

Local History

Town of Clayton Timeline

Prepared by Clayton Historical Association (2009)

In 1701, John Lawson, explorer/surveyor, described the Iroquoian Tuscarora tribe inhabiting the area where Clayton is today. Siouan tribes also occupied this region prior to major European settlement.

After the Tuscarora War (1711-1715), colonial settlement of the area increased greatly. Johnston County was formed from part of Craven County in 1746 and needed a new courthouse by 1759. William Hinton offered 2 acres of land near present day US 70 and 42 East as a site. Hinton's Quarter, as it was known, served as Johnston County's courthouse from 1759-1771. A "*smart skirmish*" occurred during the court session of August 1768 at Hinton's Quarter when eighty men "came to the court, with intentions to turn the Justices off the bench." Court was adjourned and the insurgents were driven back.

Governor Tryon and his troops used the road to the courthouse as they marched from New Bern to Hillsborough against the Regulators in 1771. They camped at Hinton's Quarter on the night of May 4th, 1771.

Early businesses included Gregory's Tavern, built near the old courthouse and later Gulley's Store, where the area's first Post Office was established in 1845.

With construction of the North Carolina Railroad in 1853 development centered around the new depot built on Mrs. Sarah Stallings' land, about 2 miles further west near present day O'Neil and Front Streets. The PO was relocated closer to 'Stallings Station', and the community officially renamed Clayton on January 30, 1856.

On the morning of April 12, 1865, a "brisk skirmish" occurred at the edge of town between the remnants of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston's army and advancing troops under Union General William T. Sherman. Sherman and 16,000 of his 88,000 man army, advancing on Raleigh, encamped here near Stallings' Station. That evening, a commission sent by NC Gov. Zebulon B. Vance arrived by train and met with Sherman. The commissioners left at dawn with assurances of safe conduct for the Governor, and protection for the city of Raleigh, its people and institutions.

Clayton faced great hardships during the Civil War; however, with the help of the railroad, it became a reputable merchant town. The Town of Clayton was incorporated on April 12, 1869. Businesses that flourished after the war were a turpentine distillery, lumber plants, a brick kiln, cotton gins, grist mills, sawmills, tobacco warehouses and two cotton mills. By April 22, 1907 Clayton was featured in the Raleigh *Evening Times* as being "The Wealthiest City for its Size in the World.'

Clayton's economy was hit hard by the Great Depression of the 1930's. The cotton mills operated for the next forty years as principal employers for the area, but the economy remained modest compared to the boom at the beginning of the century.