The articles in this annotated list were prepared by CCHA volunteers and are grouped by topic. Some of the articles are extensive—others are brief. All offer something of interest about Chatham County history. Each item on the list links to the full article.

Scroll down to browse the annotated list or select from the index below.

**Geography, Settlement & General History**
- Granville Land Grants
- Waterways of Chatham County
- Walter D. Siler’s History of Chatham County

**Politics and Military**
- Chatham Patriot, James Emerson
- Whigs Restored Two-Party Rule
- Politics of Secession
- John R. Lane and Chatham Boys
- Chatham County, Hotbed of Populism
- Veterans Memorials of Chatham
- Chatham County ~ World War I
- Pittsboro High School’s Honor Roll of WWI Veterans
- Chatham County Amputees and Artificial Limbs
- The Stone/Elkins Family Civil War Letters
- Chatham County Veterans Honored

**Architecture, Communities, and Landmarks**
- Siler City Historical Tour
- Patrick St. Lawrence House Update
- St. Lawrence House
- McClenahan House
- Taylor House
- Alvin Bynum House
- Smokehouse on Agriculture Center Property
- Chicken Bridge
- Mt. Vernon Springs—Health & Beauty
- Jones Ferry Crossing—Chatham Landmark
- Searching for Jones Ferry Crossing
- Two Bridges [and a Culvert]
- Architectural Update 2019-2020
- The Riggbee Community
- Bynum Bridge Awarded Historic Designation

**Social Fabric**
- Slave Narratives
- Adeline Crump
- Marium Alston and the Alston Freed Slaves
- How Farm Tenants Lived
- Chatham’s Early Medical Care
- Early Pittsboro Medicine
- Brief History of Schools
- Farmers Library, Family Info in Old Chatham Book
- Martha’s Chapel
- Masons in Pittsboro
- The House ~ Memories of a Time and Place
- Reconstruction and Black Rights after Slavery
- My Memories of Tobacco

**Industry and Commerce**
- The Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Company
- Siler City Mills
- Boling Chair Company History 1904-1979
- The Bynum Cotton Mill—In the Millworkers Words
- Chatham’s Role in Early Railroads
- Prosperity Came to Pittsboro on the Train
- Oval Oak Washboard
- Pittsboro Business Ledger 1832-1834
- The Justice Brothers and Justice Motor Company

**Chatham People**
- Simon Green Atkins
- Mattie Rogers Beavers—Rural Mail Carrier
- Black Chathamites—Making a Difference
- Herman Husband [Marker] Moves West
- Tod R. Edwards—Crossing Racial Lines
- The Works of George Moses Horton
- The Adventures of Hallie Beavers Allred
- Sheriff Myrtle Siler
- Family Letters Reveal Personal Side of Manly Family
Geography, Settlement & General History

Granville Land Grants in Chatham County

Some of the earliest landholders in Chatham County obtained their lands through grants from the Granville land office between 1751 and 1763. This article attempts to identify which of the grants made in Chatham's parent county, Orange, were for land in Chatham County by using references to waterways. CCHA volunteer Jim Wiggins produced a list of some 202 grants that he believes are probably for land in what is now Chatham. Along with the grantholder's name, he provides the survey and grant dates, number of acres granted, waterways and other geographic features mentioned in the survey, adjoining landholders mentioned in the survey, a map code that allows users to locate the waterway by USGS map segments, and page references to his sources.

Waterways of Chatham County

Provides a map and list identifying waterways in Chatham County compiled from old deeds and maps by CCHA volunteer Jim Wiggins. Earliest land records date from colonial times, when Chatham was part of Orange County, and identify a property first as "on waters of" a named stream or river, and often went on to name smaller waterways, such as branches, forks, and prongs, in defining the boundary lines of the property. Over time, some of the names have changed, but this article can help locate property on present-day maps.

Walter D. Siler’s History of Chatham County

Judge Walter D. Siler’s 1931 and 1932 historical sketches of Chatham County form the basis for much of what we know about the early history of the area. Steve Brooks has transcribed Siler’s works and notes that they should be read as much as reflective of the worldview of a prominent citizen of the 1930s as for its detail of the political and military life of the county in its early years.

