

Chatham County Town of Pittsborough and the Patrick St. Lawrence Tavern House

by Ray Carney Jan 2021*

The Formation of Chatham County and the Town of Pittsborough

Many people immigrated to the Colonies in North America during the 17th century for numerous reasons—religious freedoms, economic freedom, and free or low-priced land for those who were willing to farm it. England was looking for a return of wealth from the colonies in the form of raw materials. Some immigrants came as indentured servants to escape the hardships and poverty in Europe, others against their will as slaves, and some to escape religious persecution. The only way an immigrant could reach the colonies was traveling by ships that landed on the eastern shores of North America. In the early to mid-1700's population growth was mostly in the eastern coastal regions of the colonies from north to the south. (1)

By the middle of the 18th century, land was becoming scarce in the eastern coastal areas of the colonies. The land to the west was starting to open up for settlement, and newly arriving immigrants and second- and third-generation colonialists soon started moving west and south west. English, German, Moravians, Swiss, Palatine, Scot-Irish, Scotch Highlanders and other immigrants started to migrate in to Western Virginia (the state of West Virginia did not exist at this time), North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. One of the main routes for these immigrants or colonists was the Great Wagon Road, the road that started in Philadelphia Pennsylvania and routed through Virginia to Roanoke Virginia, Winston Salem and other parts of the Piedmont region, western lands of North Carolina and south into South Carolina and eventually into Georgia. There were also roads and Indian trails from both South and North Carolina's eastern coastal cities and regions leading west. The immigrants' desire for land ownership fed this increase of population throughout the Piedmont, or backwoods, of North Carolina. A settlement located near the Eno River and the Occaneechi Indian Village grew in size and importance. This newly formed settlement would eventually be called Hillsborough and would become the economic and political center of the backwoods area of North Carolina. The population growth of the back country did not go unnoticed by the wealthy plantation owners, merchants, the politically powerful of coastal North Carolina, Governor Tryon, and others from coastal colonies located up and down the eastern seaboard. (2) (3) (4)

The borders of the English Colonies in the early 18th century looked very different from the way states look today, as do the borders of the counties that make up the current state of North Carolina. The County of Orange, was established in 1752 and the town of Hillsborough would soon become the county seat. The population of Orange County quickly grew to approximately 13,700 and Hillsborough would soon have two to three stores and taverns/ordinaries as the rich merchants from the east took financial advantage of this growing region. Hillsborough became the hub for all governmental business affairs through Orange County. Imagine being a farmer, mill owner or other settlers in the outlying areas of Orange County, which included the lands that are currently in the counties of Alamance, Caswell, Chatham, Durham, and Person as well as portions of Guilford, Randolph Rockingham Lee and Wake. One would have to travel from these far regions of the county to conduct land purchases, record deeds, settle estates, attend the court of pleas and quarter sessions or the Colonial Superior Court, as well as other governmental and legal business. If you lived in the current area of Chatham County, you would need to travel to Hillsborough, a distance of about 30 miles from the future town of Pittsborough, as it was spelled 18th century. A wagon traveling on a 18th century highway could cover about 20 to 25 miles per day depending on weather and road conditions, and one traveling by horse could possibly make the trip in one day, but some backwoods people may have had to walk. One making this trip most likely would have had to lay over at a tavern or ordinary during their travels. The cost of time and expenses incurred for food, lodging and legal fees became a great hardship on these new immigrants and land owners. (5)

The start of a rebellion in the backwoods of North Carolina was caused by many factors, the wealth difference between the eastern elite and backwoods population, the stamp act, taxation, dishonest sheriffs and lawyers, and an illegal fee system that was imposed by the colonial officials in Hillsborough like Edmund Fanning. Fanning, who received his law license

in 1759 and then immigrated to Hillsborough from the northeast to start his law practice and political career. Fanning soon gained friendship with Governor Tyron, and that relationship helped him become a prestigious and very profitable lawyer. Fanning would also become a Crown Attorney, a military leader, and received other government positions that would help him to become very wealthy.

