

Vanished Lockville once a busy Deep River town

CHATHAM'S Historical Heritage

by Fred J. Vatter



Several miles upstream from the Deep Rivers' merge into the Haw River to form the Cape Fear, and about a mile west of Moncure, there is the former site of a vanished town called Lockville. It was situated on a major road between Cross Creek (now Fayetteville) and Chatham Court House (now Pittsboro).

During the mid to late eighteenth century, Col. Ambrose Ramsey operated a Grist mill at that location, taking advantage of a nearby waterfall. He also maintained Ramsey's Tavern at his nearby home to serve travelers along the major regional road.

In 1781, Lord Cornwallis' British soldiers camped at Ramsey's Tavern for a couple of days during their withdrawal from being bloodied at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. General Greene's revolutionary army also camped near Ramsey's Mill after pursuing Cornwallis to the Deep River, but did not resume the chase.

Ambrose Ramsey was a very prominent person in Chatham, having served multiple terms in the North Carolina Colonial Assembly, and also had been a delegate to the Third, Fourth and Fifth Provincial Congresses.

Eleven years after the Revolutionary War, Ramsey was one of 18 founders of the Cape Fear Company which was organized to explore the possibility of navigation from Cross Creek to the confluence of the Haw and Deep Rivers. No concrete action resulted but their effort set a precedent for subsequent studies and projects by others.

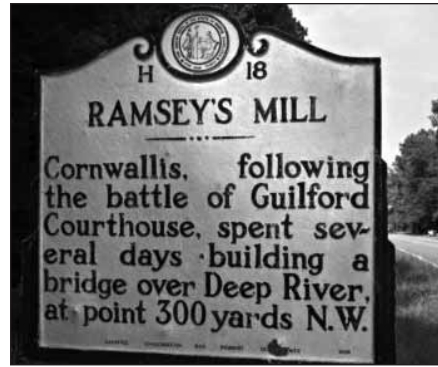
In 1800 George Lucas, one of the largest planters in the county, made a trial boat trip down the Cape Fear River to Wilmington, probably on a flatboat. He delivered about 200 bushels of corn and returned with goods not readily available in Chatham, such as rum, sugar, wine, coffee and codfish. Ten years later one observer maintained that the Deep River had no obstacle to navigation except for the falls above Ramsey's Mill. These findings made it easier for future developers in the nineteenth century to raise capital necessary to improve and expand navigation on the Cape Fear and Deep Rivers.

Ramsey's Mill operated to the end of the nineteenth century, providing an important service for the local farm economy. A local map identified the mill by name in 1808 but in later years it took on the names of future owners — Stokes Mill, Pullen's Mill and the Alston-Jones Mill.

The Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Company, formed in 1849, included in its work the construction of six dams and eight locks on the Deep River, including a dam, lock and

canal at Pullen's (Ramsey's) Mill. The area soon became known as Lockville.

The Chatham Railroad, built with Confederate money in the 1860's had its terminal at Lockville about 1870. A year later repairs were made to the lock, dam and canal at Lockville, which



This historical marker is one of the few signs indicating that Lockville ever existed. PHOTO BY CAROLINE VATTER

had deteriorated badly because of periodic flooding and shoddy construction.

The state had purchased the Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Company to protect its investment, but the system fell into neglect during the Civil War and in 1873 its remaining assets were auctioned off.

The company's assets and navigation rights were acquired by The Deep River Manufacturing Company. That business was controlled by George Lobdell, who had purchased the Endor Iron Furnace upstream from Lockville and built a blast furnace at Buckhorn, downstream from Lockville. He also had a foundry for railroad car wheels at

Lockville. Lobdell also began to repair the lock, dam and canal at Lockville and also launched a new steamboat to carry ore and pig iron between his facilities. The renovated navigation facilities reportedly continued to operate into the 1880s.

A post office was operating at Lockville by 1872 and the town's population was about 150 people. The community had its several mills, foundry, sawmill, Cotton gin and machine shop. Chatham Railroad was acquired by the Raleigh and Augusta Air Line Railroad which built its station in the nearby town of Moncure, where it also crossed the river. The absence of the railroad station and damage to the mills by floods and fire and additional damage to the navigation system apparently halted Lockville's prosperity.

The iron and manufacturing businesses closed in the 1890s. The Lockville North Carolina Power Corporation purchased the lock and dam area in 1906 but failed to develop it. In 1922, the Moncure Manufacturing Company converted part of the canal and lock system to a hydroelectric power plant and used a 1,300 horsepower generator to introduce electricity to Pittsboro. The plant was later acquired by CP&L. Today the 1922 powerhouse sits where the old lock structure once stood.

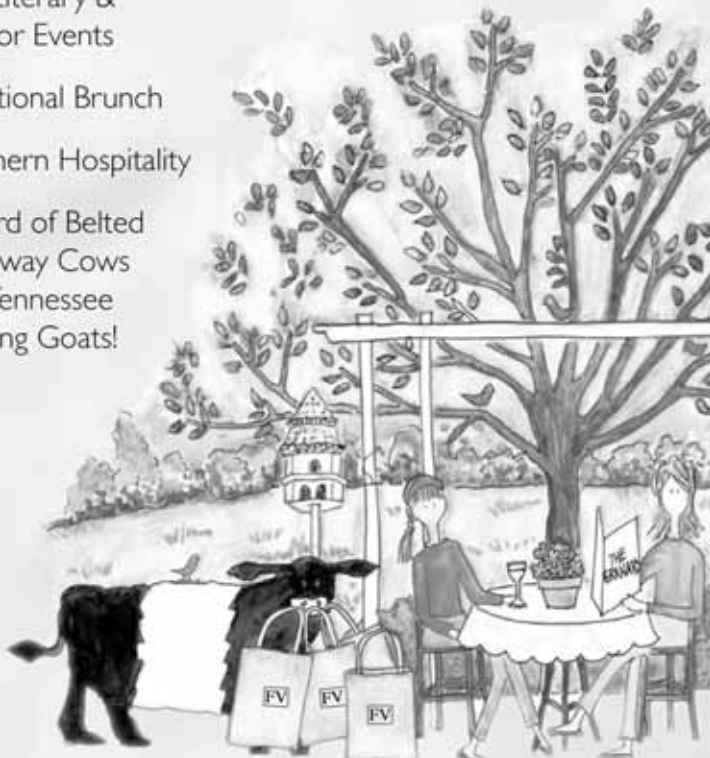
A short stub of a road near the north side of the Deep River, east of Old Route One, is called Lockville Road. Nearby is the former home of James Parham, the miller at the former Ramsey Mill. He lived there in the last few decades of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Mr. Parham recorded weather conditions with penciled notations on clapboards under the porch, including snowstorms, frosts and floods. These and highway historic signs mentioning Ramsey's Mill and Lockville are the only reminders of the busy little community that once stood here.

Fred J. Vatter is Past President of Chatham County Historical Association and a Board Member.

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