

---

# HISTORY



**Duplin County was created in 1750  
from part of New Hanover County  
and was named for Sir Thomas Hays,  
Lord Dupplin.**

## A Brief History of Duplin County, NC

The General Assembly in New Bern created Duplin County from the northern part of New Hanover County on April 7, 1750. At that time the bounds of Duplin County included what was to become Sampson County. The county was named for Sir Thomas Hays, Lord Duplin, who served on the Board of Trade and Plantations for the Crown in the 1740's. There was also an effort made in the Assembly to name this new county Donegal. It is thought that this effort was in recognition of the Irish heritage of some of the early settlers.

The earliest immigrants to the area were the Welsh from New Castle on Delaware arriving in the early 1700's. They were soon followed by German Palatines and Swiss in the 1730's and 1740's who had originally settled with Baron Christopher von Graffenried's 1709 settlements in New Bern. The Scotch-Irish arrived in 1736 from Ulster, Northern Ireland with Henry McCulloch, a wealthy London merchant, to settle on a rich and fertile 71,160-acre land granted to him from the British Crown. The French Huguenots and English, who migrated from Virginia along with Scottish Highlanders who came from the upper Cape Fear region, also were among the earliest settlers to the area along with African-Americans. The early settlements were primarily along the river and larger creeks, as these were the best means of transportation in the early beginnings of the county.

Henry McCulloch, who had transported Ulster Scots and Swiss Protestants to settle this area, established several settlements. One on the east bank of the Northeast Cape Fear River named Sarecta became Duplin's first incorporated town in 1787. Another settlement was established on the west side of the river on Goshen Swamp, and a third at a place referred to as Golden Grove, later to become the town of Kenansville. These early settlers were primarily Presbyterians and they established the Goshen congregation in 1736. Later called the Grove congregation, it was the first Presbyterian Church in the state and is still active today.

Dr. William Houston, a physician, came with McCulloch's colonists and made his home in Sarecta. In 1765, Dr. Houston was appointed Stamp Master for the Province by King George III. Houston soon resigned due to strong stamp tax protest actions in Wilmington by the citizens of the area. These actions were some of the earliest signs of resistance to British authority in the colonies and were reflective of the unity, spirit, and determination of these early settlers.

In 1751, the first official county court was held in the home of William McRee. Today, Guilford Mills, Inc. on NC Highway 11/903, is located on the old site. A short time later the first courthouse was built on Turkey Swamp near the present day Duplin/Sampson County line. When Sampson County was created in 1784 from the western half of Duplin County, the courthouse was relocated again to a more central location. The first sessions of county court at this new site were held in James home near the road to Magnolia about 2 miles south of Kenansville. Later, the court was relocated to the area that was to become Kenansville. It is said that a spring, which provided good water, and is still flowing today, was a deciding factor in relocating the county seat to its present location.

Duplin has grown steadily through the years. The first industry in the county was the naval stores industry. The harvesting of rosin from the abundant longleaf pine forests to make tar, pitch, and turpentine, provided barter and income for the early settlers and remained a significant part of the economy up until the late 1800's. The naval stores products were floated down the Northeast Cape Fear River for sale in Wilmington on large, log rafts. In later years, paddlewheel riverboats became a far better means of transportation on the river. Necessary supplies and staple goods were ferried back up the river. When the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad was completed it provided a faster and more convenient method of shipping and the use of the river for transportation decreased.

The completion of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad in 1840, which ran through the western half of the county, provided additional opportunities for growth and a tremendous influence for further development, not only for Duplin County, but the entire region. The towns of Wallace, Teachey, Rose Hill, Magnolia, Warsaw, Faison and Calypso developed along the tracks.

Although many of the descendants of the early families who settled in Duplin County are still here, many migrated to other areas of the new country during the 1800's. Settlers were moving from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware and other points north into North Carolina and continuing on to the southern states. This migration southward was a search for new longleaf pine forests to harvest and new ground to farm. Extended use of farmlands would eventually deplete nutrients from the soil limiting crop development. New ground had to be found to survive. The availability of commercial fertilizer in the middle 1800's was a major factor in slowing the migration and enhancing the development of the county.

Duplin County is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest county in the state in land area, 819 square miles. The 2000 population was 49,063. There are 10 incorporated towns in the county: Calypso, Faison, Warsaw, Kenansville, Magnolia, Rose Hill, Teachey, Wallace, Greenevers, and Beulaville. The county is served by Interstate 40, U.S. Highway 117, NC Highways 11, 24, 50, 403, and 903. Rail service is available through CSX rail service and the Duplin County Airport provides a 6,001' paved, lighted runway.