The land owners and others of the backwoods felt that their concerns about corruption unfair taxation of the lower class and growing wealth differences were not being addressed through peaceful methods and that other measures would be needed to resolve their grievances. From 1765 to 1771, the farm owners and others in North and South Carolina decided to form a group known as the Regulators. This was one measure taken to help resolve their unaddressed concerns. Another difficulty the Piedmont farmers faced was a decade of drought that caused crop failures. The lack of incoming cash flow from the sale of their crops resulted in great economic hardship for the Piedmont farmers. The farmers fell deeply into debt to merchants and tax collectors, and the merchants and tax collectors would capitalize on the farmers hardships by taking them to court to settle debts owed them. The farmers could not sell their assets to pay debts due to the lack of currency—gold or silver. Their property and assets would be put up as Sheriff's sales or courthouse auctions where the wealthy judges, lawyers and sheriffs conspired to take the farmers' farms and houses to settle their debts. This group of very wealthy lawyers, judges and sheriffs would come to be known as the 'Courthouse Rings.' (6) (7)

Farmers and others of the Piedmont tried to organize an association to conduct a general meeting of people of the Piedmont that included representatives, vestrymen and other officers to peacefully resolve their concerns with the colonial courts and their agents. Edmund Fanning rejected this association's jurisdiction and banned all Government officials from attending. The farmers and others of the Piedmont would soon change to a more violent means to get satisfaction for their demands. In September of 1770, the Regulators entered Hillsborough armed with only clubs and whips. They vandalized the colonial courthouse and dragged its officials through the streets of Hillsborough. The Regulators continued through the town destroying the rich merchants' shops and other properties. They then proceeded to Edmund Fanning's house where they looted and then burned the house down, and after finding Edmund Fanning, they put a serious beating upon him. The Piedmont farmers continued their efforts to solve their differences with the Governor Tyron with little success.

The wealthy merchant's, planters, and governmental officials on the east coast of North Carolina became very concerned with the continued population growth of the Piedmont area. They were afraid that the increase in population could cause the Colonial Government to relocate to Hillsborough. In 1766 this very wealthy eastern group proposed an amount of 5000 pounds for a mansion to be built in the coastal town New Bern for Governor Tyron. The farmers and others in the western part of the colony objected to this proposal and stated they would not help pay for it, and refused to pay their taxes. The eastern wealthy won their efforts for the grand house and an additional amount of 10,000 pounds for the project was granted and construction of the 15,000-pound mansion was started. (8) (9) (12)

The colonial government continued to protect the crooked politicians, lawyers, sheriffs and elite merchants. With the order from Governor Tyron for mandated legal fees and taxes to be collected, the corrupt practices increased. This process of unfair and unequal treatment incited the Regulators to nonpeaceful measures to accomplish their goals of fair treatment. Governor Tyron was so concerned about the Regulators actions of violence, that he traveled to Hillsborough to see what was happening. Because of the actions of the Regulators, Governor Tyron called up the local militia to help keep the peace, but many of the local militia refused to take up arms against their friends and relatives. The high tensions were defused, but Tyron saw for himself the problems in the backwoods of North Carolina.

Tensions continued to run high through the winters of 1770 and 1771. In March of 1771, the Superior Court in Hillsborough reported to Governor Tyron that they could not hold court. Governor Tyron could not tolerate the Regulator movement and called out the militia. One-thousand well-armed militia members were marched to Hillsborough to put an end to the Regulator movement. The Regulators, with twice the number of men, were located at Alamance Creek and within a few days, the governor marched his militia towards the gathering. The Regulators were poorly armed, but because they had nearly twice the number of men, they thought the Governor would negotiate to end the conflict. Governor Tyron was determined to end the Regulator movement and gave the regulators one hour to surrender. The Regulators refused and the Governor gave orders to attack! The militia hesitated to fire,

but the Governor restated his order and the Battle of Alamance began. The battle only lasted one and one-half hours. The Regulators casualties were unknown, but Governor Tryon's Militia suffered nine dead and sixty-one wounded. Shortly after the battle, James Few was hanged and there were trials against fourteen other Regulators. Twelve were convicted and six of the twelve were hung. Governor Tryon, trying to ease the tensions in the Piedmont, offered amnesty to all who took the oath of allegiance. More than 6000 complied. After the Battle of Alamance, the Regulator movement in North Carolina would end. (10) (11) (18)

