

# Hertford and Perquimans County – A Short History

by Claude Milot

When Loopers sail into the western end of Albemarle Sound, they enter an area rich in pre-colonial history. Before English adventurers came down from Virginia to explore this bountiful land, it was inhabited by the Weapemeoc, a native people related linguistically and culturally to the Algonquians. Their territory extended from the Chowan River and the Albemarle Sound up past the Pasquotank River as far as the Dismal Swamp. One of the Weapemeoc villages called Chepanoac is thought to have been located on land between Yeopim River and Yeopim Creek. This land is directly across Yeopim Creek from Albemarle Plantation Marina.



Figure 1 - Albemarle Plantation Today

The first written record of exploration of Albemarle Sound is in a report to Sir Walter Raleigh by Ralph Lane in 1586. Although there are few records pertaining to this region over the next 100 years, we do know that hunters, fishermen, trappers, and traders from Virginia had started to settle in the area, and by the 1650s, the Native Weapemeoc were actively trading with them.

In 1660, the Weapemeoc, by then known as the Yeopim Indians, sold a large tract of land southwest of the Pasquotank River to a Virginian settler named Nathaniel Batts. Nathaniel Batts is probably best remembered for the legend that he maintained a trading post on Batts Island on the Albemarle Sound, just off the coast of what is now Harvey Point.



Figure 3 - Batts Island and Grave

Storms gradually eroded the island, and it was completely submerged by a hurricane in 1950.

Perquimans County's Register of Deeds documents the first land transaction between George Durant and an Indian chief named Kilcocanen on March 1, 1661. The parcel of land was north of the Perquimans River. The end of the peninsula between the Perquimans and Pasquotank rivers is now known as

Durant's Neck. It is said that Durant was so popular among the natives, many of them adopted his name.

Settlement of the Carolinas began in earnest in 1663 with a royal charter from King Charles II granting large tracts of land to eight men who became the Lords Proprietors of Carolina. In 1668, they established Perquimans Precinct (County), which became an active center of political activity for the Carolinas. In fact, until 1716 the Assembly held more sessions in Perquimans than in any other precinct.

Court activity was also centered in Perquimans. In those days court proceedings were generally conducted in private homes. But there may have been buildings used as courthouses on Phelps Point (now Hertford) as far back as 1700. Today's handsome courthouse on Church Street was built in 1825 on the site of an earlier courthouse dating back to 1732.



Figure 4-Hertford Courthouse 1824

In addition to the Court activity, Phelps Point, because of its access to the sea, was an important shipping center for leather goods, furs, livestock, and agricultural products. For these two reasons, Phelps Point was incorporated as Hertford in 1758 and made the county seat. Loopers visiting Hertford can let their imaginations roam as they summon images of sloops and schooners from New England taking on cargoes of tobacco, corn, wheat, and lumber meant for Massachusetts and destinations as far south as the West Indies.

The importance of Hertford as a center of waterborne commerce was long ago eclipsed by the advent of railroads and highways. But Hertford hasn't forgotten its history as a thriving port for over 200 years. And, for sailors, it is still the friendliest stop on the Albemarle Loop.

#### **Additional Notes: Local knowledge for approach to Hertford Bay Marina:**

A waterborne visit to Hertford requires a long, upstream trek on the beautiful Perquimans River. This stream breaks off from the northern shores of Albemarle Sound, west of Little River, and east of Yeopim River.

The Perquimans River is a gentle stream usually seen by only a few fishermen plying the waters in their small skiffs. It has just about everything cruisers could ask for except marina facilities. The river is deep almost to its shoreline and offers no navigational difficulties. It takes a heavy blow to raise a rough chop on the Perquimans. Generally, wave conditions are ideal for larger pleasure craft. The banks are lined with untouched belts of cypress and hardwood trees, broken here and there by picturesque homes. West, northwest of Barrow Point, you must cruise under the fixed, US Highway 17 Bypass bridge, with a mere 33 feet of vertical clearance. This span will not hinder a visit by most powercraft to Hertford, but for sailors, it is a very different story indeed.

Next you must negotiate a swing bridge with 7 feet of closed vertical clearance. This span opens on demand from April 1 to September 30 from 8:00 A.M. to midnight but remains closed during the early-morning hours. From October 1 through March 31, the span opens on signal from 10:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. Depths here run from 12 all the way up to 20 feet of water. The Hertford S-Bridge Swing Span bridge tender is on duty on the following schedule:

April 1 - September 30: 8 a.m. - 12 midnight

October 1 - March 31: 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.

To contact the bridge tender for a scheduled opening, use Channel 13 or telephone 252-426-7241 during the above noted hours.

The Hertford Bay Marina is located just beyond the swing bridge almost due south on your port bow.

**Additional Notes: Local knowledge for approach to Albemarle Plantation Marina:**

For information on the approaches to Albemarle Plantation Marina go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xanDRynD7mw&feature=youtu.be> where you can view a video on the entrance to the marina.

