

WILLIAM BYRD

**HISTORY OF THE
DIVIDING LINE
BETWEEN VIRGINIA
AND NORTH
CAROLINA**

**HISTORICAL
TRAVELOGUES**



History of the Dividing Line Between Virginia And North Carolina

William Byrd

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I.

Before I enter upon the journal of the line between Virginia and North Carolina, it will be necessary to clear the way to

it, by showing how the other British colonies on the Main have, one after another, been carved out of Virginia, by grants from his majesty's royal predecessors. All that part of the northern American continent now under the dominion of the king of Great Britain, and stretching quite as far as the cape of Florida, went at first under the general name of Virginia.

The only distinction, in those early days, was, that all the coast to the southward of Chesapeake bay was called South Virginia, and all to the northward of it, North Virginia.

The first settlement of this fine country was owing to that great ornament of the British nation, sir Walter Raleigh, who obtained a grant thereof from queen Elizabeth of ever-glorious memory, by letters patent, dated March the 25th, 1584.

But whether that gentleman ever made a voyage thither himself is uncertain; because those who have favoured the public with an account of his life mention nothing of it. However, thus much may be depended on, that sir Walter invited sundry persons of distinction to share in his charter, and join their purses with his in the laudable project of fitting out a colony to Virginia.

Accordingly, two ships were sent away that very year, under the command of his good friends Amidas and Barlow, to take possession of the country in the name of his royal mistress, the queen of England.

These worthy commanders, for the advantage of the trade winds, shaped their course first to the Charibbe islands, thence stretching away by the gulf of Florida, dropped anchor not far from Roanoke inlet. They ventured ashore near that place upon an island now called Colleton island,

where they set up the arms of England, and claimed the adjacent country in right of their sovereign lady, the queen; and this ceremony being duly performed, they kindly invited the neighbouring Indian to traffick with them.

These poor people at first approached the English with great caution, having heard much of the treachery of the Spaniards, and not knowing but these strangers might be as treacherous as they. But, at length, discovering a kind of good nature in their looks, they ventured to draw near, and barter their skins and furs for the bawbles and trinkets of the English.

These first adventurers made a very profitable voyage, raising at least a thousand per cent. upon their cargo. Amongst other Indian commodities, they brought over some of that bewitching vegetable, tobacco. And this being the first that ever came to England, sir Walter thought he could do no less than make a present of some of the brightest of it to his royal mistress, for her own smoking. The queen graciously accepted of it, but finding her stomach sicken after two or three whiffs, it was presently whispered by the earl of Leicester's faction, that sir Walter had certainly poisoned her. But her majesty soon recovering her disorder, obliged the countess of Nottingham and all her maids to smoke a whole pipe out amongst them.

As it happened some ages before to be the fashion to saunter to the Holy Land, and go upon other Quixote adventures, so it was now grown the humour to take a trip to America. The Spaniards had lately discovered rich mines in their part of the West Indies, which made their maritime neighbours eager to do so too. This modish frenzy being still more inflamed by the charming account given of

Virginia, by the first adventurers, made many fond of removing to such a paradise.

Happy was he, and still happier she, that could get themselves transported, fondly expecting their coarsest utensils, in that happy place, would be of massy silver.

This made it easy for the company to procure as many volunteers as they wanted for their new colony; but, like most other undertakers who have no assistance from the public, they starved the design by too much frugality; for, unwilling to launch out at first into too much expense, they shipped off but few people at a time, and those but scantily provided. The adventurers were, besides, idle and extravagant, and expected they might live without work in so plentiful a country.

These wretches were set ashore not far from Roanoke inlet, but by some fatal disagreement, or laziness, were either starved or cut to pieces by the Indians.

Several repeated misadventures of this kind did, for some time, allay the itch of sailing to this new world; but the distemper broke out again about the year 1606. Then it happened that the earl of Southampton and several other persons, eminent for their quality and estates, were invited into the company, who applied themselves once more to people the then almost abandoned colony. For this purpose they embarked about a hundred men, most of them reprobates of good families, and related to some of the company, who were men of quality and fortune.

The ships that carried them made a shift to find a more direct way to Virginia, and ventured through the capes into the bay of Chesapeake. The same night they came to an anchor at the mouth of Powhatan, the same as James river,

where they built a small fort at a place called Point Comfort.