Duplin County has maintained its agricultural heritage and rural environment through the years while still allowing for a blending with industrial development, economic growth and an enviable lifestyle.

## Chronology of Events in the History of Duplin County

- 1730** Welsh settlements between the Northeast Cape Fear River and the Black River, including the lower, southern part of what was to become Duplin County.
- 1736** Settlement of Ulster Scots and Swiss Protestants on land granted to Henry McCulloch. These early settlements were at Sarecta, Goshen (Goshen Swamp) and Golden Grove or just the Grove (now Kenansville).  
Earliest recorded congregation of Presbyterian in North Carolina known as the Goshen congregation later known as Grove Church.
- 1739** First recorded reference to the village of Sarecta (Soracte). First reference to the "Sarecta to the Welsh Tract Road", one of the earliest county roads, (NC Hwy. 11 follows old road).
- 1748** Area citizens respond to Spanish invasion threat at Wilmington known as the Spanish Alarm.
- 1750** On April 7, Duplin County created from the northern part of New Hanover County. Named for Sir Thomas Hays, Lord Dupplin of Scotland.
- 1751** First official county court held in the Goshen settlement area on Goshen Swamp (north of Kenansville), at the home of William McRee. A short time later the Courthouse was established on Turkey Swamp near the present-day Duplin/Sampson County line west of Warsaw.
- 1763** Bear Marsh Baptist Church organized in northern Duplin, the first Baptist church established in the County.
- 1776** Revolutionary War. John Grady of northern Duplin County was the only man killed on the American side in the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge February 27, 1776.
- 1777** Duplin County Oath of Allegiance and Abjuration--a testimony of support and faithfulness to the State of North Carolina and a renouncement of the authority of Great Britain, was signed by twenty-five of Duplin's early leaders.
- 1781** General Cornwallis' troops marched through Duplin on their way to Virginia and defeat. They encamped briefly at old Duplin Court House on Turkey Swamp. Battle of Rockfish Creek: The Duplin Militia, under the command of Col. Thomas Kenan, was routed by the British on August 2, 1781 near Wallace.
- 1784** Sampson County created from the western half of Duplin County. Courthouse moved to a site more centrally located soon to become Kenansville.
- 1785** Grove Academy organized and located in Kenansville. It was one of the earliest formal educational institutions in the county and state.
- 1787** The village of Sarecta incorporated January 6, 1787, Duplin's first official town. (It no longer functions as a town).

- 1790** The beginning of Methodism in Duplin County.  
The first federal census of Duplin County; 3,936 whites, 1,278 slaves.
- 1812** War with Great Britain.
- 1816** Kenansville authorized to be laid out as a town.
- 1818** Duplin's second courthouse erected in Kenansville.
- 1838** Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad completed through Duplin County.
- 1848** War with Mexico.
- 1852** Town of Kenansville incorporated December 27, 1852.
- 1854** The Duplin County Agricultural society and Fair organized.
- 1855** Town of Warsaw incorporated February 5, 1855. The village was known in its early beginnings as Duplin Depot and Mooresville.  
Town of Stricklandville (Magnolia) incorporated February 15, 1855.
- 1856** Warsaw to Clinton Plank Road completed and in operation.
- 1857** Stricklandville officially changed to Magnolia February 2, 1857.
- 1861** Civil War begins.
- 1863** Confederate Arms Factory in Kenansville destroyed by Federal troops on July 4.
- 1867** Caleb Davis Bradham was born in Chinquapin. In 1898, in his drug store in New Bern, he created a new beverage called Pepsi Cola.
- 1868** Twelve townships established August 14, 1868. (Rose Hill Township created in 1897).
- 1872** Town of Faison incorporated February 10, 1872.
- 1873** Town of Duplin Roads (later Wallace) incorporated February 28, 1873.
- 1874** Town of Teachey incorporated January 30, 1874.
- 1875** Town of Rose Hill incorporated March 10, 1875.
- 1877** The "North Carolina Amateur", a highly acclaimed amateur newspaper, began publication in Rose Hill. Printed until 1888. Publishers were George Melvin Carr and W.B. Southerland.
- 1888** President Grover Cleveland appointed Beautancus native, Dr. Ezekiel Ezra Smith, Ambassador to Liberia. Dr. Smith was Duplin's first and only Ambassador and he was instrumental in the development of Fayetteville State University.
- 1896** James Sprunt Institute established in Kenansville. Named in honor of Dr. James Menzies Sprunt, educator, minister, Civil War Chaplain, botanist and Register of Deeds.

