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THE
Historic Tea-Party of Edenton,

OCTOBER 25TH, 1774.

AN INCIDENT IN NORTH CAROLINA
CONNECTED WITH BRITISH
TAXATION

—BY—

RICHARD DILLARD, M. D.

"National recollection is the foundation of national character."

Edward Everett.

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TO
HON. W. D. PRUDEN,
OF THE ROANOKE COLONY MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION
THIS IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.



MRS. PENELOPE BARKER.

PRESIDENT OF THE EDENTON TEA-PARTY OF 1774.

[From a portrait in possession of her descendants]

PROEM.

The religious votaries of the Maldivian Isles, at certain times, commit to the mercy of the wind and waves little boats laden with rich hued flowers, delicate perfumes, and sweet-scented woods of their native isles, hoping to receive in return rich rewards for the sacrifice; though I have no flowers of rhetoric to offer, no measured lines, no burning incense from the Muses' shrine, 'tis thus I consign this bit of native history rudderless to the tide, trusting some friendly wave may bear it safely on: Hoping also like Ruth in the fields of Boaz, to glean, and bind together a few handfuls, which other and abler reapers have carelessly, or on purpose let fall.

There is in Afghanistan, according to Eastern tradition, a miraculous history plant, which records upon its broad luxurious leaves whatever happens each day in its immediate vicinity; There are no inaccuracies and misstatements of the press, no partiality or partizan writers, no incongruity of conflicting records, but like the polished waters around which it flourishes, it faithfully mirrors the enviring objects. Unfortunately in this country there is no such gift by Nature, no historic Genii, but there is, I believe, a movement on foot to condense, preserve, and separate true and legitimate history from the ordinary records of the press. The ancients were especially particular that their records should be exact, even the works of the historian Livy, barely escaped annihilation at the hands of the infamous Caligula, for their alleged historical inaccuracies. As history is but the story of the past, then posterity demands a truthful and unbiased narration of facts; "Truth comes to us from the past, as gold is washed down from the mountains of Sierra Nevada, in minute but precious particles, and intermixed with infinite alloy, the debris of centuries." It is sufficient for us to preserve facts as they happen, the succeeding generations will give them their proper coloring.

Tacitus, appreciating the value of history to mankind, wrote, nearly twenty centuries ago, that its chief object was "to rescue virtuous actions from the oblivion, to which the want of records would consign them."

Even in this practical, speculative age there seems to be a tendency all over our country to exhume from oblivion the events and traditions of our past. This growing reverence for American history is an evidence of increasing national intelligence, pride and dignity. Unfortunately for North Carolina, many of her most

beautiful traditions have been allowed to pass unnoticed, and her glorious deeds regarded as mere ephemera to perish with the actors. The establishment of a chair of history at the state university, and the organization of the historical society will do much to develop and preserve our vast and valuable historic material. We must confess, and with mortification and chagrin, that in order to study any subject connected with state history intelligently, we have been obliged in the past to refer not only to the historical societies of other states, but even to the libraries of Europe.

It is the object of this paper to bring into light an exceptionally interesting and patriotic incident in North Carolina, hitherto only casually noticed by one state historian. A stranger coming to Edenton twenty-five years ago was shown an old-fashioned, long wooden house fronting directly on the beautiful court-house green; this historic house has since yielded to the ruthless hand of modern vandalism. It was the residence of Mrs. Elizabeth King, and under its roof fifty-one patriotic ladies,* (and not fifty-four as stated erroneously by Wheeler) met October 25th, 1774, and passed resolutions commending the action of the provincial congress. They also declared they would not conform "to that Pernicious Custom of Drinking Tea, or that the aforesaid Ladys would not promote ye wear of any manufacture from England" until the tax was repealed. Wheeler, in alluding to this incident and to the stormy days closely preceding the Revolution, in his second volume says, "The patriotism of the men was even exceeded by that of the women. By some strange freak of circumstance, many years ago, there was found at Gibraltar a beautiful picture done in skillful style, enameled on glass, of a 'meeting of the ladies of Edenton destroying the tea, (their favorite beverage) when it was taxed by the Eng-