Politics and Military

Tribute to a Chatham Patriot—James Emerson

Records remarks and a slide show of photographs taken on May 1, 2011, at the Old Tick Creek burial grounds in Chatham County, to honor the memory of James Emerson, one of twelve Regulators captured at the battle of Alamance on the 16th of May, 1771—a battle in which the settlers in the backcountry of the North Carolina piedmont were considered in governor Tryon’s own words to be in “a state of war and rebellion.”
Whigs Restored Two Party Rule to Chatham and North Carolina

Documents early 19th century politics in North Carolina and Chatham County. The roles of Chathamites Abraham Rencher and Charles Manley are described.

Chatham County and the Politics of Secession, 1854-1861

Documents the political events that eventually took North Carolina out of the Union and into the Confederacy, with a particular focus on information about Chatham County’s involvement in these events. Identifies the views and votes of Chatham citizens and their political representatives regarding slavery and secession.

John Randolph Lane and the Chatham Boys

Fred Vatter’s account of the life and lessons of John Randolph Lane, who enlisted as a private in the Chatham Boys or Chatham Grays, which later became Company G of the 26th North Carolina Regiment. In July 1863, the 26th found itself at Gettysburg, facing the dreaded Iron Brigade of the Army of the Potomac. Vatter describes the Gettysburg battles, during which most of the men of the 26th were killed and Col. Lane was severely wounded. After the war Lane met and became friends with Charles McConnell of Chicago, who was the sniper who wounded him.

Chatham County, A Hotbed of Populism

Describes Chatham County’s leadership role in the Populist movement of the 1890s and on the political debates of that decade as described in several Chatham newspapers. It identifies dozens of Chatham citizens who participated in the politics of the day.

Veterans’ Memorials, Chatham County

Photos and brief descriptions of the West Chatham Veterans Memorial and the Goldston Veterans Memorial.

Chatham County ~ World War One

Several articles on our website provide information about the WWI experience in Chatham County. Topics include the WWI draft and lotteries, exemptions, service records, and genealogical resources.

Pittsboro High School’s Honor Roll of WWI Veterans

Photograph and transcription of a memorial tablet honoring men from Pittsboro High School who served in WWI. It was presented at commencement in May 1922 by the Winnie Davis Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.
Chatham County Amputees and NC’s Artificial Limbs Program

North Carolina became the first of the former Confederate states to offer artificial limbs to amputees. At least twenty-six Chatham men received artificial limbs from this state program. Ansley Herring Wegner’s article describes Civil War amputation, the NC artificial limbs program, and lists the Chatham men who benefitted from that program.

The Stone/Elkins Civil War Letters

Ten letters donated to CCHA give a glimpse of life during the Civil War for some Chatham soldiers and for the families they left at home. A number of families from the Pedlar’s Hill area of Chatham are mentioned. Dav Robertson’s article provides background to events in Chatham and in the camps, gives highlights of the letters and provides links to transcripts and the original images of the letters.

Chatham County Veterans Honored

More than 225 Chatham County veterans’ photographs have been shared by their families for display in the Chatham County Historical Museum’s “Tribute to Valor” exhibit. A photo frame presents a slide show of the donated photographs. The names of included veterans are listed here. If your family member’s photograph is not included, see the instructions for eligibility and how to submit.

Architecture, Communities, and Landmarks

Architectural Update 2019-2020

In 2019, CCHA member Kimberly Steiner volunteered to photograph and document the historic structures she had observed in the county. Her work will encompass structures in four townships—Baldwin, Center, Williams, and New Hope—as well as within the town of Pittsboro, to provide an updated inventory. You can find the results of her work to date here.

Weekend Historical Tour Offers View of One Dozen Siler City Locations

St. Lawrence House “The Yellow House” 2016 Update

Tells what has happened to the historic St. Lawrence House in Pittsboro since it was purchased by Ray and Janet Carney in 2012. Describes some of the renovations the Carneys have undertaken and discoveries about the house and its history that they have made.

Three Historic Chatham County Houses: Parts I and II – Patrick St. Lawrence or Yellow House

Parts 1 and 2 of a five-part series by Jane Pyle, written in 2006, that describes three historic Chatham County houses. Part I describes the Patrick St. Lawrence House—also called the Yellow House and Part II gives a brief background on Patrick St. Lawrence himself.

