

Mial Scurlock was a founder of Chatham

In 1771, when the colonial government authorized the establishment of Chatham County from the southern portion of Orange County, there was not an existing town in the area. The region had been slowly populated by Scotch-Irish and German settlers who followed the Cape Fear River up from the coast.

The territory was part of the British Crown Colony and its government consisted of a Superior Court, local justices of the peace, and a Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions. This latter body was commonly known as "the county court."

A county court house was first built on land belonging to Ambrose Edwards, but the building was in such a bad state of repair that a new court house was erected on the farm of Mial Scurlock, just south of Roberson Creek. This site was almost at the geographic center of the county.

Mial Scurlock was a planter, surveyor and a miller. He owned 1,000 acres of land, a mill on Roberson Creek, and a half interest in a mill on the Haw River. The value of his personal property was said to total £20,000, a goodly sum in those days.

When the Court House was erected on his land, Mr. Scurlock, ever the entrepreneur, set up a tavern for the use of people attending the court. The tavern's rates and fees were set by the Court. During the August 1774 term these rates were as follows: a hot dinner with beer or "cider" – 1 shilling, 4 pence; and lodging with a "good feather bed" – 4 pence per night.

Mial Scurlock became Clerk of Chatham County in 1777. In the same year the General Assembly of North Carolina, which had joined the Revolution, met in New Bern, and

CHATHAM'S HISTORICAL HERITAGE

by Fred J. Vatter



Scurlock had served in its House of Commons. He resigned after the beginning of its first session to take the aforementioned County Clerk position. Scurlock also had been appointed First Major of two companies of Minute Men to be raised in Chatham County in September 1775. He was also appointed one of three commissioners to take possession of confiscated Tory property.

Unfortunately, Major Scurlock did not live to see the end of the Revolutionary War. He died in June 1781 and his widow Sarah ran the plantation and operated the tavern. Soon after Mial's death Lord Cornwallis, whose army invaded and camped at "Chatham Court House", made his headquarters at the Scurlock house. Even though she was a widow of an officer of the North Carolina Militia, was outspoken in her support of the revolution, and had a son in the Continental Army, she and her children were treated with consideration and no property was abused.

In July 1781, the Tory leader, David Fanning, attacked the Chatham Court House during a trial and captured 53 prisoners, including Thomas Scurlock, son of

Mial. They were marched off to Wilmington where they were held until the end of the war.

Mial and Sarah Howard Scurlock had 13 children. Three sons, George, James and William are known to have served in the Revolutionary War, and George was killed in battle at Cowpers, South Carolina. Mial, Jr. served in the North Carolina General Assembly in 1797, Thomas was captured and jailed in Wilmington by the British.

The Scurlock house reportedly stood until early in the 20th century and had clapboards bearing the carved initials of British soldiers.

Fred J. Vatter is Past President of Chatham County Historical Association and a Board Member.

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