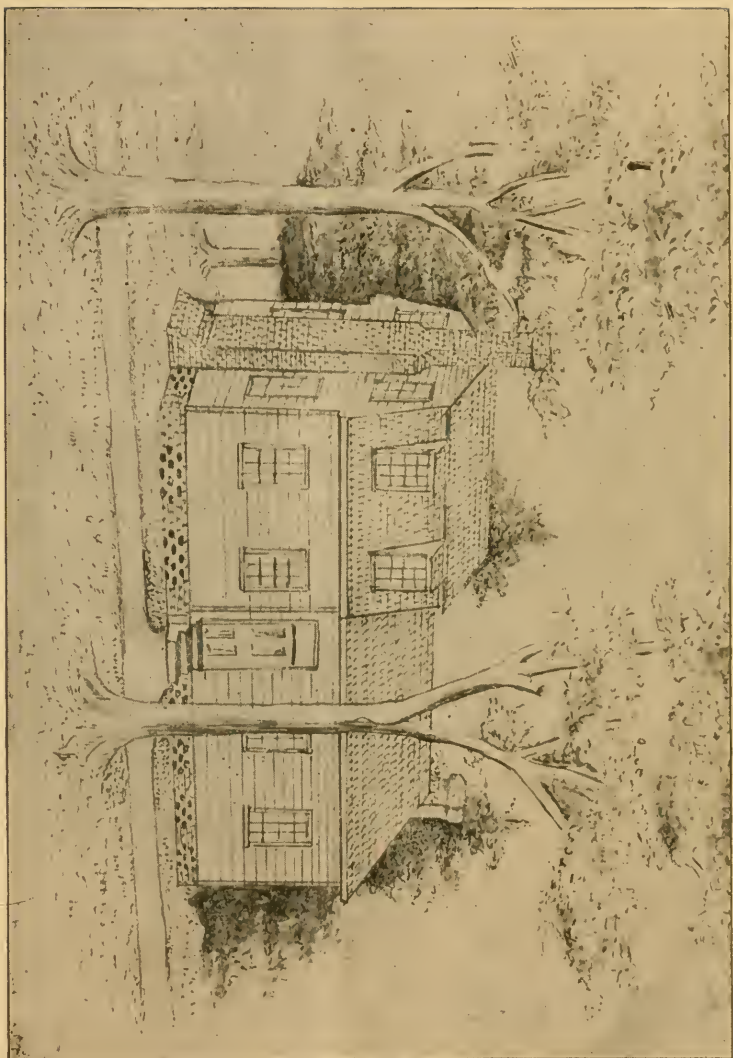
*As the population was sparse, it is very probable that fifty-one names comprised most of the ladies living in and around Edenton then.

lish parliament. This picture was procured by some of the officers of our navy, and was sent to Edenton, where I saw it in 1830."

This is not only erroneous, but Mr. Wheeler has also misquoted the reference to the meeting in the American Archives, and there has been considerable other misinformation afloat regarding it, all of which I shall endeavor to set aright. The following is the correct notice copied directly from the American Archives, and occupies just twelve lines: "Association Signed by Ladies of Edenton, North Carolina, October 25, 1774. As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears to affect the peace and happiness of our country; and it has been thought necessary for the publick good to enter into several particular resolves, by meeting of Members of Deputies from the whole province, it is a duty that we owe not only to our near and dear relations and connections, but to ourselves, who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do everything as far as lies in our power to testify our sincere adherence to the same, and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper, as a witness of our fixed intention, and solemn determination to do so.' Signed by fifty-one ladies."*

Women have always been potent factors in all great moral and political reformations. The drafting of such resolutions, so directly antagonistic to royal authority required a calmer, far more enviable courage than that developed by the fanatic heroism of the crusades, or the feverish bravery of martial music. The tax upon tea was a direct insult to their household gods; it poisoned every cup of their tea, it affected every hearthstone in the province. In looking back upon our past it should be a matter of pride to know, that such women helped to form the preface of our history, characters which should be held up to our children as worthy of emulation.