Three Historic Chatham County Houses: Part III – McClenahan House

Part 3 of a five-part series by Jane Pyle, written in 2006, that describes three historic Chatham County houses. Part III provides the history of the McClenahan House.

Three Historic Chatham County Houses: Parts IV and V – Taylor House and Taylor Family

Parts 4 and 5 of a five-part series by Jane Pyle, written in 2006, that describes three historic Chatham County houses. Parts IV and V the Taylor House and Taylor family.

Alvin Bynum House

Photograph and brief note about the Alvin Bynum House in Pittsboro.

CCHA Documents History of Property for New County Agricultural Center and Saves Unique Smokehouse

Describes the history of the property on which the new Chatham County Agricultural Center was built in 2016, and an architectural survey of the property prior to construction. The report highlights an intact smokehouse found on the property which was saved by CCHA.

The Day Chicken Bridge Got Its Name

Barbara Pugh describes an incident in the early 1950s in which a Chatham County bridge collapsed as a chicken truck was crossing, and the subsequent history of the bridge.

Health & Beauty Face a Rapidly Changing Chatham

Describes Mt. Vernon Springs—the resort and the twin springs “Health” and “Beauty.”
Jones Ferry Crossing—Chatham Landmark

Margaret Miller Growe and Richard Ellington detail the findings of their search for the location of Jones Ferry Crossing. The two researchers discover that their combined clues point to a possible answer to the mystery.

Searching for Jones Ferry Crossing

Doug Berg uses Chatham County deeds and tips from old-timers to pinpoint the location of Jones Ferry Crossing. His research puts the crossing upstream of the location suggested by Ellington and Growe.

Two Bridges (and a Culvert)

Chatham native, Bill Sharpe, traces the paths of old roads, bridges (and a culvert) in northeast Chatham and shares some memories along the way.

The Riggsbee Community

The Chatham County community of Riggsbee was located at what is now the intersection of Briar Chapel Parkway with US 15-501. In the latter half of the 19th century, it had a store with a post office, a one-room school and two churches. It was, indeed, a community. Bill Sharpe tells its story.

Bynum Bridge Awarded Historic Designation

Bynum Bridge was entered into the National Registry of Historic Places on April 23, 2020. Built in 1922 and closed to vehicles in 1999, the bridge still occupies a place of community importance in the village of Bynum. It’s history, unique characteristics, and place in the community are detailed in this article by Diane Swan and Debbie Tunnell.

Social Fabric

Chatham County Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers Project

Identifies and links to the records of twelve former slaves who lived at some time in Chatham County. The first-person narratives and photographs are from the Federal Writer’s Project and are part of a joint online collection developed by the Manuscript and the Prints and Photographs Divisions of the Library of Congress.

Glimpses into the Life and Family of Adeline Crump

Discusses the outcome of an experiment to see what could be learned about a family based on the information contained in the interview with one formerly enslaved woman—Adeline Crump.
Marium Alston and the Alston Freed Slaves

Plantation widow Marium Alston contested her husband’s will to obtain more of his slaves and, by her own will, arranged for them to be taken to a free state and freed. Freeing slaves in 1850s North Carolina was an exceedingly difficult feat. This paper documents the extraordinary actions of a Chatham County woman to set her slaves free and the impact on the lives of the Alston freedpersons.

How Farm Tenants Lived in Chatham County

Describes the results of a 1922 survey of farm owners and farm tenants in Chatham County. Discusses the various kinds of tenants (landless farmers), their economic situations, crops, education, homes, health, religious practices, and opinions about social issues, and social mobility.

Chatham’s Early Medical Care Was Primitive but Dedicated

A brief note about 18th and 19th century medical care and physicians in Chatham County.

Early Pittsboro Medicine Studied

Reprint of an article by Milburn Gibbs that appeared in the Thursday, May 6, 2004, Chatham New/Record. The article recounts Fred Vatter’s investigation of early Pittsboro medicine—primarily recollections of residents and former patients of Dr. K. M. Mathiesen, who came to Pittsboro in 1938 and ran a clinic until 1966-67.