This settlement stood its ground from that time forward in spite of all the blunders and disagreement of the first adventurers, and the many calamities that befel the colony afterwards. * The six gentlemen who were first named of the company by the crown, and who were empowered to choose an annual president from among themselves, were always engaged in factions and quarrels, while the rest detested work more than famine. At this rate the colony must have come to nothing, had it not been for the vigilance and bravery of captain Smith, who struck a terror into all the Indians round about. This gentleman took some pains to persuade the men to plant Indian corn, but they looked upon all labour as a curse. They chose rather to depend upon the musty provisions that were sent from England: and when they failed they were forced to take more pains to seek for wild fruits in the woods, than they would have taken in tilling the ground. Besides, this exposed them to be knocked on the head by the Indians, and gave them fluxes into the bargain, which thinned the plantation very much. To supply this mortality, they were reinforced the year following with a greater number of people, amongst which were fewer gentlemen and more labourers, who, however, took care not to kill themselves with work.

These found the first adventurers in a very starving condition, but relieved their wants with the fresh supply they brought with them. From Kiquotan they extended themselves as far as James-town, where, like true Englishmen, they built a church that cost no more than fifty pounds, and a tavern that cost five hundred.

They had now made peace with the Indians, but there was one thing wanting to make that peace lasting. The natives could, by no means, persuade themselves that the English were heartily their friends, so long as they disdained to intermarry with them. And, in earnest, had the English consulted their own security and the good of the colony—had they intended either to civilize or convert these gentiles, they would have brought their stomachs to embrace this prudent alliance.

The Indians are generally tall and well-proportioned, which may make full amends for the darkness of their complexions. Add to this, that they are healthy and strong, with constitutions untainted by lewdness, and not enfeebled by luxury. Besides, morals and all considered, I cannot think the Indians were much greater heathens than the first adventurers, who, had they been good Christians, would have had the charity to take this only method of converting the natives to Christianity. For, after all that can be said, a sprightly lover is the most prevailing missionary that can be sent amongst these, or any other infidels.

Besides, the poor Indians would have had less reason to complain that the English took away their land, if they had received it by way of portion with their daughters. Had such affinities been contracted in the beginning, how much bloodshed had been prevented, and how populous would the country have been, and, consequently, how considerable? Nor would the shade of the skin have been any reproach at this day; for if a Moor may be washed white in three generations, surely an Indian might have been blanched in two.

The French, for their parts, have not been so squeamish in Canada, who upon trial find abundance of attraction in the Indians. Their late grand monarch thought it not below

even the dignity of a Frenchman to become one flesh with this people, and therefore ordered 100 livres for any of his subjects, man or woman, that would intermarry with a native.

By this piece of policy we find the French interest very much strengthened amongst the savages, and their religion, such as it is, propagated just as far as their love. And I heartily wish this well-concerted scheme does not hereafter give the French an advantage over his majesty's good subjects on the northern continent of America.

About the same time New England was pared off from Virginia by letters patent, bearing date April the 10th, 1608. Several gentlemen of the town and neighborhood of Plymouth obtained this grant, with the lord chief justice Popham at their head.

Their bounds were specified to extend from 38 to 45 degrees of northern latitude, with a breadth of one hundred miles from the sea shore. The first fourteen years, this company encountered many difficulties, and lost many men, though far from being discouraged, they sent over numerous recruits of presbyterians, every year, who for all that, had much ado to stand their ground, with all their fighting and praying.

But about the year 1620, a large swarm of dissenters fled thither from the severities of their stepmother, the church. These saints conceiving the same aversion to the copper complexion of the natives, with that of the first adventurers to Virginia, would, on no terms, contract alliances with them, afraid perhaps, like the Jews of old, lest they might be drawn into idolatry by those strange women.

Whatever disgusted them I cannot say, but this false delicacy creating in the Indians a jealousy that the English were ill affected towards them, was the cause that many of them were cut off, and the rest exposed to various distresses.

This reinforcement was landed not far from cape Cod, where, for their greater security, they built a fort, and near it a small town, which, in honour of the proprietors, was called New Plymouth. But they still had many discouragements to struggle with, though, by being well supported from home, they by degrees triumphed over them all.