*American Archives fourth series, vol. I. 89I.



OLD TEA PARTY HOUSE, FACING COURT HOUSE GREEN.
(Residence of Mrs. Elizabeth King)

“These are deeds which should not pass away,
And names that must not wither, though the earth
Forgets her empires with a just decay.”

The account of this tea-party found its way into the London papers of that day, and the effect it had there may be noted in the following old letter, strongly tinged with sarcasm. It was written by Arthur Iredell of London to his brother James Iredell, a distinguished patriot of this place, who married Miss Hannah Johnson, a sister of one of the signers of the noted document.

“LONDON QUEEN SQUARE,” January 31, 1775.

DEAR BROTHER: I see by the newspaper the Edenton ladies have signalized themselves by their protest against tea drinking. The name of Johnston I see among others; are any of my sister's relations patriotic heroines? Is there a female congress at Edenton too? I hope not, for we Englishmen are afraid of the male congress, but if the ladies, who have ever since the Amazonian era been esteemed the most formidable enemies; if they, I say, should attack us, the most fatal consequence is to be dreaded. So dexterous in the handling of a dart, each wound they give is mortal; whilst we, so unhappily formed by nature, the more we strive to conquer them, the more we are conquered. The Edenton ladies, conscious, I suppose, of this superiority on their side, by a former experience, are willing I imagine, to crush us into atoms by their omnipotency; the only security on our side to prevent the impending ruin, that I can perceive, is the probability that there are but few places in America which possess so much female artillery as Edenton.

Pray let me know all the particulars when you favor me with a letter. Your most affectionate friend and brother.

ARTHUR IREDELL. *

The society of Edenton at this period was charming in its refinement and culture; it was at one time the colonial capital, and social rival of Williamsburg, Virginia. Edenton then had five hundred inhabitants. Its galaxy of distinguished patriots, both men and women, would shine resplendent in any country or in any age. The tea-party then, as now, was one of the most fashionable modes of entertaining. The English were essentially a tea-drinking nation, and consequently tea became the almost universal drink of the colonies. Dr. Johnson declared that “with tea he amused the evening, with tea

* Life and correspondence of James Iredell, vol. 1, page 230.

solaced the midnight, and with tea welcomed the morning". Coffee was not introduced in Europe until much later, the first cup having been drunk by Louis XIV. of France at a cost of twenty-nine dollars per pound. The principal variety of tea used by the colonies was the Bohea, or black tea, and came from India. It was of the purest quality, the art of sophistication and adulteration being unknown at that day. The feeling of ease and comfort inspired by an elegant cup of tea, as well as the exhilaration of the mental faculties which it produces, made it a necessary assistant to break the stiffness of those old-fashioned parties. It contains an active principle thine, which, taken in considerable quantity, produces a species of intoxication. Foreigners who visit China, where tea is served upon almost every occasion, become frequently tea-drunk. The method of preparing tea by our ancestors was essentially that of the wealthy class in China. The tea was brought upon the table in decorated china tea-caddies, some of which are still in existence, along with an urn of boiling water. The tea-leaves were then placed in the cup of every guest, the cup filled with hot water, and the saucer inverted over it for a few minutes to retain the aroma. The tea-pot was only used then by the rather bourgeoisie. Social life was never more enjoyed than then, there was an abandon and freedom of manner, united with an open-hearted hospitality, of which we know nothing at this day, when social restrictions restrict also social pleasures.