A Brief History of the Schools of Chatham County

Describes the history of education in Chatham County from approximately 1771 to 1971—beginning with early academies and public schools; consolidation of the 1920s, which eliminated many one-room schoolhouses in favor of larger schools; and post WWII growth and integration. Some photos.

Virginia Man Finds Chatham Info in Old Book

A reference to Riggsbee, a community in northern Chatham near what is now Briar Chapel, is discovered in an old book, which also had a bookplate for “The Farmer's Library Agriculture, Science, and the Arts”—incorporated in Chatham County in 1833 and probably one of the earliest library associations in the state. Inked on the back endpaper of the book are the birth dates for Hasten Poe, his wife and children. The Ivey family of Chatham is also mentioned.

Ceremony Celebrates Martha’s Chapel

Describes a 2011 ceremony in which a historic marker was dedicated at Martha’s Chapel by the Sir Humphrey Gilbert Chapter Colonial Dames XVII Century. Gives a brief history of Martha’s Chapel and James O’Kelly, founder of the Christian Church.
Mason’s Came to Pittsboro Early

Fred Vatter’s delightful account of the Masonic apron in CCHA’s collection and Masonry in Chatham County.

The House ~ Memories of a Time and Place

In this brief article, Bill Sharpe explores his memories of the Chatham County house in which he was born and raised. In the process, he provides us a revealing glimpse of a slice of Baldwin Township in an earlier time.

Reconstruction and Black Rights after Slavery

While much has been written about Reconstruction and black rights in the South, in this paper Jim Wiggins focuses on how these events played out in Chatham County and the role that Chatham County leaders and voters played in these developments.

My Memories of Tobacco

Bill Sharpe’s Chatham County homeplace was on an ungraded dirt road that is now Polks Landing Rd running west from US 15-501. In this article, he describes the various aspects of tobacco growing and his memories of working in his neighbor’s tobacco field as a boy.

Industry and Commerce

The Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Company

The Story of the Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Company, 1849-1873 by Wade Hadley, 1980. The author’s abstract reads: “The story records an heroic attempt to render almost one hundred miles of the upper Cape Fear and lower Deep rivers continuously and reliably navigable for steamboats.” The 90-page booklet, which includes a bibliography and map, is now online thanks to CCHA’s partnership with the NC Digital Heritage Center.

Siler City Mills

Jerry Stone’s detailed account of the people, processes and products of Siler City Mills, from the Mills’ early days through its decline and closing.

Boling Company History 1904-1979

This 50+ page booklet tells the story of the Boling Company from its beginning in 1904 through 1979. A separate page contains photos from the booklet. Thanks to Miles Boling for sharing this history of an important Siler City company.
Chatham’s Role in Early Railroads

A brief excerpt about the first public meeting to discuss bringing rail transportation to North Carolina. The meeting was held at the residence of William Albright in Chatham.

The Bynum Cotton Mill – In the Millworkers Words

What was it like to work in the Bynum/Odell Cotton Mill? We can answer that question because in the 1970s, UNC’s Southern Oral History Program interviewed mill workers and saved their words and voices for future generations. This article extracts sections of those interviews to answer questions about working at the mill.

Prosperity Came to Pittsboro on the Train

Discusses the impact of poor roads on Pittsboro's economy and the effect of transportation improvements such as the Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Company, the Western Railroad, and the Pittsboro Railroad Company. The arrival of the railroad opened a period of prosperity and building in Pittsboro. A map shows old homes and structures in and around Pittsboro during the period of 1787-1900.

The Oval Oak Washboard

A brief history about the Oval Oak Washboard in CCHA’s collection and the Chatham Manufacturing Company that produced it.

Business Ledger for the Pittsboro Merchants Womack and Goodwin

This business ledger for the general merchants Womack and Goodwin in Pittsboro, dates from 1832-1834. The ledger lists the firm’s many customers and transactions during this period, including Green Womack (1772-1856), a prominent citizen of Pittsboro during the early 19th century. If your ancestors lived in Pittsboro or near enough to trade there in 1832-1834, you may well find their names—and purchases—listed. You can link to the ledger and find out why it is in a Cumberland County vs Chatham County collection here.

