeing her. The clerks, they just make out like they don't see nary a thing.)

We had frolics like corn shucking, house raisings, and quilting bees. (We don't make much mention of the cock fighting, gambling, and horse racing some of us used to do.) We had good dance frolics too. In Surry County we have hung on to our old fiddle tunes when we was sort of ashamed of them--especially when our young-uns moved to town or went to college and got above their raisins. Now the big colleges and universities is getting interested and we are proud to have them come and listen to us and to put our tunes down on tape recorders and sich. They say that some of these old tunes we play take after the old English and Irish tunes of the 1700's--that they come from acrost the water. Of course we knowed that these was good all along--we could do good flat foot dancing to them. Some of our old ballets we sing is the same that the people of the Old Country used to sing, like "Barbary Allen" and "Lord Lovel". Of course we have made up some for our-selves too.

I would just mention the old mustering times when them soldiers what fit in the Revolutionary War used to git together. One place was called Shipp's Mustering Ground and a man named Hardin Taliaferro he mentioned it in his "Fisher River Tales". 'Twas said to have been another mustering ground in the hollow below Jesse Franklin's place on Fisher River and one called Buffalo Mallow down near Shoals. The old soldiers, they got together, drilled, and practiced shooting, swapped tales, and some got drunk on likker. Anyway, they pleased theirselves a heap.

Surry County has had some right clever men to come out of it. It had one man made governor, like I told you, Jesse Franklin. He rid down from Furginny to this country to find a place for his father, Bernard, to live when he war just sixteen or seventeen year old. He found a place on Mitchell's River; but along in 1792 he and his pa they moved over to Fisher's River whar they built themselves big mansion houses. They was not fur from whar Dr. John Taliaferro lived on Little Fisher River. Dr. Taliaferro he come down with his friend Bernard Franklin from Furginny and war a doctor and a Baptist preacher--them two things used to go

together in them days--doctoring and preaching. (We didn't have no eye ~~doctors~~ doctors or tooth dentists then either.) Dr. Taliaferro and Bernard Franklin had book larnin--they could read and write but they never thought they was above their neighbors. They was well thought of. They took up for us Patriots during the Revolutionary War when they was so many Tories stirring up trouble around.

Jesse Franklin, even though he went to Congress in Washington whar he become president of the Senate, and even though he come to be governor of our state in 1820 he never did git above his raisin. He wouldn't have his likeness painted and he wouldn't have no pretties sewed on to his clothes--said that his friends in Surry would not take to hit. Showed he didn't think he war any better than anybody else.

Jesse, he was so clever that he could do most anything he would set his mind to. When hisn and his neighbors' places up on Mitchell's and Fisher's rivers got put over into Wilkes County Jesse, he just had them put right back in Surry. He knowed a good thing when he seed hit.

Jesse, he had a brother Meshack who went to Congress too and who help our state write out its Constitution. He had more book larnin' than anybody in Surry County. Jesse, he never had much except what he got by hissself and he was so busy running things that he didn't have time to git much. That is why he war for free education.

They was many families living in Surry County in the 1700's and early 1800's what has the same name as them that is living here now. They is too many to mention, but if you will go to our courthouse and look into one of them old records thar I'll bet you will find your name. Might find out somet'ing else too, like a hanging.

Right here, I should stop and tell you about the most famous people what ever lived in Surry County. They was named Bunker, Chang and Eng, but was better knowed as the Siamese Twins. We in Surry County just uster call them The Twins.

Of course you have heered tell of them so I will not say much except that they was jined together about the waist, could never git apart, come to Surry in the early 1840's, settled along Stewart's Creek--one family of them on one side of the creek and the other on the other--become good farmers, got rich and had big families. They lost much of their money and all of their slaves after the Civil War and had to go acrost the Big Water again to make more money. They settled down again and become two of Surry's most well thought of citizens. They was clever, liked to joke, wouldn't cheat you, and everbody thought a heap of them. They died in 1874 and are buried in White Plains in the graveyard of the church they holped to build.

Not much is knowed or wrote down about Surry County before the Civil War because as I have told you, we was not much interested in books or in writing things down.

They was not many big slave holders around because our farms was not big and they was no call for them. They was some people, though, what had several.

We fit in all the wars. In the Revolutionary War, some of us was Patriots, or Whigs, and some was Tories. The Tories they liked to devil the Whigs, steal, rob, and do all kinds of devilment. Some of them got caught and hanged. The Patriots they formed a home militia up in The Hollows under a Captain Gidens. They help keep the Tories down. And some of the Surry County men went along with Jesse Franklin when he jined up with his Uncle Ben Cleveland and other mountain men to fight at Kings' Mountain. They done good too as all that was there and wrote about hit will tell you. Some other Surry County militiamen, when they heered that Cornwallis war down near Guilford Courthouse they hurried on down to fight him. But they got thar too late--the battle of Guilford Courthouse had been fit the day before. But Jesse Franklin and his friend Richard Taliaferro and his daddy, Dr. John Taliaferro, and sister Judith got down thar in time. Richard, he was kilt. But his daddy and sister went on helping the wounded. In fact Judith she war not a mind to help the men what had kilt her own brother but her daddy he told her to go on and help the enemy as well as her friends. Showed what kind of a fellow he war.

