

Annals of the Ashpole Community 1750-1814

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by
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 of
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The following is the first of several segments that provide us the early history of one of the more prominent Alford branches. The work was provided to our Alford effort in 1986 by Michael I. Shoop who was then reference librarian in the Robeson County Public Library.

There are several branches of the Alford family in South Carolina, and there will be considerable emphasis on South Carolina Alford in preparation for the AAFA meeting in that state in 2008. We are unable to follow the ancestry of most of the South Carolina Alford branches, but the branch discussed in this article is the exception. Many of the descendants of these Robeson County Alford settled across the state line in Marion and Dillon Counties, South Carolina. We can trace their ancestry back to the mid 17th century in Virginia.

Judge Z. T. Fulmore, the author of the "ANNALS OF ASHPOLE COMMUNITY, 1750-1814" was born November 11, 1846, at the old Fulmore home about one mile east of Ashpole Church, on the Red Springs road. As a boy he attended various schools in the community, the last of which was Ashland, which he describes in his ANNALS. He attended Brigham School for two years and then enlisted in the Confederate Army at the age of 17 ½ years and fought in the Battle of Fort Fisher and was captured there. After the war he returned to the Bingham School to finish his course. He attended the University of Virginia in 1867 and graduated in law in 1870. He moved to Texas the same year and opened a law office in Austin. He had a long and distinguished career as a lawyer and civic leader, becoming an

outstanding man of the city and state. He was specially interested in history and wrote several books on the history of his adopted state. He was specially interested in his boyhood home, visiting it frequently. He collected the material for his ANNALS on these visits, and finally he wrote the narrative which we of Ashpole so deeply appreciate. As he says, "With all its errors and imperfections, I offer it in affectionate remembrance of the old community where I was born and reared, and commend it to the keeping of the authorities of Ashpole Church, around which so many of the tenderest recollections of youth cluster." He died June 22, 1923.

In the absence of any local efforts along that line, I concluded several years ago to see what I could do towards collecting such data about the early history of Ashpole Church as my limited opportunities would permit, but in the outset found that the old community of Ashpole had a history that ran back of the establishment of the church between thirty-five and forty years.

Furthermore, I found that the records of the church from its establishment in 1796 down to about 1830 had been lost or destroyed and the minutes of Orange Presbytery, to which jurisdiction it belonged until 1813, were so meager as to be almost valueless.

For these and other good reasons I changed my purpose and have embraced the period extending from 1750 down to 1814, in order to get a general perspective of the beginnings of the entire community — this will include of course, such parts of the early history of Ashpole Church as I have been able to obtain from the miscellaneous sources available to me.

As a convenient and agreeable method of research I have resorted to the identification of the old families and have dealt with some genealogies in order to make the connection between that obscure period and the status of the present generation for obvious reasons, and in order to identify those families, I have made as critical a study as I could of the federal census of heads of families in 1790, living in that community and in the contiguous region of South Carolina as far south as Little Pee Dee River which became a part of the old Ashpole community in 1796.

As this has involved the exercise of more or less judgment, it is liable to errors in many instances, but such errors may be easily corrected by those who have the facts.

The roll of some of these families have long since disappeared from the roll of Robeson citizenship, but almost without exceptions some of their descendants are still living there.

An examination of the brief sketches of some of these people will disclose the prominent place which the old community occupied in the earliest annals of Robeson, both in Church and State, and the ever widening influence their lives had in the up-building of, at least, seventeen states of the Union.

With all its errors and imperfections, I offer it in affectionate remembrance of the old community where I was born and reared, and commend it to the keeping of the authorities of Ashpole Church, around which so many of the tenderest recollections of youth cluster — reserving only the right to revise and correct as circumstances may justify. It is hardly necessary to state that this is not intended as a history but as a simple narrative which may in some measure serve as a contribution to aid in rescuing from oblivion much that has gone beyond recall.

