

# Popular Tavern and Its Keeper's Powerful Family Connections Decided Capital's Site

## Geographical Location Happy Lever for Prolific Family That Knew What It Wanted

By WILLIS G. BRIGGS.

The popularity of Isaac Hunter's wayside tavern and its favorable geographical situation determined the location of permanent capital for the State of North Carolina, the present City of Raleigh. When President George Washington visited New Bern on his memorable tour he entered in his diary: "Upon the Neuse River and 80 miles above New Bern the convention of the State that adopted the Constitution made choice of a spot or rather district within which to fix their seat of government." The North Carolina General Assembly which met in Tarboro in 1787 had requested the people to instruct their delegates to the forthcoming convention, "to fix on the place for unalterable seat of government." In that the State was without a capital is one of the peculiarities of Har Heel annals.

Among the 17 states then comprising the Union North Carolina ranked third in population. In 1790 her population was 393,751. This commonwealth was surpassed in numbers only by Virginia and Pennsylvania. Her population exceeded New York or Massachusetts. The village of Edenton was greater than the Dutch settlement which became New York City. But the inhabitants of North Carolina were almost wholly rural. Their plantation homes, often three or four miles apart, scatteringly dotted the State.

The General assemblies had hitherto alternatively met in the various small settlements called towns. The members usually journeyed horseback or by sulkey to the designated meeting places. These arduous trips were made over trails which could hardly be dignified by the name roads. The first paths either took the old Indian trading routes, one of which passed from the upper Neuse westward, not many miles north of the present capital, or followed the course of the important streams. The disturbance of the Regulators at Hillsboro and the creation of Wake and Chatham counties in 1770, had caused Governor Tryon to run new roads westward, both for commercial and military purposes, one of the most famous of these locally being Rhamkatté, a corruption of Rams Gate, over which his cannon was drawn to perform its murderous duty at Alamance. The marching of the armed forces during the Revolutionary struggle, particularly the course of Cornwallis from South Carolina to Guilford Court House, thence southwardly to Wilmington and again north across the State to his tragic surrender at Yorktown, and the forays of his bands and camp followers

routes and remade some former paths.

Over these roads and trails journeyed the men chosen to sit in the convention called to meet in 1789 in the town of Hillsborough. This town, situated in a high, healthy and fertile country on what had been the trading trail of the Indians hardly two generations ago, could then boast of nearly fifty houses and faced the future with high expectations of becoming the capital of the State. New Berne was then North Carolina's largest town and the favorite abode of the Royal Governors. Wilmington, 34 miles from the Atlantic, on the east bank of the Clarendon, now Cape Fear, river had then considerably less than 200 houses.

Edenton on the north side of Albemarle Sound, rivaled New Berne as the seat of political influence, and had less than 150 wood houses. Fayetteville at the head of navigation on the Clarendon had tragically struggled through the Revolution but had scarcely emerged from its Campbelltown or Cross Creek village status, although a competitor of Petersburg, Va., as a port of entry and export for the landlocked interior counties of Carolina. The town Washington, named for the General, by reason of its proximity to Ocracoke Inlet, was beginning its life with a rosy future. In the west Salisbury, on the Piedmont trail, a decade later could boast 90 dwellings. Tarborough and Greenville on the navigable Tar River gave promise of growth by reason of their favorable location and the fertility of the surrounding territory. Halifax on the western bank of the Roanoke, six miles below the falls, was then deemed a town of unusual promise, with its 25 houses, and boasting the home of the famous Willie Jones, a keen manipulator of men, whose grave is now on the eastern border of Raleigh. Halifax had been the scene of the memorable convention whose delegates April 12, 1776, authorized the representatives from this State in the provincial congress to vote for the independence of the colonies. Smithfield upon the Neuse, had already passed her fiftieth anniversary and harbored high expectations. The little settlement Haywood in the fork of the Haw and Deep Rivers likewise was not without ambition of becoming the capital of a great State. These were practically all the towns for Bath and Swan Quarter had doubtless passed their meridian.

New Berne, Fayetteville, Tarborough, Hillsborough, Haywood and Smithfield all had their champions and each was placed in nomination before the Hillsborough convention for the honor of being selected for the unalterable seat of government for North Carolina. But a last and seventh site was offered. This proposed location was perhaps known to nearly all delegates from the west and it was