Their brethren, after this, flocked over so fast, that in a few years they extended the settlement one hundred miles along the coast, including Rhode Island and Martha's Vineyard.

Thus the colony throve apace, and was thronged with large detachments of independents and presbyterians, who thought themselves persecuted at home.

Though these people may be ridiculed for some pharisaical particularities in their worship and behaviour, yet they were very useful subjects, as being frugal and industrious, giving no scandal or bad example, at least by any open and public vices. By which excellent qualities they had much the advantage of the southern colony, who thought their being members of the established church sufficient to sanctify very loose and profligate morals. For this reason New England improved much faster than Virginia, and in seven or eight years New Plymouth, like Switzerland, seemed too narrow a territory for its inhabitants.

For this reason, several gentlemen of fortune purchased of the company that canton of New England now called Massachusetts colony. And king James confirmed the purchase by his royal charter, dated March the 4th, 1628. In less than two years after, above one thousand of the puritanical sect removed thither with considerable effects, and these were followed by such crowds, that a proclamation was issued in England, forbidding any more of his majesty's subjects to be shipped off. But this had the usual effect of things forbidden, and served only to make the wilful independents flock over the faster. And about this time it was that Messrs. Hampden and Pym, and (some say) Oliver Cromwell, to show how little they valued the king's authority, took a trip to New England.

In the year 1630, the famous city of Boston was built, in a commodious situation for trade and navigation, the same being on a peninsula at the bottom of Massachusetts bay.

This town is now the most considerable of any on the British continent, containing at least 8,000 houses and 40,000 inhabitants. The trade it drives, is very great to Europe, and to every part of the West Indies, having near 1,000 ships and lesser vessels belonging to it.

Although the extent of the Massachusetts colony reached near one hundred and ten miles in length, and half as much in breadth, yet many of its inhabitants, thinking they wanted elbow room, quitted their old seats in the year 1636, and formed two new colonies: that of Connecticut and New Haven. These king Charles II. erected into one government in 1664, and gave them many valuable privileges, and among the rest, that of choosing their own governors. The extent of these united colonies may be about seventy miles long and fifty broad.

Besides these several settlements, there sprang up still another, a little more northerly, called New Hampshire. But that consisting of no more than two counties, and not being in condition to support the charge of a distinct government, was glad to be incorporated with that of Massachusetts, but upon condition, however, of being named in all public acts, for fear of being quite lost and forgotten in the coalition.

In like manner New Plymouth joined itself to Massachusetts, except only Rhode Island, which, though of small extent, got itself erected into a separate government by a charter from king Charles II., soon after the restoration, and continues so to this day.

These governments all continued in possession of their respective rights and privileges till the year 1683, when that of Massachusetts was made void in England by a quo warranto.

In consequence of which the king was pleased to name sir Edmund Andros his first governor of that colony. This gentleman, it seems, ruled them with a rod of iron till the revolution, when they laid unhallowed hands upon him, and sent him prisoner to England.

This undutiful proceeding met with an easy forgiveness at that happy juncture. King William and his royal consort were not only pleased to overlook this indignity offered to their governor, but being made sensible how unfairly their charter had been taken away, most graciously granted them a new one.

By this some new franchises were given them, as an equivalent for those of coining money and electing a governor, which were taken away. However, the other

colonies of Connecticut and Rhode Island had the luck to remain in possession of their original charters, which to this day have never been called in question.

The next country dismembered from Virginia was New Scotland, claimed by the crown of England in virtue of the first discovery by Sebastian Cabot. By colour of this title, king James I. granted it to sir William Alexander by patent, dated September the 10th, 1621.

But this patentee never sending any colony thither, and the French believing it very convenient for them, obtained a surrender of it from their good friend and ally, king Charles II., by the treaty of Breda. And, to show their gratitude, they stirred up the Indians soon after to annoy their neighbours of New England. Murders happened continually to his majesty's subjects by their means, till sir William Phipps took their town of Port Royal, in the year 1690. But as the English are better at taking than keeping strong places, the French retook it soon, and remained masters of it till 1710, when general Nicholson wrested it, once more, out of their hands.

Afterwards the queen of Great Britain's right to it was recognized and confirmed by the treaty of Utrecht.