Col. Edward Buncombe but crystalized, and formulated the almost universal feeling of this section, when he inscribed, in unmistakable lines upon his front gate the euphaneous distich,

"Welcome all
To Buncombe Hall"*

There were quiltings, and cotillion parties, and tea-parties without number, the gentlemen would often go

*Buncombe Hall stood in Washington Co., and was the seat of a generous hospitality; The mantel from its banquet hall is now in the Courthouse at Asheville the county seat of Buncombe.

great distances on horseback, with their sweethearts riding behind them, and attend these gatherings. If the night was cold, blazing fires of lightwood crackled to receive them, and huge bowls of spicy apple-toddy mellowed to enliven and cheer, later in the evening tea would invariably be served, which no one would be so unfashionable as to refuse. An old lady informed me that her grandmother had a medical friend, who would always drink fourteen cups of tea.

Under its influence conversation enlivened, and wit sparkled. After tea the ladies would gossip, and spin, and reel, while the gentlemen would retire to discuss the political issues of the day, the policy of Lord North in regard to the American colonies, or the unjust tax which was about to be placed upon tea, or perhaps one would read aloud a recent speech by Mr. Pitt, from an English newspaper, which he had been so fortunate to obtain from some incoming ship; All along this would be punctuated by puffs of tobacco smoke from their long-stemmed pipes. They were as notional about their tobacco as they were about their tea, the method of preparing and using the weed, was to cure it in the sun, cut it upon a maple log, keep it in a lilly pot, which was a jar of white earth, and to light the pipe with a splinter of juniper, or with a coal of fire, in a pair of silver tongs made for that purpose.

The incidents connected with this particular tea-party are especially interesting, as they come to us through the blue mist of a century. We can easily imagine how they sat around in their low-necked, short-waisted gowns, and after they had gossiped sufficiently, "it was resolved that those who could spin, ought to be employed in that way, and those who could not should reel. When the time arrived for drinking tea, Bohea, and Hyperion were provided, and every one of the ladies judiciously rejected the poisonous Bohea, and unanimously and to their very great honor, preferred the balsamic Hyperion" which was nothing more than the dried leaves of the raspberry vine, a drink, in the writer's opinion, more vile even than the

much vaunted Yeopon.

The picture of this patriotic party, incorrectly alluded to by Wheeler, has a strange and unique history, and I give it as I have received it from the lady into whose possession the picture has fallen. Lieutenant William T. Muse, a United States naval officer, who became conspicuous during the civil war, and whose mother was a Miss Blount of Edenton, while on a cruise in the Mediterranean stopped at Port Mahon on the island of Minorca, and accidentally saw hanging in a barber's shop there a picture, representing the Edenton tea-party of 1774. It was purchased, and brought by him to Edenton in 1830. I have this date from an old Bible bearing the date of his return from the cruise. It was first placed on exhibition in the court-house, and the representation of the characters was so distinct that many of the ladies were easily recognized. It then found a resting place in the old tailor shop of Joseph Manning, ancestor of Chief Justice Manning of Louisiana, and finally in a cracked condition, was intrusted to the care of a lady. During the confusion of refugeeing incident to the civil war, it was broken in three pieces.

It is a painting upon glass, twelve by fourteen inches. Upon one of the pieces is the declaration set forth by the ladies, that they would drink no tea, nor wear any stuffs of British manufacture. Upon another is the picture of the lady, who presided upon that occasion. She is seated at a table with a pen in her hand, her maid Amelia standing behind her chair. This maid lived for many years after this incident, and is still remembered by some of the oldest citizens. By a singular coincidence her granddaughter is still living upon the very same lot where the tea-party was held. Upon the third fragment of this picture in plain letters is written, "The Town of Edenton." It is not known how the picture of this party was obtained, or how it found its way to Port Mahon, or even into the barber shop. The printer's name in the corner of the picture is said to have been the same one, who printed the celebrated letters of Junius in the reign of George III.

