



NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BOX 874, SHALLOTTE, N. C. 28459

Nathaniel Rice was one of the most prominent men who settled on Town Creek in colonial days. As far as I have been able to find, history does not record the date of his birth or his birthplace, and there is no given date as to when he settled in Town Creek. However, it is a historical fact that he was the son-in-law of Colonel Martin Bladen, one of the Lords of Trades and Plantations of London.

Some historians list him as coming to Town Creek along with John Baptista Ashe and a number of other men who became prominent in the colonial life of the Cape Fear area, and Ashe is said to have come to America from England in about 1727. According to local tradition, Nathaniel Rice and his brother John were from Bath, England. One historian writes of a number of persons from the Albemarle section coming to settle on Town Creek before 1730, and John Baptista Ashe with John and Nathaniel Rice were listed in that number. On the other hand, it may be that Rice came to Town Creek from South Carolina, because there is on record a comment to the effect that in 1731 Rice was absent from the colony as he had gone to South Carolina to "fetch" his family.

Information found in the Colonial Records indicate that Nathaniel Rice was appointed secretary of the Province in 1729. In 1734 he was Justice of the Peace for New Hanover Precinct. He was Justice for the Court of Oyer and Terminator from 1735 to 1738. He was a member of Governor Burrington's Council, of which he was president. It appears that Rice received a salary as Secretary of the Province and as clerk of the Crown and for holding nine courts of Oyer and Terminator. He served by appointment as vestryman in St. Phillips Parish. He was a member of the board of commissioners appointed by the Assembly of North Carolina in 1745 to erect a fort which was named Fort Johnston.

Nathaniel Rice, along with some other members of the Governor's Council, had many stormy sessions with Governor Burrington, so much so that a list of complaints were compiled against Burrington and sent to England. Later when Gabriel Johnston was governor, there arose a struggle between Brunswick and Wilmington, then called Newton.

The struggle for supremacy culminated on the twenty-fifth of February, 1740, at a meeting of the Council. A bill passed in 1736 had made Newton a township to be called Wilmington, in honor of Johnston's influential friend, Spencer Compton, the Earl of Wilmington, who was the speaker of the House of Commons. Johnston had received his appointment as Governor through this Earl of Wilmington.

This action was bitterly assailed by Eleazer Allen, Edward Mosely, and Roger Moore, and Nathaniel Rice, on the ground that by the Act of 1729, Brunswick was made a township and was empowered to build a court house, jail and church. It was stated that good houses had been built there before Newton was established, and that the Customs House, if moved from Brunswick, would be too far up the river. One historian lists Johnston's trick to obtain the establishment of Wilmington as the "first sample of 'machine politics' in North Carolina history."

According to deeds in the New Hanover County Court house, Rice owned a large amount of land on a "fork" of Town Creek. This "fork" is now known as Rice's Creek. The Rice home was along this Creek, for some deeds mention "the land on which he now lives" and also "the land on which I now live". In addition, Rice owned land at the head of Town Creek and a thousand acres or more in Bladen County.

Colonel Alfred Waddell stated the Honorable George Davis who was born in 1820, reported in his youth that he saw the remains of the old Rice residence. It has been handed down that D. L. Russell, Senior, used a great deal of the Rice house which stood on the fork of Town Creek, in the building of his own plantation home, less than a mile away, around the 1840's. Mr. Russell incorporated all the Nathaniel Rice holdings on the fork of Town Creek into his plantation. Several interesting features about this house, which still stands today, are some of the mantels, and five colonial locks bearing the seal of England and depicting the Lion and the Unicorn.

The traditional site of Rice's home is 300 feet away from the creek and on a bluff approximately twenty-five feet high, and is located at a bend in the creek. This was a brick house of which the foundation is still beneath cultivated fields existing there today.

To the west of the Rice house site 200 feet is a brick vault which has come down through the years as Rice's tomb. There is no marker or slab at the tomb; this might be due to the fact that treasure hunters have raided this place from time to time since 1850. Due to this activity, many colorful tales have been told.

At the death of Governor Burrington in 1734, Nathaniel Rice, who was secretary of the Council, became governor and took his oath of office at Edenton on the 17th of April, 1734, and held this office until Gabriel Johnston was sworn in as governor at Brunswick Town in November of 1734. On the death of Johnston, July 17, 1752, Rice again became acting governor of North Carolina (due to the fact that he was first councillor named in the Kings commission) and he held this office until his death in January of 1753. Nathaniel Rice died in Wilmington, North Carolina, January 20, 1753, "old and feeble".

CURRENT CONCERNS

The next meeting of the Brunswick County Historical Society will be Monday evening, November 12, at 7:30 in the Old Courthouse at Shallotte. Mr. Durbin Varnum will talk on seashore living and working in earlier days.

Membership dues are now payable to Mrs. Lottie Ludlum, Box 874, Shallotte, N. C. 28459.

Mr. James Barclay, Assistant Curator of Historic Brunswick Town, will present a paper on the Port of Brunswick for the joint meeting of the North Carolina Genealogical Society and the Society of County and Local Historians November 14.

An exhibit on "Raleigh's Roanoke" will be on display at the North Carolina Museum of History from March 1 through May 31, 1985. This display will include documents, drawings, and maps pertaining to the Roanoke settlements of 1585 and 1587.

David Quinn's book The Lost Colonists is available from the Division of Archives and History at 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh.

The Rand McNally Company is selling the forty-page Reference Map and Guide of North Carolina for \$5.95

The Trustees of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington have a committee studying appropriate landmarks to be constructed on the campus. Regional historians have been requested to offer their suggestions.

The Forest History Society will be relocated at Duke University. The Society's board cited Duke's eminence in history, forestry, and library science as some of the features leading to the relocation.

The Baptist Historical Collection is housed in the Reynolds Library at Wake Forest Campus. One of the recent acquisitions is the 1278-item collection of the papers of Samuel Wait, Baptist minister and first president of Wake Forest University.