The Battle of Alamance may have ended the Regulator movement, but the defiance in the backwoods would continue. Governor Tryon continued to look for answers to resolve these problems to the west, but still protect the eastern rich elite. One of the measures that would be enacted was to decrease the size of Orange County and its politically corrupt system. Orange County would have its boundaries reduced and new counties with their own court systems would be created. One of these new counties was Chatham, named after the Earl of Chatham. The creation of Chatham County was approved in December of 1770 and finalized on April 1st 1771.

Chatham County would conduct governmental business—its first Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions—in the home of Stephen Poe. It has been reported that the first Chatham County Courthouse was built on the land belonging to Ambrose Edwards, but other reports state that the first court house was built on the land of Mails' Scurlock in 1782. The 1782 court house was a wooden structure that would be built on Scurlock's land, about one-half mile south of the current town of Pittsboro's center. Before the land sale for the future Town of Pittsborough could be finalized, Mr. Scurlock passed away, and his heirs decided not to complete the sale of land for the new county seat and the Town of Pittsborough. (13) (14) (15)

What happens next involves a man named Patrick St. Lawrence, so I will introduce him before telling the rest of the story.

Patrick St. Lawrence and the Town of Pittsborough, Chatham County

One of the names associated with very early Pittsborough is that of Patrick St. Lawrence. Little is known about St. Lawrence before he came to Chatham County. There are documents that reveal a Patrick St. Lawrence may have immigrated to the Colony of Virginia from Ireland prior to 1776 and may have been granted a release from his indentureship to serve in the Western Virginia Militia, Fincastle Virginia, during the Revolutionary War. (16) St. Lawrence served under Captain Evan Shelby and Lieutenant Isaac Shelby. This militia fought at the battles of King Mountain NC and the Cowpen. It has not been confirmed that Patrick St. Lawrence fought in any of these battles, but he is listed on the muster roll of this militia as a private. With the surrender of Cornwallis on October 19, 1781, most of the Revolutionary War hostilities ended. This would coincide with the time line of Patrick St. Lawrence entering North Carolina and Chatham County in 1782. There is also an Orange County NC Marriage Certificate that mentions that Patrick St. Lawrence as a witness to this marriage (1782).

We next hear of Patrick St. Lawrence in connection with the estate of Dr. James McCarroll, who operated a tavern on the main road from Pittsboro to Salisbury (there was no Siler City at that time). Dr. McCarroll died in 1777. Patrick St. Lawrence would become an inn/tavern/ordinary keeper for McCarroll's widow Elizabeth prior to 1783. In fact, the area where the tavern was located was called 'St. Lawrence' for some time. There are other Orange County court documents with the name of St. Lawrence handling estate affairs for Dr. McCarroll and other legal business at the Orange County Courts.

St. Lawrence and Dr. James McCarroll's widow, Elizabeth, were married sometime around 1783, and St. Lawrence was granted guardianship for Thomas, son of Dr. and Elizabeth McCarroll, in August 1783. After the Mial Scurlock land sale for the new Town of Pittsborough fell through, land belonging to William Petty, located north of the Scurlock land, was acquired by the State and placed under the control of Mathew Jones. A group of nine men, one of whom was Patrick St. Lawrence, was charged with the task of laying out the Town of Pittsboro in 1786. The Lancaster plan—in which lots are organized around a central square—was chosen for the new town. The County Courthouse was to be built in the center square and that surrounded by 125 lots. The four courthouse lots were one-quarter acre and the remaining 120 lots each contained one-half acre. Matthew Jones proceeded with lot sales that began in 1786, I am not sure if the 1786 lot sales were speculative or lots that might have

The town layout map shows the movement of the St. Lawrence Tavern. The tavern has been moved three times and now sits on its fourth foundation—shown on the shaded lots 50, 91, 125, and finally lot 100.

