

**HISTORY OF HAMPTON
AND ELIZABETH CITY
COUNTY, VIRGINIA**

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History of Hampton and Elizabeth City County, Virginia by Lyon Gardiner Tyler

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LYON GARDINER TYLER

**HISTORY OF HAMPTON
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History *of* Hampton

AND

Elizabeth City County
Virginia



COMPILED BY

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PUBLISHED BY

The Board of Supervisors of Elizabeth City County

Hampton, Virginia

1922

To

The Confederate Veterans

of the Peninsula, who gave up homes and all for the cause of their State, for four long years on battle-fields of fame served the land they loved to the best of their great ability and then returned to find their homes in ruins and ashes, this little volume is dedicated as a tribute of ineffable remembrance.

Composed 1912 for the Retail Merchants Association
by Lyon G. Tyler, M. A., LL. D., and now published
in pamphlet form by the Board of Supervisors of
Elizabeth City County, Virginia, November, 1922.

FOREWORD

Dear old Hampton, with its colonial, Revolutionary, 1812, and Civil War memories, has endured and survived much. We of the present Hampton, we who love this old place either because it is our home by inheritance or adoption must carry on and remember that we are its guardians and makers and that the Hampton of the future will be the sort of place we are making it today.

With a deep and abiding love for the place of his birth and a keen interest in her welfare the first steps were taken by Hunter R. Booker, youngest son of Major and Mrs. George Booker, of Sherwood estate, now Langley Field, Elizabeth City County, who brought to the attention of his fellow towns and countrymen his wish that a history of Hampton be compiled as a matter of civic concern.

In accord with this viewpoint the Retail Merchants Association of Hampton gave the money for this project and the history was written by Dr. Lyon G. Tyler, eminent Virginia genealogist and former President of the College of William and Mary.

With commendable public spirit the Board of Supervisors of Elizabeth City County made up of Messrs. W. R. Rawlins, A. L. Dixon, Hunter R. Booker, as members, and H. H. Holt, clerk, made an appropriation for the publication of this history.

In 1896 the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities put upon the old light house at Cape Henry a bronze tablet with these words upon it: "Near this spot landed April 26, 1607, Capt. Gabriell Archer, Hon. George S. Percy, Christopher Newport, Bartholomew Gosnold, Edward Maria Wingfield, with 25 others, who calling the place Cape Henry, planted a cross April 29, 1607."

That same evening, toward dusk, while attempting to enter James River the colonists struck what is now known as Willoughby Spit, the eastern end of Hampton Roads, where "they found shallow water for a great way."

The next day April 30, they rowed to a point of land

on the opposite side of Hampton Roads where they found a channel "which put us in good comfort. Therefore we named that point of land Cape Comfort (present Old Point Comfort)." Upon the invitation of some friendly Indians to come ashore to their town called by them Kecoughtan, Captain John Smith says: "Wee coasted to their town running over a river running into the main where these savages swam over with their bowes and arrows in their mouths." "Kecoughtan," continues the doughty Captain, "has a convenient harbor for fisheries, boats or small boats, that so conveniently turneth itself into Bayes and Creeks that make that place very pleasant to inhabit, their corn-fields being girded thereon as peninsulars." "The abundance of fish, fowls, and deer" was noted.

To such a goodly place some of the colonists returned after three years, from Jamestown, in 1610, making a permanent settlement at Kecoughtan. Thus it is that the present Hampton occupying a place near the site of the Indian village is the oldest English settlement in the United States in continuous existence. Hampton may well be proud of this priority and others. The Church came with the colonists and the first church was probably erected in Kecoughtan in 1620. The walls of the present St. John's Church have stood since 1728. The three old pieces of communion silver now in use in St. John's Church bear the "hallmark" of 1618. This plate has been in use in America longer than any English Church plate now known to be in existence. These pieces "were given by Miss Mary Robinson of London to a church endowed by her in Smith's hundred in Virginia which lay in the point between the Chickahominy and the James rivers. This church was endowed especially with the hope of converting the Indians; but the settlement was almost destroyed by them in the great massacre of 1622. At this time these vessels were carried by Governor Yeardley to Jamestown. Years afterwards they were given to the parish of Elizabeth City." The present Syms-Eaton School is a continuation of the oldest free school in America, there having been no break in its history since its establishment in 1634, by Benj. Syms and Thos. Eaton.

We, of Virginia, are justly proud that no matter what services were rendered in raising the superstructure of our

present national government, the foundation-stone of constitutional liberty for the English speaking race was laid firmly and irremovably at Jamestown. The House of Burgesses convened there from 1619 to 1698. In 1698 the seat of government was moved from Jamestown to Middle Plantation (Williamsburg) which lies half in James City and half in York County. Many of us in the peninsular counties had forebears who sat in this august assemblage. Representing Kecoughtan at this first Legislative Assembly held in the New World at Jamestown in 1619, were William Tucker, and William Capps. These gentlemen were commissioned to ask the House of Burgesses for a change of name for Kecoughtan. Says an old chronicle concerning that event: "Some people, in pious frame of mind, took a spite at Kecoughtan name and said a name so heathen should not be for a people so pious as we, and suggesting some other names, they made their grudges to old King James, and so the King a new name found, for this fine section and all around."

The name Kecoughtan does not appear regularly in legal documents from 1619. The new name, Elizabeth City, was called after the daughter of King James I. The corporation of Elizabeth City developed into Elizabeth City County in 1634. In 1705 the town of Hampton was founded by an act of the Legislature. The name was in honor of the English Earl of Southampton.

The American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the War Between the States left their impress on old Hampton. In 1812 and again in 1861, the "Gamecock Town" was burned. Attesting their loyalty to and love for the cause of the Confederacy, the inhabitants, in August, 1861, set fire to their own homes rather than have them fall into the hands of the Federal troops who were approaching. General Macgruder commanded the Confederates.

"Furl that Banner! True, 'tis gory,
Yet 'tis wreathed around with glory,
And 'twill live in song and story,
Though its folds are in the dust."

The loyalty of Hampton to the Union has been tried and proved in the Spanish-American, and World Wars. Side by side the descendants of the followers of Lee and

those of the followers of Grant clad in khaki, a blend of the blue and the gray, battled for the same principle, the same cause, and a common country.

Dear old Hampton! For you, indeed, does love make memory eternal. Blessed memories are yours—"memories of images and precious thoughts that shall not die, and cannot be effaced."

To new Hampton, God bless her.

Hark forward! Carry on!

BESSIE LEE BOOKER