don to the Virginia line. Its appeal was strong from a geographical, political and social standpoint. About four miles north of what was then known as Wake Cross Roads or Bloomsbury, the home of Col. Joel Lane, in a grove of giant oaks, a few of which still survive, stood the tavern owned and kept by Isaac Hunter on his 600-acre tract, adjacent on the north to the land of Nathaniel Jones of Crabtree. The location was well adapted for the purpose of a tavern. From this point radiated the new stage route northeast via Louisburg, Warrenton and Petersburg to the national capitol, while southward it stretched on to Fayetteville, and along the coastal ridge even to New Orleans. About 15 miles south from the tavern this highway forked with an east route to Smithfield and New Berne. From the tavern tract ran another spur northwest by the Falls of Neuse to the Granville courthouse, while the direct line north from the tavern door via the ancient settlement of Forestville (older than Wake Forest), was a path to and from Virginia which was gaining increasing favor. The present Louisburg road east from Person street running south of Crabtree came at a later period. One northern ford over Crabtree served the purposes of that day. Even that was too frequently impassable and the lumbering stage or even mounts had to turn back to Isaac Hunter's tavern or to Wake Cross Roads, as the case might be. Aunt Lucinda Briggs, born here in 1802, recalled that in her girlhood in favorable weather the blast of the stage driver's horn, from the hills beyond Crabtree, were heard in her Raleigh home. The last of the stage lines from Raleigh was to Fayetteville and that was operated until after the Civil War. Lane, the colored driver, was the champion horn blower of his day. The Crabtree crossing north of Raleigh had first a wooden bridge with a ford on the side for watering the horses. Thirty years ago the late W. W. Wynne always contended that the law should prohibit any bridge without a ford for the use stated.

Styles for bridges constantly change. The covered bridge became the vogue. The last of these covered bridges was probably the one spanning Crabtree on the Milburnie road. Such structures were peculiarly favorable for highwaymen and the "stick ups." Hardly 25 years have passed since horses hoofs clattered on the old plank road to Pigeon House branch. Those planks survived even while W. C. McMackin and William G. Allen were experimenting with macadam, but it finally vanished along with the grade crossing of the Seaboard Air Line with its numerous tragedies. Then came the iron and steel bridge over Crabtree, only in turn to be displaced until now the driver speeds his automobile over the concrete and hardly knows when he crosses this once formidable creek.

as it did amid the primeval oaks which adorn the lawn of the present home of Solicitor General J. Crawford Biggs, many of the convention delegates had no doubt rested on their wearisome journeys and had perhaps relished the liquid refreshments Isaac Hunter served.

Dr. K. P. Battle in 1892 wrote: "This historic tract of Isaac Hunter lies about three and a half miles north of our city on what was once the great road from the north to the south by way of Petersburg, Warrenton, Louisburg, Wake Court House to Fayetteville, Charleston and other points. The giant oaks which probably sheltered Isaac Hunter and the guests of his hospitable home, still stand about one mile north of Crabtree bridge." (Also N. C. Booklet, Vol. 2, No. 2 and No. 7.)

The proposal before the Hillsborough convention that the capital for North Carolina be located within ten miles of Isaac Hunter's tavern also had strong personal and political backing. Isaac Hunter and his brothers, Theophilus (died 1798) and Reubin (died 1796), had been among the early settlers in this section before Wake county was formed. Conveyances to Isaac and Theophilus appear in the records of Johnston county, which then embraced this section which later became Wake county. The holdings of Isaac Hunter were mainly on the north side of Crabtree, but not entirely, while Theophilus owned stretches south of Rocky branch and Walnut creek. Their brother, Reubin Hunter, lived on Steep Hill branch, a tributary of Swift creek, about seven miles south of here in the vicinity of Yates Mill. Reubin Hunter named sons Isaac and Theophilus and in order to distinguish them from contemporaries of the same name they signed their instruments either "Isaac Hunter, Jr." or "Isaac Hunter, S. C." (meaning of Swift creek, not South Carolina as some people have erroneously guessed) and "Theophilus Hunter, son of Reuben."

The family of the tavern keeper, Isaac Hunter, in 1790 consisted of himself, his wife, four sons and four daughters, for already the two eldest sons had families of their own and three of his daughters were married.

These marriage ties probably had an important bearing upon the location of Raleigh, a conjecture which seems to have escaped the attention of historians. Isaac Hunter's first wife was Rebecca Hart, by whom he had seven children. After her death he married Charlotte Thomas, whose father, John Giles Thomas, was the first owner by grant of what was called the Falls of Crabtree, now Lasser's Mill, property which Isaac subsequently acquired and ran a grist mill there. The mill was burned in 1804 but rebuilt. By the second marriage there were six children, a total of 13 children. Prior to 1790 the eldest son, Jacob, who had served in the Revolutionary



Rogers, a sister of Priscella (called Cele), wife of Col. Michael Rogers, one of Wake's outstanding patriots during the Revolution, who served as sheriff, as colonel in the militia, represented this county in the Hillsborough convention, 1775, and at Halifax, 1776, and as State Senator, 1778-81.