Starting in 1786, Patrick St. Lawrence speculated on six lots and ten acres of pasture land in the newly formed Town of Pittsborough. On a one-quarter-acre lot, number 50, located on the courthouse square, he had constructed a large yellow house that was 'well fitted for a tavern.' On two adjacent one-half acre lots, St Lawrence also had built 'a neat billiards room with table, an excellent stable for 20 horses, a coach house, and a granary. Also, on St. Lawrence's property to support the tavern, was a good garden and a handsome meadow containing about ten acres. (see Fayetteville Gazette ad below)

In 1792, St. Lawrence also invested in a Mercantile Store on lot 51 with a Mr. Henderson. (court of pleas and quarter sessions) The two men formed a company known as St Lawrence and Henderson Company. The mercantile store would purchase most of its merchandise from Ronald Donaldson from Fayetteville. Mr. Donaldson supplied merchandise to most of the southern storehouses in the late 18th century. St. Lawrence and George Lucas (another wealthy Pittsboro leader) were also involved with James Patterson, contractor-builder-mason of the Old East building, the first building to be constructed at the newly established University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Patrick St. Lawrence and George Lucas would provide funding for a five-thousand-pound bond for James Patterson to construct the Old East Building. (17) I am not sure of the relationship between Patterson and St. Lawrence, but a review of the construction specifications that James Patterson submitted for Old East Building shows many similarities with the St. Lawrence Tavern, and the timing of the two projects works out well. It is quite possible that James Patterson was involved in the construction of the Patrick St. Lawrence Tavern. The construction similarities, Patrick St. Lawrence's involvement with the Old East bond, and the known completion of the Tavern by 1792 in Pittsborough and the start of construction of the UNC Old East building of 1793 suggest that, although Patterson cannot be confirmed as the builder of the Tavern, I believe it would be a good educated guess. (Much of the St. Lawrence information came from the minutes of the Chatham County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions.)

The Rise and Fall of Patrick St. Lawrence

As noted earlier, Patrick S. Lawrence arrived in Chatham County around 1782, in the area that is now Siler City-Hickory Mountain. He became an inn-keeper for a tavern/ordinary owned by Dr. James McCarroll's estate. Dr. McCarroll was a well-known and respected resident of Chatham County. Sometime after Dr. McCarroll's death, Elizabeth McCarroll and Patrick St. Lawrence would marry, and he would take control of her wealth. I am not sure when St. Lawrence became involved in the governmental business of Chatham County, but it is known that he was one of nine people involved in the formation of the Town of Pittsborough, County seat of the County of Chatham. St. Lawrence's name appears many times in the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions of Chatham. He was also involved in trying to secure the building of the University of North Carolina in the area of Pittsborough. (15) (16) (17)

St. Lawrence built his grand tavern in Pittsborough for the gentry class—no cage bar or drinking from a pewter mug—but dining at a table with fine crystal, silver utensils and linen table cloths. (21) St. Lawrence was investing in the future growth of the town of Pittsborough. But, the decision to build the University of North Carolina well north of Pittsborough and the failure of the town to grow quickly led St. Lawrence put his tavern up for "Sale or Let" in September of 1792.

Note: A cage bar is an enclosed section of a tavern/ordinary where alcohol was stored that usually has a bar type door.

Fayetteville Gazette.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1792.

(VOL. I.)

PRINTED BY ALEXANDER MARTIN, FOR JOHN SIBLEY.

(NUMB. 10.)

FOR SALE, OR TO LET,
For a term of years.
IN THE TOWN OF PITTSBOROUGH,
Chatham County.

**A NEW, TWO STORY
H O U S E,**
COMPLETELY finished,
and well fitted for a TAVERN,
with convenient Out Houses, among which
are a neat BILLIARD ROOM, with a
TABLE, much frequented,—also, a
good GARDEN, the whole of the im-
provement on two adjacent LOTS, con-
taining one acre, an excellent STABLE
with stalls for twenty Horses, a COACH
HOUSE and GRANARY, adjoining a
handsome peice of MEADOW, contain-
ing about ten acres.