- 1898** Spanish-American War.
- 1899** Town of Wallace incorporated March 4, 1899, formerly Duplin Roads.
- 1900** Beginning in the early 1900's and continuing into the 1940's (peaking in the 1920's and 1930's) the area around Wallace, Teachey, Rose Hill and Calypso produced and shipped more strawberries than any other area of the state.
- 1911** Town of Bowden incorporated February 27, 1911. It no longer functions as a town.
- 1913** Duplin County's present courthouse completed and accepted on January 16, 1913. Town of Calypso incorporated March 5, 1913.
- 1914** World War I.
- 1915** Town of Beulaville incorporated March 9, 1915.
- 1921** First Armistice Day celebration held in Warsaw. Renamed Veterans Day in 1954 and continues to be celebrated each year. It is the oldest, continuous Veterans Day celebration in the United States.
- 1931** Warsaw native, Henry L Stevens, Jr., elected national Commander of the American Legion. He was instrumental in establishing the Veterans Day Celebration in Warsaw.
- 1939** Four County REA first began installing electric power lines in the rural areas of the county. Four County REA organized in 1937.
- 1941** World War II.
- 1948** The Faison Fruit and Vegetable Exchange organized. Today the Faison market is the largest fresh vegetable auction market in the state. The produce market began in the early 1920's.
- 1949** "The Duplin Story", an outdoor historical pageant commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Duplin County, was presented. Staged again in 1950.
- 1950** Korean War begins.
- 1952** J.P. Stevens & Co. located in Wallace. The first major non-agricultural industry in Duplin. Christine W. Williams became the first woman to be elected Register of Deeds.
- 1953** The beginning of the poultry industry in the county, soon to become Duplin's largest industry.
- 1954** The county's hospital, Duplin General, completed. Hurricane Hazel devastated the area in October.
- 1963** The Duplin County Fair reactivated and held in Beulaville. It was held in 1963, 1964, and 1965. First annual Rose Hill Poultry Jubilee held October 19, 1963. Later changed to the North Carolina Poultry Jubilee and featured the "world's largest frying pan", 15 feet in diameter.
- 1964** James Sprunt Institute re-established in Kenansville, later to become a part of the state community college system.

- 1966** Vietnam War.
- 1969** Town of Greenevers incorporated October 27, 1969. Alex Brown was elected Mayor; first African-American to become Mayor of a Duplin County town.
- 1975** The County's first airport opened north of Kenansville.
- 1976** "The Liberty Cart", a historical outdoor drama, first performed in Kenansville.
- 1982** The Duplin county Fair was re-established and is held each year in Kenansville. Dovie Penney became the first woman to be elected to the Board of County Commissioners.
- 1983** Dr. William Edgar Thornton, a native of Faison, soared into space on August 30, becoming Duplin's and North Carolina's first astronaut.
- 1985** The nation's largest turkey processing plant, Carolina Turkey, built in Duplin County.
- 1989** Zettie B. Williams was the first African-American to be elected to the Board of County Commissioners.
- 1990** Interstate Highway I-40 connecting Wilmington, North Carolina to Barstow, California completed through Duplin County.
- 1991** Persian Gulf War.
- 1993** The outdoor drama, "The Song of Liberty" and the accompanying musical review "Carolina Country 93", opened for its first season.
- 1995** Town of Warsaw held its 75<sup>th</sup> Veterans Day Celebration.
- 1996** Hurricanes Bertha and Fran struck the area causing extensive damage.
- 1997** Duplin County ranks number one in economic growth across the state.
- 1999** Hurricane Floyd left parts of the county flooded and many homeless.
- 2000** Duplin County celebrates its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- 2001** Duplin County as well as all of the United States was devastated when terrorist flew planes into the World Trade Center Towers & The Pentagon.
- 2002** Vision 21 Committee established to carry out the recommendations put forth in the 2002 Strategic Plan. This Plan was created in the hopes of "building Duplin County into a unified community with a diversified economic base providing a good quality of life to all those who would be it's citizens.
- 2003** WestPark Business Technology Center opens offering office and educational space. War on Iraq begins.

- 2005** The historic courthouse dons a new red roof. Construction is completed on Duplin Commons, a planned campus that serves as home to an agriculture office building, multi-purpose arena, and other future amenities.
- 2008** Cogentrix power plant retrofitted to become Duplin County's first "green power" generated facility.