

## Warrenton, NC : Origins

The origins of Warrenton, NC, can be traced back to well before the Revolutionary War, even before the initial settling of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. Native American Indians, the Tuscarora, populated this area prior to the first incursions of white explorers who came to the North Carolina region, in and around present day Warren County, as early as the late 16th and early 17th centuries. From the early 1700's to around 1730, more and more settlements were created. One of the first known settlers to what would eventually become Warren County was William Raleigh Duke in 1735. (His grandson George Washington Duke was the founder of Duke University in Durham, NC)

Born in 1709, William Raleigh Duke, was the youngest son of Raleigh Duke, Esq. of Hayes (Barton) Farm, Dovershire, England. Hayes Farm is still owned by the descendants of Williams older brother. It was the birthplace of Sir Walter Raleigh in 1552 (Raleigh's father leased the estate from the Duke family of Otterton, England ) and a picture of it can be seen in the first volume of Hawk's History of North Carolina.

The familial relationship between the Dukes and Raleighs is not completely clear [but Mr. Raleigh Daniel, of Virginia, is a descendant of Sir Walter Raleigh] says that he always understood that Hayes Farm ascended from the Duke family by intermarriage with the Raleighs. Although marriage records cannot be located, some favor is lent to this supposed marriage by the fact that William Fever's father was named Raleigh Duke.

Williams parents died when he was a small child, and the estate passed, according to English law and custom, to his oldest brother. William Duke was left poor and brought to the Virginia Colony by his relative Col. William Byrd, of Westover on James River, who reared him and gave him the rudiments of a good business education and better than all taught him to work. {NOTE: It is said that William Raleigh Duke was a grown man and well educated when he came to Virginia with Col. Byrd and had an interest in the Virginia estate.}

**In 1727 Col. Byrd was appointed one of the Commissioners to run the dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina, and as we learned from his published account of the survey, he was so pleased with the soil of what is now Warren County, that he called it the "Land of Eden", and pronounced it a great country for a young man. A short time afterward, William Duke, probably through Col. Byrd's influence, moved to North Carolina, and in 1735, married Mary Green a daughter of Thomas Edward Green, who lived in what is now Warren County then a part of Edgecombe. William Duke settled on "Purchase Patent", and had a lot of children.**

**The area was not formally created as a county until 1764, when Bute County, the forerunner of Warren County, was created. Family names of Hawkins, Macon, Duke, Jones, Eaton, and Person moved into the area. The Shocco community, while not incorporated, began to form with the construction of a local tavern and the Bute County Courthouse in the vicinity. By the time of the Revolutionary War in 1776, the name of Bute took a negative connotation, as Lord Bute was the Prime Minister of England.**

**In 1779, the North Carolina State legislature passed a bill that would divide Bute County and remove the name. As such, the northern half of this division became what is now Warren County (name comes from a Massachusetts soldier who was killed in action while fighting at Bunker Hill). The bottom half of this now divided area was named Franklin County. It was at this time when William Duke gave 50 acres of land to the state on North Carolina for the purpose of building the town of Warrenton, the county seat for the new county.**

**With the close of the Revolutionary War, Warren County began to experience prosperity, not only on an economic scale in the form tobacco and cotton, but in producing noted politicians. Names such as Nathaniel Macon and Benjamin Hawkins became part of the state government.**

**Educational establishments at this time included the Warrenton Female College, thirteen academies and grammar schools, and ten primary and common schools. The Warrenton Male Academy, now the John Graham Center, was established in downtown Warrenton and remains today as a local government center and home of the County Department of**

**Social Services.** Warren County also had a carriage factory, 26 gristmills, four flour mills, 10 grocery and dry goods stores, and seven saw mills. Yet as prosperity increased, once again so to did the clouds of war, as the country wrestled with the issue of states rights. Present-day Ridgeway was, during the Civil War, Camp Beauregard, a large training facility for Confederate troops, including the First North Carolina State and First North Carolina Cavalry.

**Major Orren Randolph Smith, a Warrenton native, designed the original Stars and Bars flag and present-day Fort Bragg is named for Confederate General Braxton Bragg, also a Warrenton native.**

**With the end of the Civil War and the ensuing reconstruction period, Warren County experienced change and some deterioration of its structure. Due to its plantation economy, after the war, mansions became dilapidated, there was a decline in its racing economy, and the resorts that centered on the mineral springs began to close.**

**In time the fabric of Warren County would experience resurgence in the agricultural and textile industries, while still retaining its historical heritage. Many historic homes in downtown Warrenton as well as numerous sites throughout the County have been refurbished, adding to a rich culture. As the population for North Carolina grows, especially in the Raleigh-Durham area, more and more people are attracted to the simpler lifestyle of Warrenton and the surrounding area.**

**Even with this growth, many families of Warren County can still trace their ancestry back to the original founders, as well as those who have influenced the history and development of the State of North Carolina, America and the World.**

**Compiled by Robert Schuerch 2007**