The situation is agreeable
and healthy, and the summer society is
one of the best in the state—within one
mile of the *Mineral Springs*, which, tho'
but lately discovered, are much frequen-
ted in the season. For terms apply to the
subscriber on the premises.

P. St. LAWRENCE.

Pittsborough, September 29, 1792. (†)

The following ad was
found in the:

**North Carolina Digital
Collection
News Papers**

**Fayetteville Gazette
Tuesday, October 9, 1792**

**Ray Carney
January 3, 2016**

Cut and Paste

Link to the c.1792 News Paper ad in the Fayetteville Gazette listing:

<http://cdm16062.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15016coll1/id/22687/rec/18>

Click on Page 4

St. Lawrence's business adventures must have caused him financial hardships. One example may have been his investment in the bond for James Patterson for the construction bond for the Old East Building. James Patterson found it difficult to compete the work due to the lack of supplies and non-payments for work completed. There were other demands not in the contract that caused him time and financial hardships. I cannot find any information if St. Lawrence ever received payment for his bond investment.

Col. John Hogan of Orange County was involved in securing the University of North Carolina to be built in Chapel Hill. Col. Hogan and others donated money and land, and Hogan supplied bricks at a cost for the University. There must have been hard feelings between St. Lawrence and Col. Hogan, because he made a statement in 1804 in which he said, essentially, that St. Lawrence had wasted his wife's estate, run away, and had died on his in route to the West Indies. (20) We don't know the truth of these statements, but we do know that St. Lawrence left his wife Elizabeth and her son with his debt prior to 1798.

On August 13, 1798, suit was filed by Robert Donaldson of Fayetteville for two thousand and seventy-six pounds owed and by Thomas McCarroll (Elizabeth's son) for three hundred and fifty-eight pounds owed. An inventory of all Patrick St. Lawrence's holdings was taken and all assets were to be sold at a court house auction. One of the items listed was Lot No. 50 with its big "Yellow House." The Patrick St. Lawrence Tavern was sold at the sheriff sale-auction to Robert Donaldson! (The following is the notice as stated in the court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions Chatham County.)

Inventory of the Property of Pat. St. Lawrence Esq. Levied on at the instance of Thos. MacCarroll and Robt. Donaldson This 15. March 1798. in the County of Chatham.

~~One Lot~~
 one ¼ acre lott with a large yellow house and other improvements thereon

one ½ acre lott with smith shop & log house thereon —

one part of a lott beginning at Elisha Stedmans store house and running to John Williams house, with ~~two~~ Billiard House store house and Kitchen thereon —

one lott and house thereon where Braden Hilton now lives —

Eight acres of ground with a stable —

3 Vacant Vacant Lots.

150 Acres Land, joining John Macswines line
 100 do do joining Henry Cook
 65 do do joining Straughans line —

Three Negroe Slaves viz. Lydia, Betty and Isaac —

1 Mare and cart.
 1 Billiard Table, maces Balls etc
 2 Chr. chairs, 1 clock, 1 Beaufet and furnishings
 1 Desk and book case, 8 Tables, 12 pictures
 1 Settee, 3pr Dogs Fire Dogs, 4 Beds & furniture
 7 Head Cattle.
 Books of account, notes of hand and bonds
 Kitchen furniture viz. pots &c &c —

Inventory of the Property of Patrick St. Lawrence Esq.
 Levied on the insistence of Thos. McCarroll and Robt. Donaldson
 This 15 March 1798 in the County of Chatham.

*One ¼ acre lott with a large yellow house and other improvements thereon.

*One ½ acre lott with smith shop & log house thereon.

*One part of a lot beginning at Elisha Stedman's store house and running to

*John Williams house with Billiard House store house and kitchen thereon.

*One lot and house thereon where Braden Hilton now lives.

*Eight acres of ground with a stable

*3 vacant lots

*150 acres land joining John Macswines line

*100 do do joining Henry Cook

*65 do do joining Straughans line

*Three Negroe slaves viz. Lydia, Betty and Isaac

*1 mare and cart

*1 Billiard Table with maces balls etc

*2 doz. chairs, 1 clock, 1 beaufet and furnishings, 1 desk and book case, 8 tables, 12 pictures, 1 settee, 3pr fire dogs, 4 beds and furniture, 7 Head cattle, books of account notes of hand and bonds, kitchen furniture viz pots etc etc

Information above is copied and pasted from the Court records as spelled then.