The Ashpole community which forms the subject matter of this narrative in its widest aspect, may be described as that part of Robeson County embraced within the area of the modern townships of Thompson and Alfordville together with that part of South Carolina extending from a point on the north bank of the Little Pee Dee River, several miles southeast to Dillon, up to where that river emerges from Richmond County.

The first settlers in the region were native born Americans of English, Welsh and Scotch Irish descent, augmented after the close of the Revolutionary War by Scotch families mostly all of which were natives of Scotland, though there were a few Scotch settlers there at a much earlier date.

Prior to the coming of the white men, there were a few Indian families — Oxendine, Dial, Hunt, Chavis, Fiveash, Locklear and possibly others. If they identified the streams and other natural objects by any geographical names, no vestige of it has come down to me.

The Colonial Records of North Carolina indicate that Abraham Paul was the earliest permanent white settler there, a grant of land having been issued to him in 1750, the location being around the head waters of what afterwards became known as Ashpole Swamp. He was living there in 1790 as was William Paul and many of their descendants have continued to live there ever since that time.

The bulk of the prominent settlers who came in later seem to have come between the years 1757 and 1762. From that time up to the beginning of the Revolution, immigrants flowed in and there were many comfortable homes and well-tilled, but small farms, scattered up and down the upper reaches of Ashpole Swamp and its tributaries. The principal occupation of the people was stock raising. They introduced horses, cattle, sheep and hogs, and the virgin range was admirably adapted to

their business. A market for their surplus stock was found in Charleston, and Gregg in his "Old Cheraw" is authority for the statement that the people of that section drove cattle as far north as Richmond and Philadelphia.

The woods were full of wild game, the streams abounded in fish, the wants of the people were few and simple, and property accumulated rapidly so that at the beginning of the Revolution they were one of the most prosperous communities in the whole country. A number of them doubtless participated in the war of Revolution in one military capacity or another, but there is no record of it so far as I know.

They had opened up roads, constructed sunken rafts for the passage of wheeled vehicles across the swamps, built the first grist mill, planted out the first orchards, established the first community religious worship, organized the first schools and generally laid the foundation of civilization in that section.

The only native Scotchman on Ashpole so far as I can ascertain was Archibald McKissock who was a staunch Whig and an aggressive opponent of the forces under Fanning. He left that vicinity in the closing year of the Revolution. The only troubles that seriously interfered with the settlers were several marauding expeditions which came up from South Carolina after the disastrous defeat of Gates, and though they were no more than lawless, irresponsible bandits, pure and simple, intent upon robbery and if necessary to accomplish their purpose, murder, they were called Tories. Common hardships and perils, common hopes and aspirations drew the people together into a social and religious unit which resulted in the establishment of a school and church where their children grew up together, intermarried and in later years became the pillars of society there. When their church and school was first established is one of the many important facts that have been relegated to oblivion. It was about two miles and a half in an almost northerly direction from the site of the modern Ashpole Church, and came to be known as the Ashpole Meeting House. It seems to have been the social and religious unit of the community until abandoned and Providence (Methodist) and Ashpole (Presbyterian) Churches succeeded it.

In the inchoate state of religious worship, it was doubtless a union congregation based upon the broad principle of Christianity without regard to denominationalism.

The first seeds of division began to germinate after the first visit to Robeson of the First great missionary Bishop, Francis Asbury, to whom the historian McMaster justly says more is due for the origin and spread of the Methodist Church in American than any other man living or dead. Besides a vague tradition that a Methodist Society was formed which held services at the home of Lemuel Thompson and other men of the Methodist persuasion, we have no definite information as to results until 1803, when Bishop Asbury made his second visit to Robeson.

Some years ago there was published in three volumes, what is known as "Asbury's Journal", and as it touches upon the history of the Ashpole Community, I shall make no apology for referring to his first two visits.

In March, 1787 while on his tour south, having doubtless heard of the recent creation of Robeson County and the establishment of Lumberton as its county seat, he made a hasty visit there and as he says he preached in the new Court House after which he hurried on to Buck Swamp in South Carolina. No incidents are given of this tour save the simple fact he preached in Lumberton. Sixteen years elapsed before he made another visit and this time from South Carolina. Arriving at the Ashpole community, he became the guest of Brittan Drake, and on the next day preached at what he called a "pine pole meeting house". (1803) In common parlance today we would say "log church".