In the Civil war, as in the Revolutionary War, some of us in Surry war on different sides---some war for the north--they was called bushwhackers---and some war for the south/ They didn't have no use for each other. We had a heap of soldiers in the army and a heap of us got wounded and kilt. Folks tell how most of one whole company were either kilt, died of smallpox, or got in prison. In the last months of the Civil war, April 1 and 2, 1865 we had a raiding party come through Surry. A general named George Stoneman let on that he war very anxious to git to Virginia when he really aimed to send soldiers to Salisbury when the Southerners had left. (He fooled us too and got to Salisbury.) So he sent some soldiers through Surry County on a foraging raid. They was to live off the country, so the people they hid their stock deep in the woods, buried what fine pretties they could, hid others and the food in secret places. So General Stoneman he moved over to Elkin and when the waters went down--the rain had swolled it up--his officers named General Gillem and Colonel Palmer and their soldiers come over and they all went through Surry County. Some went on down to Siloam and Rockford. Then they marched through Dobson whar they raised a little cain, and on to Mount Airy whar they spent the night--'tis said up on the hill by Lovell's Creek north of Mount Airy. Early the next morning they went on to Hillsville, Virginia whar they captured a wagon train of supplies. Stoneman's raiders lived off us and used up what food they could get holt of and stole what horses they could find. But they did not burn down houses nor kill people. Which was right accommodating of them.

Along about 1840 and right atter the Civil war Surry County got to manufacturing. There got to be a sight of cotton and woolen mills around. Mr. Gwyn, he started a big cotton mill in Elkin. That give others the notion and finally they got Chatham Manufacturing Company and other businesses. Elkin had worked so hard to outshine Jonesville and finally they got it done.

Mount Airy, hit also started up some cotton and woolen mills about that time. Around 1840 a man named Brower come to Mount Airy and started up a cotton mill. Then that give somebody else the notion of starting a woolen mill. They ain't no woolen mill thar now but they is a heap of cotton mills. In the late 1880's

W. S. Gwyn, the cotton mill was in Elkin. The woolen mill was in Mount Airy.

some men figured that they could sell some pieces off a big rock just outside Mount Airy that nobody had ever used except to make doorsteps and sich like. This big rock warn't good for nothing--wouldn't even grow good grass, let alone corn or beans. But now it is knowed all over the country as the biggest open faced granite quarry in the world. Too, in Mount Airy, they was a lot of timber up in the mountains that they could get. So, early in 1900, or about this time some men got the idea of making furniture out of it. So they did and they air big furniture factories thar now.

It war lucky that railroads come in about this time--around 1890. These railroads they come in from Wilmington and went to Mount Airy and to Wilkesboro. That meant they had to pass through Elkin. This war good for little towns like Ararat, Siloam, and Rockford just like it was for the other towns, but it just about kilt the little places when the railroad business about give out.

Surry County had tried some mining before the Civil War but it didn't amount to much. They was a heap of iron forges about. What's left of one is down at Ararat along the river. They mined some iron ore for it around Ash Hill but the ore warn't much account. Folks say that they was iron mines at Siloam too.

Of course we done all kinds of work. We all had our wagon makers, shoemakers, gunsmiths, carpenters, cabinet makers, blacksmiths, coopers, millers, tanners, weavers, and just about everthing we needed.

We people in Surry loved to grow tobacco to chew and dip. We can also grow bright leaf tobacco that not many places can grow. After the Civil War the people people got to building little tobacco factories that got to be bigger and bigger. Then come these really big tobacco companies--I ain't calling no names--that ganged up on us and put our factories out of business in the 1890's. So now we don't have no tobacco factories no more but we do have plenty of tobacco warehouses whar we buy and sell bright leaf tobacco what many of us farmers raise.

They was right many little towns or settlements that grewed up in Surry County. Most was along the rivers that had the richest land. Also, the settlers would take their boats and go up and down the rivers or walk along the river banks

whar the land war low. The early settlers, they settled down whar the Indians did; they figured that what war good enough for the Indians war good enough for them.

Mount Airy, hit war the biggest town. Nobody knows persactly when Mount Airy was settled, but people was living thar before 1759 when the Moravians spoke about it. Some thinks about 1730 or 1740. The road from Salem was knowed by Moravians as The Hollow Road and hit followed what is just about whar the Indians had figured out, Route # 52. The first road to these parts was built in 1762 and they called it The Hollow Road because that is what they called this section. They was hollows up thar between the ridges on the east--Slate Mountain and Chestnut Ridge--Pilot Mountain and the Sauratowns on the south, and the Blue Ridges on the north and west. If you get up on the mountain and look down you can see that Mount Airy and the land around it is in one big hollow. People claim that Mount Airy was named for Jonathan Unthank's place in the southern part of town which he had named Mount Airy. He started the first post office in 1832.