Pictures have immortalized many events in history, and it is very probable that but for this one, the pleasing little incident would have been lost or forgotten. The defense of Champigny, by the "Garde Mobile," could never have been so immortalized in prose or rhyme, as by the brush of Edouard Detaille. The Confederate etchings by Dr. A. J. Volck, spoke volumes and were so severe, that he was confined in Fort McHenry prison, and the political cartoons by John Tanniel of the London Punch produced a profound sensation. "Porte Crayon;" (General Strother), in his interesting article on Edenton and the surroundings, written for Harper's Magazine in 1857, says, "It is to be regretted that Porte Crayon did not get a sight of this painting, that the world might have heard more of it, and that the patriotism of the Ladies of Edenton might have been blazoned beside that of the men of Boston, who have figured in so many bad woodcuts." None of the names of the fifty-one ladies present at this party have been preserved in history, but I have succeeded in rescuing five of them from the local traditions. Mrs. Penelope Barker, whose picture appears here, was the president of this party. She was no advocate of celibacy, having been married first to a Mr. Hodgson, then to a Mr. Craven, and lastly to Mr. Barker, whom she survived.

At a casual glance one might easily mistake her portrait for that of Lady Washington. She was one of those lofty, intrepid, high-born women peculiarly fitted by nature to lead; fear formed no part of her composition. Her face bears the expression of sternness without harshness, which a cheap novelist would describe as hauteur. She was a brilliant conversationalist, and a society leader of her day.

Mr. Thomas Barker,* her husband, was a gifted lawyer and had for his pupil at one time the distinguished Governor, Samuel Johnston. The attachment of Gov. Johnston for Mr. Barker was so great, that in after years he had

*A portrait of Thomas Barker by Sir. Joshua Reynolds, graces the Hayes library. There is also a fine portrait of him, probably by Prinçely, in the Cupola house.

him and his more illustrious wife interred in his private graveyard on his beautiful estate Hayes,* where a mossy slab marks their last resting-place. Mr. Barker was detained for some time in London during the Revolution, and while there his wife was called upon to show some of that pluck, and courage she had evinced at the tea-party. Being informed by a servant that some British soldiers were taking her carriage horses from her stables, she snatched her husband's sword from the wall, went out and with a single blow severed the reins in the officer's hands, and drove her horses back into the stables. The British officer declared, that for such exhibition of bravery, she should be allowed to keep her horses, and she was never afterwards molested. Mrs. Barker's residence stood upon the site now occupied by the Woodward Hotel.

Mrs. Sarah Valentine was also one of the signers, her portrait is still in the possession of her descendants,† and her house is still standing on lower end of Main St. Mrs. Elizabeth King was another signer, and it was at her house as before mentioned, that the party was held. She was the wife of Thomas King, a prominent merchant of the town. The Miss Johnston referred to in the Iredell letter was undoubtedly Miss Isabella, a sister of Governor Johnston. She was engaged to Joseph Hewes, a signer of the Declaration of Independence from North Carolina and died just before her marriage was consummated. Hewes, who was a man of great wealth and refinement, soon followed her broken-hearted to the grave.

Mrs. Winifred Wiggins Hoskins, was another signer, and lived in the country near Edenton, she was the wife of Richard Hoskins, a fearless and zealous patriot: joining the American army at the first sound to arms, he served with signal bravery and courage until its close. During his absence, his wife managed the entire farming

*Hayes, the lovely seat of Gov. Johnston, is the most interesting place in North Carolina. Its library of artistic octagonal design, and unique appointments, together with its 5000 vols. of rare books, old manuscripts, busts, and portraits of distinguished men, still stands unsullied by time, and without a parallel.

†The Bockover family of Norfolk, Va., are among her descendants.