The Justice Brothers and Justice Motor Company

In Chatham County for the majority of the twentieth century, the name “Justice” was associated with automobile sales—specifically Justice Motor Company in Pittsboro and The Justice Motor Company and then Chatham Motors in Siler City—and with two Hickory Mountain born brothers—Frank N. Justice and Fred C. Justice. In this article, Margaret Hamlet Bingham, the granddaughter of Fred C. Justice, shares the history of the brothers and their automobile dealerships, and gives us a walkthrough of the Justice Motor Company Building in the 1950s.
Chatham People

Simon Green Atkins

Describes the dedication of a marker honoring the achievements of Simon Green Atkins in Haywood, Chatham County, on June 11, 2005, the 142nd anniversary of his birth. The marker is placed near the historical location of the school where Atkins received his early education and began his teaching career in 1884. Also included are photographs of the marker and celebration, as well as a brief biography of Atkins, who was the founder and first president of Winston-Salem State University. Atkins was born in 1863 in Haywood. His parents were farmers and former slaves.

Mattie Rogers Beavers – Rural Mail Carrier

Meet Mattie Rogers Beavers, who became a rural mail carrier in 1908. Her mail route was from Siler City to Harper's Crossroads and Bear Creek. For more than 24 years she delivered the mail by horse and buggy. (Think about how awful the roads were in those days!) Women on Mattie’s route gave her lists of things they needed which she purchased in town and delivered the next day. Mattie’s story was told in the Greensboro Daily News (22 July 1928). Her granddaughter, Milli Hammer, has transcribed the article and provided additional information and photos about Mattie and her family.

Black Chathamites – Making a Difference

Brief biographical sketches of eighteen black Chatham residents. All of the individuals described were either born in Chatham, received their education in the county, or lived later in life in Chatham. Included are Simon Green Atkins; Louis Edgar Bland; Mildred Edna Cotton Council; Margie Horton Ellison; Lewis Freeman; George Moses Horton; Gatha Horton Lassiter; Benjamin Joseph Lee; Dr. Mansel Philip McCleave; Walter Alston McLaughlin, Sr.; Margaret Bryant Pollard; Richard R. Ramsey, Sr.; J.R. Richardson; Jeanette French Richardson; Roxie A. Small; Jessie Walker Rodgers; Lillie Freeman Rogers; and Isaiah Eugene Taylor, Sr.

Herman Husband [Marker] Moves West

Describes why a Highway Historical Marker noting Herman Husband’s contributions to the Regulator Movement was moved from Chatham County to Randolph County. Includes links to the research by Warren Dixon that instigated this move and to additional information on Herman Husband.

Tod R. Edwards – Crossing Racial Lines

Celebrates the contributions of the Tod R. Edwards family to Chatham County. For 66 years, 1905-1961, the African-American family owned and operated the county’s largest jewelry store in Siler City—the only black-owned business in the otherwise all-white business district on Chatham Street.
The Works of George Moses Horton

George Moses Horton was an African-American poet from North Carolina, the first to be published in the Southern United States. His book The Hope of Liberty was published in 1829 while he was still enslaved. His poetic protests of his status are the first ever written by a slave in America. This document provides links to several of his works.

The Adventures of Hallie Beavers Allred

Milli Hammer tells the story of her aunt, Hallie Beavers Allred, who was born in Chatham County in 1893 to an interesting and unusual family, and who went on to lead an unusually adventurous life for a woman of her time.

Sheriff Myrtle Siler

On October 4, 1920, Myrtle Siler was appointed ‘high sheriff’ of Chatham County—becoming North Carolina’s first female sheriff. In this article, Jennifer Gillis recounts how that came to be and tells us more about Myrtle’s life.

Family Letters Reveal Personal Side of Manly Family

Charles Manly, Governor of North Carolina from 1849 to 1851 is a favorite Chatham son. Two letters—one from Charles Manly to his daughter Ida, and a second, from Governor Manly’s wife, Charity Haywood Manly, to Ida’s future husband, J. H. Baker—provide a rare glimpse of the Manly’s family life. The letters, donated by the Williamson family, have been transcribed by CCHA volunteer Cindy Schmidt.

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