Elkin is the next biggest town. A man named Allen was give some land around Big Elkin Creek in 1782. Some says that around 1775 a man named Shore had an iron forge thar. Anyway most of the land was on Richard Glyn's place whose house still stands on a high hill in the town. He war the man that started a cotton mill. Now they got a great big mill and plenty of other businesses. The town war named for the Elkin River which war called that as long as anybody knows.

Pilot Mountain growed because they was a lot of farmers who made a good living around thar and they had to have a place to trade. They used to be some tobacco factories thar. But since the earlies times, in the 1700's, they was folks living around thar. At one time they even called it Captain Lovill's district after a Revolutionary War soldier that lived thar, another time Tom's Creek. But now they call it Pilot Mountain and they have mills and sich thar.

Dobson we done told you about. For a long time atter it got started in 1850 about the only way people over thar made a living war by lawyering and keeping places for people to stay. They say that thar war a Democrat boarding place and a Republicn boarding place. Now with a college and some mills moving in Dobson

is getting right citified.

We have done told you about Rockford too. When the county seat was took away, Rockford went down. Then when the railroads sort of give out it got down more. Now they is not much people living in "ockford but visitors like to go thar to look at the old buildings still a-standing. They call them "quaint" and "Picturesque

One of the very oldest places that anybody lived was around Siloam. A man named Morgan Bryant--one of his son's girls married Daniel Boone--bought up that rich bottom land from the Earl of Granville's people. Then he sold it to a Samuel Freeman who worked for the Patriots in the Revolutionary War by being a member of the Committee of Safety. Then little by little more people come in until thar was a right good sized little town thar and a tobacco factory. But then things give out especially when the railroads run into hard times. Now thar is not many people living thar but them that does lives good.

Westfield is like Pilot Mountain. People around thar have to have a place to trade. They have a big Quaker church what come from the one the Quakers begun in 1772. It is still a-going.

Low Gap is near whar Jesse Franklin's place war. People heared more about the place when a feller up thar figured out a way to preserve galax leaves and such as could be used in funeral wreathes and Christmas decorations and such like. Galax leaves is them pretty little leaves shaped shaped like a heart that grows close to the ground only in our southern mountains. For a long time whole families of mountain folks went galacking and made a little money selling their little burghes of leaves tied up with a string. They done sort of like a lot of mountain people used to do when they went yarbing. Yarbs is what keep people peart and cures them when they're ailing.

The town of Ararat used to be called Forge atter that thar forge I was telling you about. The forge hit didn't do much good, but people had to have a place to trade. When the railroad business got sorry it hurt Ararat.

They is a lot of little communities here and thar like Burch, Rusk, Ash Hill, Shoals, Stony Knoll, Level Cross, Copeland, Crutchfield, Pine Ridge, Zepher,

Ladonia, Mountain Park, Woodville, Shelton town, Round Peak, Pine Ridge, just to name a few. In fact there is no place in Surry what ain't fit to live in.

People in Surry County make such a fine living that Surry County is one of the most well off counties in North Carolina, so the Raleigh folks tell us.

We ought not to end this tale unless we tell you how pretty Surry County is. There is lots of pretty rivers like the Yadkin, the Ararat, Johnson's Creek, Lovill's Creek, Tom's Creek, Faulkner's Creek, Stewart's Creek, Big and Little Fisher Rivers, Mitchell's River, Elkin Creek, Jamey's Creek, Hogan's Creek, and a whole lot of other little branches. We have plenty of little mountains or peaks too, a-sticking up here and there, like Skull Camp, Stott's Knob, Turner Mountain, Warrior Mountain, Buck Mountain, Round Peak, Saddle Mountain, Slate Mountain, Chestnut Ridge as well as the Blue Ridges and Fisher's Peak which is the highest peak we got and it is the furthest them men got when they was figuring out the line in 1749.

But the finest of all peaks is Pilot Mountain which sets in the eastern part of the county. A man named William Byrd of Virginia was the first white man to see it in 1728 when he was trying to figure out the Virginia-North Carolina line. The Indians had long knowed it as, some say, Jokomekee. The people that made the first maps they named it Mount Ararat. The Moravians they called it Pilot Mountain. Now we in Surry just call it The Pilot. There ain't nary a place whar you can't see the Pilot. Other counties can see it too. Some times you can see just the knob, sometimes just the hump, and sometimes the knob and the hump and the saddle. Everybody has always knowed the Pilot and you can't miss it.

And you shouldn't miss Surry County. We would be proud to see you if you was to come up to set with us a spell.

Now this is the best I can do about telling you about Surry County. Most of the things I can't prove. I know only what I've been told and read. If you know anything I don't I'd be proud if you would tell it to me.

By Herself