He had a good congregation, preached on Christian Perfection, and says himself that he was pleased with his efforts. He then goes on to say that he met many Scotch here, and speaks complimentary of their religious status. The next day he rode fifteen miles to Lumberton through the rain. His reputation having become nation wide, two young Presbyterian preachers, Malcolm McNair and Duncan Brown, determined to avail themselves of the sermon and followed him to Lumberton. There he met them and was interviewed by them and referred to them and their work among the Scotch Presbyterians.

It seems at that time there was no church building in Lumberton, and instead of holding the service in the Court House, the different denominations used the Lumberton Academy for religious worship. This Academy had been chartered four years after the Bishop's first visit, was now in a flourishing state and had the best auditorium in the village. For an unexplained reason the Bishop did not preach at this appointment but assigned that duty to his assistant, his

part of the service being only to exhort. He is careful to state that there was a flourishing Methodist Society in the village. Some of his observations on Lumberton are noteworthy. Among other things he says it had a population of about two hundred, is the head of navigation of Drowning Creek, so called because some Indians had been drowned in it, and that its principle commerce is carried on with Georgetown, etc., etc..

As old Providence passed out about sixty years ago, to be superseded by Asbury Church, a few words concerning it may not be out of place.

Being the oldest son of a pious Methodist mother, I was baptized there in 1849, a fact which stirs the impulse to indulge in some person reminiscences. It was situated about four and a half miles east of Ashpole and on the same highway to Lumberton. I do not know, nor have I been able to find out anything about it for the first forty or fifty years of its history. I have a sort of hazy recollection of having attended the last camp meeting ever held there. Among her preachers, Martin, Jones, Caraway, and Peter Doub are distinctly remembered; all were of exemplary character and of more or less ability. Jones was an author as well as a preacher.

Some of my first prejudices against the Roman Catholics were imbibed from this book by Jones, "The Great Apostasy". It was right in the edge of the Presbyterian settlement on the west and the appointments for services there seem to have been arranged so as not to conflict with those at Ashpole so that all the people might have the benefit of both. The result was a spirit of liberality and fraternity not common among different denominations of that day.

The abandonment of the old church site while it assured a location more central to the Methodist population tended along with other influences hereinafter mentioned to disturb the old community unit.

A rather unique feature of the inside arrangement of the building and one which may be of interest to those who never lived during the days of slavery was the accommodations provided for the negro worshippers. In his tour through the southern states, Bishop Asbury never missed an opportunity to administer to the spiritual wants of the slaves. Here a raised platform extending all the way across the rear end of the church was occupied by this class and proper encouragement given them to participate in the services. From this elevated platform they could plainly see the minister in

the pulpit at the other end of the church and were eager listeners.

As part of the closing service the minister would often call on some one of these members to pray. Among the favorite ones was Ceasar McCallum, the slave of an Elder of Ashpole Church. He was more than ordinarily familiar with the Bible, especially with the book of Revelations from which he learned much of his poetic imagery. The old man's powerful voice and the fervency and grandiloquence of his prayers made him a great favorite with all classes and gave him a reputation that extended beyond the boundaries of the congregation. The old church was abandoned about 1860.

The year 1787 was replete with historical events, other than Bishop Asbury's visit.

In that year Robeson was created and organized. Of its two first members of the State Legislature, Elias Barnes of the Ashpole community was one. He and Sampson Bridgers were also two of the trustees of the lottery by means of which the main site of the town of Lumberton was obtained. John Cade and his neighbor, Sampson Bridgers, were selected as two of the three Commissioners to organize the county.

Another event that affected every community in the United States took place during this year. The need of a closer union than had been possible under the Articles of Confederation was sorely felt everywhere, especially in those communities adjacent to state lines.