Another limb lopped off from Virginia was New York, which the Dutch seized very unfairly, on pretence of having purchased it from captain Hudson, the first discoverer. Nor was their way of taking possession of it a whit more justifiable than their pretended title. Their West India company tampered with some worthy English skippers (who had contracted with a swarm of English dissenters to transport them to Hudson river) by no means to land them there, but to carry them some leagues more northerly.

This Dutch finesse took exactly, and gave the company time soon after to seize Hudson river for themselves. But sir Samuel Argall, then governor of Virginia, understanding how the king's subjects had been abused by these republicans, marched thither with a good force, and obliged them to renounce all pretensions to that country. The worst of it was, the knight depended on their parole to ship themselves for Brazil, but took no measures to make this slippery people as good as their word.

No sooner was the good governor retired, but the honest Dutch began to build forts and strengthen themselves in their ill-gotten possessions; nor did any of the king's liege people take the trouble to drive these intruders thence. The civil war in England, and the confusions it brought forth, allowed no leisure for such distant considerations. Though it is strange that the protector, who neglected no occasion to mortify the Dutch, did not afterwards call them to account for this breach of faith. However, after the restoration, the king sent a squadron of his ships of war, under the command of sir Robert Carr, and reduced that province to his obedience.

Some time after, his majesty was pleased to grant that country to his royal highness, the duke of York, by letters patent, dated March the 12th, 1664. But to show the modesty of the Dutch to the life, though they had no shadow of right to New York, yet they demanded Surinam, a more valuable country, as an equivalent for it, and our able ministers at that time had the generosity to give it them.

But what wounded Virginia deepest was the cutting off Maryland from it, by charter from king Charles I. to sir George Calvert, afterwards lord Baltimore, bearing date the 20th of June, 1632. The truth of it is, it begat much

speculation in those days, how it came about that a good protestant king should bestow so bountiful a grant upon a zealous Roman catholic. But it is probable it was one fatal instance amongst many other of his majesty's complaisance to the queen.

However that happened, it is certain this province afterwards proved a commodious retreat for persons of that communion. The memory of the gunpowder treason-plot was still fresh in every body's mind, and made England too hot for papists to live in, without danger of being burnt with the pope, every 5th of November; for which reason legions of them transplanted themselves to Maryland in order to be safe, as well from the insolence of the populace as the rigour of the government.

Not only the gunpowder treason, but every other plot, both pretended and real, that has been trumped up in England ever since, has helped to people his lordship's propriety. But what has proved most serviceable to it was the grand rebellion against king Charles I., when every thing that bore the least tokens of popery was sure to be demolished, and every man that professed it was in jeopardy of suffering the same kind of martyrdom the Romish priests do in Sweden.

Soon after the reduction of New York, the duke was pleased to grant out of it all that tract of land included between Hudson and Delaware rivers, to the lord Berkley and sir George Carteret, by deed dated June the 24th, 1664. And when these grantees came to make partition of this territory, his lordship's moiety was called West Jersey, and that to sir George, East Jersey.

But before the date of this grant, the Swedes began to gain footing in part of that country; though, after they saw the

fate of New York, they were glad to submit to the king of England, on the easy terms of remaining in their possessions, and rendering a moderate quit-rent. Their posterity continue there to this day, and think their lot cast in a much fairer land than Dalicaria.

The proprietors of New Jersey, finding more trouble than profit in their new dominions, made over their right to several other persons, who obtained a fresh grant from his royal highness, dated March the 14th, 1682.

Several of the grantees, being quakers and anabaptists, failed not to encourage many of their own persuasion to remove to this peaceful region. Amongst them were a swarm of Scots quakers, who were not tolerated to exercise the gifts of the spirit in their own country.

Besides the hopes of being safe from persecution in this retreat, the new proprietors inveigled many over by this tempting account of the country: that it was a place free from those three great scourges of mankind, priests, lawyers, and physicians. Nor did they tell them a word of a lie, for the people were yet too poor to maintain these learned gentlemen, who, every where, love to be well paid for what they do; and, like the Jews, cannot breathe in a climate where nothing is to be gotten.