Another important connection was the marriage of Isaac Hunter's oldest daughter, Pherbe, to Joseph Lane, who was not only a brother of Joel Lane but was a member of the first Wake county court and he was named by the General Assembly as one of the seven commissioners to locate the county seat for Wake county. (N. C. Booklet, Vol. 2, No. 7, p. 7; Haywood's Lane, p. 7). Joseph Lane died in 1798 owning 1,752 acres which he left to his son, Joseph Lane, and grandsons, Joseph Lane McCullers and Henry Augustus McCullers, sons of his daughter, Sarah McCullers. Besides these marital ties with the Rogers and Lane families his daughter, Delilah (called Dilla and Delia), had married Reubin Sanders who, with Hardy and Britain Sanders, were conspicuous and valiant leaders in Wake and Johnston counties during the Revolution and in the halls of legislation.

After the Hillsborough convention, 1789, under the leadership of Willie Jones rejected the Constitution of the United States by a vote of 184 to 84 (Nathaniel Jones voted with the minority) the second proposition, namely, the choice of a location for the seat of State government, came before the body. On the second ballot, over the six competitors previously named, Isaac Hunter's tavern won. The convention "passed an ordinance directing the General Assembly to provide for the selection of a site for the State capital within ten miles of the plantation of Isaac Hunter in the county of Wake—that being as near as possible the geographical center of the State and on the great highways leading to every section." (Ashe, Vol. 2, p. 85.)

In conformity with this decree Judge James Iredell, who two years later was to sit upon the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States by commission from President Washington, drafted the ordinance which authorized the General Assembly to purchase a thousand acres of land within the radius stated "for the unalterable seat of government." Under this authority the General Assembly at New Berne in 1791 named the commissioners to select the site and make the purchase.

March 20, 1792, should have been a proud day for Isaac Hunter when the commissioners assembled at his tavern to consider the tracts offered. Starting from this vantage point, mounting their horses beneath these lordly oaks, the commissioners rode over an area of about twenty square miles, from Neuse river on the north and east almost to the headwaters of Swift, Middle and Crabtree creeks on the west. Finally at the end of about three weeks after enjoying the hospitality of Col. Joel Lane for the night, the choice was made, one thousand acres purchased for one thousand pounds, the surveyors began running their lines and the city of Raleigh was born within ten miles, yet within less than four miles of Isaac

ged old oaks, which once harbored this tavern and at which Lafayette was later welcomed and escorted to Raleigh, the stream of traffic on National Highway No. 1 flows by and to the south with the gathering evening shades a myriad of city lights glitter in their brilliance where a century and a half ago Isaac Hunter and his companions chased the deer from Crabtree to Walnut creeks, never dreaming that the cedar growth of that run would give place to the illuminated Fayetteville street of today.

The descendants of Isaac Hunter now no doubt number a thousand and can be counted by the hundreds in Wake county. He outlived nearly all of his 13 children and many of his grandchildren. His eldest son, Jacob Hunter, has been mentioned. He died in 1798 on his plantation, deed him by his father, which stretched from the Falls road to Marsh creek, east of the National Highway. Some of this land is still in the possession of his descendants, Hunters, Norwoods, Jeffries and other well-known families. His home was near the present Swindell residence. The second son, David Hunter, married Ghaskey McKleroy (same as Muckelroy), of Wake, then pioneered to Tennessee and has numerous descendants in that State and Arkansas.

A grandson Kimbrough Simms and his son Joseph Hunter, Jr., of Dallas County, Ark., and the daughter of the latter, Mrs. Susan B. McDonnell, have preserved more complete records than the descendants remaining here. For part of the purely personal data given I am indebtedness to Mrs. McDonnell and the recollections of one of Isaac Hunter's great granddaughters. Mrs. Evelina Norwood Briggs (1819-1901) my granddaughter. Third son, Alexander Hunter, helped settle Natchez, Miss. and is represented throughout that State and Texas. Fourth son, Michael never married and survived his father. Pherbe married Joseph Lane as related and her father deeded them lands on Williams Creek. Seventh child by the first marriage, Rebecca, married Benj. Lockhart, Anderson Hunter, 8th child but first by the second marriage, was living on his plantation adjacent to his father's when he died 1819 leaving 3 children and his widow who subsequently married A. B. W. Hopkins. A son, Norfleet, never married, and lived with his father on 315 acres adjacent on the east to the tavern tract. One year after his father died Norfleet sold this home place to his neighbor Kimbrough Jones in 1824. Tenth child Elizabeth married first William Camp and in 1801 Isaac Hunter deeded him the famous 600 acre tavern tract. Camp died in 1812 leaving an only child Nancy, who married James Brewer. The Brewers sold the land to B. S. King, long clerk of the court here, and great grandfather of Ernest Haywood, and it passed from him to Richard Smith, register of deeds of the county, then into the Mary Moorehead Smith estate; later Andrew Causse acquired it and named it "Hardimont" until he subdivided and sold in 1919. So the old 600 acre historic tavern tract lies on both sides of the national highway from the Kimbrough Jones place on the south to and including Cooper