Elizabeth St Lawrence petitioned for a divorce from Patrick St. Lawrence in Wake Co. NC and received the right to administer her own estate and property from the General Assembly of NC. (19) The date listed was 1880. I cannot confirm the date, but I believe it was some time around 1804.

The St. Lawrence Tavern/House Now

My wife, Janet, and I purchased the Patrick St. Lawrence House/Tavern in August of 2012 and began restoration in the same month. The restoration effort for the first two years was to stabilize the building, replace all decayed elements and install a new roof to keep the building dry. The Patrick St. Lawrence Tavern was purchased as retirement project, but my retirement was put on hold for two years at the request of my employer. After retiring in 2014 we increased our restoration efforts.

Many people are wondering if the restoration is ever going to be done on the Tavern, but what they don't understand is the amount of time it takes to recreate missing or damaged moldings and doors using period-correct molding planes, restore original nine over nine window sashes, update mechanicals, new roof, period correct porches, and install a special wall board material known as veneer base or blue board. Blue board is a gypsum product that requires a single or double coat of plaster. This process provides a period-correct appearance when completed.

Janet is carefully removing the layers of paint to determine the original paint colors so they can be recreated and applied to the wood trim. Through her paint removal process, she found that the first-floor interior doors were faux finished with a mahogany finish and a gold line inlay. We hope to have the interior completed by the spring of 2021. The siding for the exterior repairs and siding that has been removed over the years is currently being milled. As soon as all the siding is cut, a special edge bead will be applied to match the original siding and it should be ready for installation. We have found written evidence and conducted paint analysis to determine that the original exterior color was yellow, as reported for many years. The fireplaces that were removed will be the last project in the restoration process. When they are complete there will be four corner fireplaces on the North gable end and two large fireplaces on the South gable end. We are looking forward to the completion of this very important restoration project.

References:

- (1) [Colonial America – Colonial Immigration: An Overview | World History](#)
- (2) [Great Wagon Road | NCpedia](#)
- (3) [Migration Trail History 17th, 18th & 19th Centuries – Piedmont Trails](#)
- (4) [Westward movement | Definition, History, Outcome, & Facts | Britannica](#)
- (5) [The 13 Colonies: Map, Original States & Regions | HISTORY - HISTORY](#)
- (6) [What Was the Regulator Movement? History and Significance \(thoughtco.com\)](#)
- (7) [Settlement of the Piedmont | NCpedia](#)
- (8) [Regulator Movement | NCpedia](#)
- (9) [Royal Governor William Tryon \(1729 - 1788\) - North Carolina History Project](#)
- (10) [Hillsborough Confrontation \(1768\) - North Carolina History Project](#)
- (11) [Battle of Alamance - North Carolina History Project](#)
- (12) [Tryon Palace - North Carolina History Project](#)
- (13) [Chatham County, North Carolina \(carolana.com\)](#)
- (14) [The War of Regulation 1767 to 1771 \(carolana.com\)](#)
- (15) [List of soldiers at the Battle of Point Pleasant \(wvgenweb.org\)](#) Scroll down to find Patrick St. Lawrence's name: Captain Evan Shelby's Company of Volunteers, Fincastle
- (16) [1774 Militia List, Capt. Evan Shelby, Fincastle \(Washington\) Co, Virginia and later Sullivan County, Tennessee \(tngenweb.org\) Patterson, James \(d. 1799\) \(ncsu.edu\)](#)
- (17) [Patterson, James \(d. 1799\) \(ncsu.edu\)](#)
- (18) <https://northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/battle-of-alamance/>
- (19) http://www.ncgenweb.us/chatham/court/wills_s.html Note: date of 1880 on divorce is incorrect.
- (20) North Carolina Genealogical Journal (Vol. X, No. 4)
- (21) Daniel Maudlin FSA Professor of Early Modern History, University of Plymouth, United Kingdom