The Jerseys continued under the government of these proprietors till the year 1702, when they made a formal surrender of the dominion to the queen, reserving however the property of the soil to themselves. So soon as the bounds of New Jersey came to be distinctly laid off, it appeared there was still a narrow slip of land, lying betwixt that colony and Maryland. Of this, William Penn, a man of much worldly wisdom, and some eminence among the quakers, got early notice, and, by the credit he had with the

duke of York, obtained a patent for it, dated March the 4th, 1680.

It was a little surprising to some people how a quaker should be so much in the good graces of a popish prince; though, after all, it may be pretty well accounted for. This ingenious person had not been bred a quaker; but, in his earlier days, had been a man of pleasure about the town. He had a beautiful form and very taking address, which made him successful with the ladies, and particularly with a mistress of the duke of Monmouth. By this gentlewoman he had a daughter, who had beauty enough to raise her to be a dutchess, and continued to be a toast full 30 years. But this amour had like to have brought our fine gentleman in danger of a duel, had he not discreetly sheltered himself under this peaceable persuasion. Besides, his father having been a flag-officer in the navy, while the duke of York was lord high admiral, might recommend the son to his favour. This piece of secret history I thought proper to mention, to wipe off the suspicion of his having been popishly inclined.

This gentleman's first grant confined him within pretty narrow bounds, giving him only that portion of land which contains Buckingham, Philadelphia and Chester counties. But to get these bounds a little extended, he pushed his interest still further with his royal highness, and obtained a fresh grant of the three lower counties, called Newcastle, Kent and Sussex, which still remained within the New York patent, and had been luckily left out of the grant of New Jersey. The six counties being thus incorporated, the proprietor dignified the whole with the name of Pennsylvania.

The quakers flocked over to this country in shoals, being averse to go to heaven the same way with the bishops. Amongst them were not a few of good substance, who went

vigorously upon every kind of improvement; and thus much I may truly say in their praise, that by diligence and frugality, for which this harmless sect is remarkable, and by having no vices but such as are private, they have in a few years made Pennsylvania a very fine country. The truth is, they have observed exact justice with all the natives that border upon them; they have purchased all their lands from the Indians; and though they paid but a trifle for them, it has procured them the credit of being more righteous than their neighbours. They have likewise had the prudence to treat them kindly upon all occasions, which has saved them from many wars and massacres wherein the other colonies have been indiscreetly involved. The truth of it is, a people whose principles forbid them to draw the carnal sword, were in the right to give no provocation.

Both the French and Spaniards had, in the name of their respective monarchs, long ago taken possession of that part of the northern continent that now goes by the name of Carolina; but finding it produced neither gold nor silver, as they greedily expected, and meeting such returns from the Indians as their own cruelty and treachery deserved, they totally abandoned it. In this deserted condition that country lay for the space of ninety years, till king Charles II., finding it a derelict, granted it away to the earl of Clarendon and others, by his royal charter, dated March the 24th, 1663. The boundary of that grant towards Virginia was a due west line from Luck island, (the same as Colleton island,) lying in 36 degrees of north latitude, quite to the South sea.

But afterwards sir William Berkley, who was one of the grantees and at that time governor of Virginia, finding a territory of 31 miles in breadth between the inhabited part of Virginia and the above-mentioned boundary of Carolina, advised the lord Clarendon of it. And his lordship had

interest enough with the king to obtain a second patent to include it, dated June the 30th, 1665.

This last grant describes the bounds between Virginia and Carolina in these words: •To run from the north end of Coratuck inlet, due west to Weyanoke creek, lying within or about the degree of thirty-six and thirty minutes of northern latitude, and from thence west, in a direct line, as far as the South sea. • Without question, this boundary was well known at the time the charter was granted, but in a long course of years Weyanoke creek lost its name, so that it became a controversy where it lay. Some ancient persons in Virginia affirmed it was the same with Wicocon, and others again in Carolina were as positive it was Nottoway river.

In the mean time, the people on the frontiers entered for land, and took out patents by guess, either from the king or the lords proprietors. But the crown was like to be the loser by this uncertainty, because the terms both of taking up and seating land were easier much in Carolina. The yearly taxes to the public were likewise there less burthensome, which laid Virginia under a plain disadvantage.

This consideration put that government upon entering into measures with North Carolina, to terminate the dispute, and settle a certain boundary between the two colonies. All the difficulty was, to find out which was truly Weyanoke creek. The difference was too considerable to be given up by either side, there being a territory of fifteen miles betwixt the two streams in controversy.