FROM AN OIL PAINTING OF THE ORIGINAL FRAGMENTS, PRESENTED THE VIRGINIA DARE MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION BY THE AUTHOR, AND NOW IN THE STATE LIBRARY AT RALEIGH, N. C.

interest with prudence and profit. When they were married, they came down the Roanoke river in an open boat, crossed the Albemarle sound, and landed at Edenton. He then took his bride behind his own horse, to his farm called Paradise* by a bridle path, there being no public roads in that direction then. Her wedding dress was spun and woven from flax grown upon her father's farm in Halifax county. So delicate and smooth was the warp, that when she was preparing it for the loom, she passed the entire chain through her gold ring. The art of household production probably reached its greatest perfection about this time. All connection with the mother country was severed, and the colonists thrown upon their own resources. It was indispensable to every lady's education that she should know how to spin, sew, and weave. The spider-like fineness of their yarns, the exquisite beauty of their needlework, and the lacy filminess of the woven fabrics which their nimble fingers wrought, are the envy and admiration of the present age. From the Napoleonic standpoint Mrs. Hoskins was the greatest of them all, having given eight sons, and eight daughters to her country.‡ I extract the following from the first volume (1877) of the Magazine of American History.

“Revolutionary Caricature. I send a description of a caricature that may interest collectors. It is a mezzotint, fourteen by ten inches, entitled A Society of Patriotic Ladies, at Edenton, in North Carolina.

*The fine pasturage and great number of wild bees in that vicinity suggested the name. It literally flowed with milk and honey.

‡The Hoskins family and collateral branches are still prominent in the state. The venerable W. E. Bond, a descendant of this family, possesses a priceless and unique relic, a gold breastpin of Turkish scimitar design upon which is engraved “H de M. 1574 [81].”

Henry de Montmorency was constable of France, and Grand Master Knights Templar about that time. The figure 81 may represent the number of the Commandery, or it may have been a Knight's personal badge, 81 is also the square of a square, formed from the original degree of Masonry, of which 9 was the square.

The history of this relic is veiled in mystery, and it is not known whether it was presented to a member of this family for valuable services, or whether it descended by intermarriage with some of the Montmorencys. The fact however that the Hoskins Arms was augmented with a sword would seem to strengthen the former supposition.

London. Printed for R. Sayer & J. Bennett, No. 53 in Fleet Street, as the Act directs 25 March. 1775, Plate V. A group of fifteen figures are around or near a table in a room. A female at the table with a gavel is evidently a man, probably meant for Lord North. A lady, with pen in hand is being kissed by a gentlemen. Another lady, standing, is writing on a large circular which can be read, 'We the Ladys of Edenton do hereby solemnly engage not to conform to that Pernicious Custom of Drinking Tea, or that we the aforesaid Ladys will not promote ye wear of any manufacture from England, untill such time that all Acts which tend to enslave this our Native Country shall be repealed' The other figures are not close around the table, and are emptying tea-caddies or looking on. A child and dog are under the table. Compare Bancroft's United States, Vol. VII p, 282. J. C. B."

It will be remembered that Lord North, referred to in the description, was prime minister of England at that time, and the Stamp Act, which included a great many articles, had been relieved upon everything except tea; this made him especially odious to the ladies of the Colonies. The dissolute, and impecunious King was cartooned at this time as a hopeless pauper, thrusting both hands down to the bottom of his empty pockets, in search of his last guinea. The taxation of the Colonies became a necessity, which grew out of his extravagances. A writer in alluding, to the activity and zeal of the women of the Revolution says, "In the lives of those high-mettled dames of the olden time, the daughters, wives, and mothers of men, the earnest inquirer might find much to elucidate that befogged question of the present day, what are the rights of women?"

And now my task is ended, let history distill in her great alembic whatever is valuable from these pages for posterity.

"The torch shall be extinguished which hath lit
My midnight lamp, and what is writ is writ" *

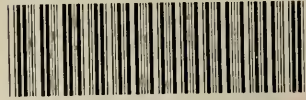
*A portion of this article appeared in the Magazine of American History, August 1892.

Edenton, North Carolina, Nov. 25th, 1898.





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