Rogers and Isaac Hunter deeded him nearly a 100 acres, north of Lassiters Mill and facing along the Raleigh-Oxford road. Durrell Rogers died 1852 leaving 9 children. Eleventh child Louise married James House of Franklin County. In 1800 Isaac Hunter traded this son-in-law 627 acres for a stud horse named "Rufus." He had a passion for horses and bought them often. In 1776 the wild or unbranded horses and those confiscated from Tories were auctioned off at Wake courthouse and Isaac was there and bought a small bay horse "not branded." There was a race track on his home place sign of which were plainly visible within the memory of men now living. The 12th child Charlotte, called Lottie, married 1805 Green Davis of Franklin County. A tract of 600 acres was deeded them. The 13th and youngest child Frances (called Fanny) married Burwell Jones of Wake. In 1807 Isaac Hunter sold William Boylan 452 acres adjacent to Hunter home and this is still known as part of the Boylan land on the Louisburg road. In 1813 he sought to retire from active affairs and offered in

The Raleigh Register his grist mill and various other tracts for sale. He only reserved his home place 300 acres.

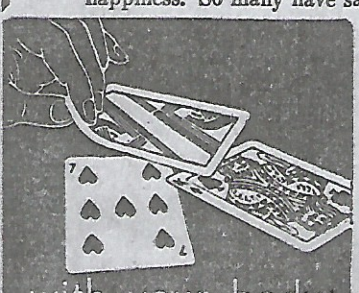
The house has long since disappeared and the unmarked grave is difficult even if possible to locate. His will was written June 11, 1821, witnessed by Almond Beavers and Abrighton Vandergrift. His executors were two of his sons-in-law, James Houze and Burwell Jones and Theophilus Hunter, a nephew. He had outlived all his sons except Michael and Norfleet. The slaves who ministered to him were like himself very old. He must have been well in his nineties. The announcement of the death of this patriarch is contained in The Raleigh Register, March 21, 1823: "Died in this vicinity at an advanced age Wednesday last Mr. Isaac Hunter, planter."

This article is for the purpose of bringing before the commission designated to mark historical spots this site of Isaac Hunter's tavern, just north of Raleigh, the unalterable seat of government for North Carolina.

# When appetite fails— don't gamble

Life insurance companies tell us that the gradual breakdown of the human body causes more deaths every year than disease germs

- 1 If your physical let-down is evidenced by lack of appetite... loss of weight... nervousness... sleeplessness... paleness... a tired feeling or lassitude caused by a lowered red-blood-cell and hemo-glo-bin content in the blood—then S.S.S. is waiting to help you... though, if you suspect an organic trouble, you will, of course, want to consult a physician or surgeon.  
Make S.S.S. your health safeguard and, unless your case is exceptional, you should soon enjoy again the satisfaction of appetizing food... sound sleep... and renewed strength.
- 2 Take a course of S.S.S. Remember, your present run-down condition may have been a slow, gradual process. Likewise, a reasonable time is required to rebuild full strength. S.S.S. is not a miracle worker—no rebuilding tonic is—but it is a scientifically proven and time-tested medicine. This is your guarantee of satisfaction. Its benefits are progressive... accumulative... and enduring.
- 3 Moreover, S.S.S. is not just a so-called tonic. It is a tonic specially designed to stimulate gastric secretions, and also has the mineral elements so very, very necessary in rebuilding the oxygen-carrying hemo-glo-bin of the blood. This two-fold purpose is important. Digestion is improved... food is better utilized... and thus you are enabled to better "carry on" without exhaustion—as you should naturally.  
If your condition suggests a tonic... if your appetite is not keen... get a bottle of S.S.S.... take an appetizing portion just before meals. You will find it is truly a blood and body tonic. You should feel and look years younger with life giving and purifying blood surging through your body. You owe this to yourself and friends.  
S.S.S. is sold by all drug stores in two convenient sizes. The \$2 economy size is twice as large as the \$1.25 regular size and is sufficient for two weeks treatment. Begin on the uproad today. S.S.S. is really an inexpensive way to better health and more happiness. So many have said— "S.S.S. makes you feel like yourself again?"



Do not be blinded by the efforts of a few unethical dealers who may suggest that you gamble with substitutes. You have a right to insist that S.S.S. be supplied you on request. Its long years of preference is your guarantee of satisfaction.

**S.S.S. the world's great blood**