However, till that matter could be adjusted, it was agreed on both sides, that no lands at all should be granted within the disputed bounds. Virginia observed this agreement punctually, but I am sorry I cannot say the same of North

Carolina. The great officers of that province were loath to lose the fees accruing from the grants of land, and so private interest got the better of public spirit; and I wish that were the only place in the world where such politics are fashionable.

All the steps that were taken afterwards in that affair, will best appear by the report of the Virginia commissioners, recited in the order of council given at St. James', March the 1st, 1710, set down in the appendix.

It must be owned, the report of those gentlemen was severe upon the then commissioners of North Carolina, and particularly upon Mr. Moseley. I will not take it upon me to say with how much justice they said so many hard things, though it had been fairer play to have given the parties accused a copy of such representation, that they might have answered what they could for themselves.

But since that was not done, I must beg leave to say thus much in behalf of Mr. Moseley, that he was not much in the wrong to find fault with the quadrant produced by the surveyors of Virginia, because that instrument placed the mouth of Nottoway river in the latitude of 37 degrees; whereas, by an accurate observation made since, it appears to lie in 36 and deg; 30' 30", so that there was an error of near 30 minutes, either in the instrument or in those who made use of it.

Besides, it is evident the mouth of Nottoway river agrees much better with the latitude, wherein the Carolina charter supposed Weyanoke creek, (namely, in or about 36 and deg; 30',) than it does with Wicocon creek, which is about fifteen miles more southerly.

This being manifest, the intention of the king's grant will be pretty exactly answered, by a due west line drawn from Coratuck inlet to the mouth of Nottoway river, for which reason it is probable that was formerly called Weyanoke creek, and might change its name when the Nottoway Indians came to live upon it, which was since the date of the last Carolina charter.

The lieutenant governor of Virginia, at that time colonel Spotswood, searching into the bottom of this affair, made very equitable proposals to Mr. Eden, at that time governor of North Carolina, in order to put an end to this controversy. These, being formed into preliminaries, were signed by both governors, and transmitted to England, where they had the honour to be ratified by his late majesty and assented to by the lords proprietors of Carolina.

Accordingly an order was sent by the late king to Mr. Gooch, afterwards lieutenant governor of Virginia, to pursue those preliminaries exactly. In obedience thereunto, he was pleased to appoint three of the council of that colony to be commissioners on the part of Virginia, who, in conjunction with others to be named by the governor of North Carolina, were to settle the boundary between the two governments, upon the plan of the above-mentioned articles.

February, 1728. Two experienced surveyors were at the same time directed to wait upon the commissioners, Mr. Mayo, who made the accurate map of Barbadoes, and Mr. Irvin, the mathematic professor of William and Mary College. And because a good number of men were to go upon this expedition, a chaplain was appointed to attend them, and the rather because the people on the frontiers of North Carolina, who have no minister near them, might

have an opportunity to get themselves and their children baptized.

Of these proceedings on our part, immediate notice was sent to sir Richard Everard, governor of North Carolina, who was desired to name commissioners for that province, to meet those of Virginia at Coratuck inlet the spring following. Accordingly he appointed four members of the council of that province to take care of the interests of the lords proprietors. Of these, Mr. Moseley was to serve in a double capacity, both as commissioner and surveyor. For that reason there was but one other surveyor from thence, Mr. Swan. All the persons being thus agreed upon, they settled the time of meeting to be at Coratuck, March the 5th, 1728.

In the mean time, the requisite preparations were made for so long and tiresome a journey; and because there was much work to be done and some danger from the Indians, in the uninhabited part of the country, it was necessary to provide a competent number of men. Accordingly, seventeen able hands were listed on the part of Virginia, who were most of them Indian traders and expert woodsmen.

Feb. 27th. These good men were ordered to come armed with a musket and a tomahawk, or large hatchet, and provided with a sufficient quantity of ammunition. They likewise brought provisions of their own for ten days, after which time they were to be furnished by the government. Their march was appointed to be on the 27th of February, on which day one of the commissioners met them at their rendezvous, and proceeded with them as far as colonel Allen's. This gentleman is a great economist, and skilled in all the arts of living well at an easy expense.