To remedy the many existing evils, the Constitution of the United States was framed, and provision made for its ratification by the states. A convention was called to meet at Hillsboro to consider the matter. Robeson was entitled to five delegates in this body — John Willis of Lumberton, John Regan of the Saddletree section, Neill Brown, Jr. of the upper Rart Swamp region, and John Cade and Elias Barnes of Ashpole were selected.

Although all the delegates from Robeson except Regan voted for ratification, it failed.

Another convention was called to meet in 1789, and the same delegates, except Regan, were selected. In his place young Sion Alford was chosen. The Constitution was ratified and North Carolina joined the new union; three of the five delegates from Robeson County were residents of the Ashpole community. These facts are

mentioned to show the position of the Community at that early date.

A somewhat notable place was Ashpole Bridge which was about two miles north of the site of the present town of Rowland, adjacent to the farm now owned by W.H. Graham. I don't remember to have seen any reference to it in any of my researches except in the will of John Cade. It will be particularly noticed in the sketch of him later on.

As already mentioned, as soon as peace was assured after the Revolution, immigration began to flow in and the country between Ashpole and Richmond on the west and from the immediate country on the south, southeast and southwest began to fill up with new settlers almost exclusively Scotch. The old settlers had been living there in an isolated situation and the newcomers met with a warm welcome not only from their countrymen who had previously settled there, but from the old settlers generally.

I have found no means of fixing the dates of arrivals except in a few cases of those who came between 1785 and 1790.

One of the first acts passed by the first Congress of the United States was a provision for the census of the population. This shows substantially all heads of families in Robeson in that year.

One of the drawbacks to it was the uncertainty as to the exact lines between North and South Carolina, and the county lines between Richmond and Robeson. It is an invaluable aid in ferreting out family history. I have depended upon it in this narrative in identifying the families of the Ashpole Community in 1790, and have made the classification of the names which will be largely self-explanatory.

The first classification embraces those old settlers of English, Welsh and Scotch-Irish descent who made their homes on Ashpole Swamp and its tributaries.

The names are: Jacob Alford, James Alford, Sion

Alford, Elias Barnes, Sampson Bridgers, James Bullard, Arthur Braswell, David Braswell, Charles Bullock, John Cade, Stephen Cade, Britton Drake, Lucy Gaddy, Joseph Hammond, John Jackson, Jessie Jernigan, William Kennedy, Joseph Kitchin, Wright Leggett, Robert McTyer, Neill Martin, Solomon Miller, Nazare Mitchell, John Rackley, Joseph Rackley, Arch Smith, Jonathan Taylor, Reuben Thompson, George Thompson, John Thompson, Henry Thompson, Lemuel Thompson, Charles Thompson, Trimmegan Thompson, W.B. Thompson, Othniel Trawick and John Watson.

[Please do not fail to read the AAFA NOTES that follow this next paragraph.]

Jacob Alford was the progenitor of the Alford names in Robeson. He was born about 1756 in that part of Johnston [County] from which Wake [The capital city of Raleigh is in Wake County] was created in 1770, and is reputed to have been one of nineteen children. His father, Lodowick, Sr., having twice married. His father was prominent in the early history of Raleigh and Wake County. His brother, Warren, was one of the original residents of Raleigh, was a vestryman in the first Episcopal Church there. He was a prominent Mason, and in his home was organized the first Masonic Lodge of that city. His brother, Lodowick, Jr., was a delegate to the Convention which met at Halifax in December 1776, and framed the first Constitution of North Carolina and later served as a member of the Legislature from that county. The names of his brothers Julius, Hudson and William are mentioned in the Colonial Records of North Carolina, as holding some subordinate positions.

AAFA NOTES: The St. Peter's Parish Register in New Kent Co., VA prove that Jacob was born 1738 in that county. His father had three different wives identified in that record and it is thought he had at least one more in North Carolina. Some would not agree that the Lodwick, Jr. mentioned above was the son of the Lodwick who died in Franklin Co.

(To be continued in a future issue.)