

1677 - George Durant Arrested for Treason



George Durant

John Culpeper, Surveyor-General of Carolina in 1677, became known for seditious conduct on the Ashley River which caused him to flee northward to escape the hangman. Culpeper was resisting the enforcement of the Navigation Act. In December of 1677, a Yankee schooner, heavily armed and bearing a seductive cargo of rum and molasses, appeared in Pasquotank River.

Her skipper, whose name was Gillam, had scarcely set foot on land when he was arrested by the governor and held to bail in 1,000 pounds. The astute yankee, with an air of innocent surprise, meekly promised to weigh anchor at once and not return. However, a thirsty mob, angry over the loss of rum, entreated Gillam to stay. Governor Miller was a man in whom bravery prevailed over prudence, and, hearing at this moment that George Durant, a wealthy settler of Perquimans, was on the schooner, he straightway boarded her, pistol in hand, and arrested him on a charge of treason. George Durant (Born October 1, 1632, Died February 6, 1692) later became Attorney General and Speaker of the House of

Burgesses in the Province of Carolina, sometimes called the "father of North Carolina." A mob representing John Culpeper proceeded to take action.

They arrested the governor and his council. Then they took possession of the public records, convened the assembly, appointed new justices, making Culpeper governor, and seized 3,000 pounds of customs revenue collected by Miller for the king, which they applied it to the support of this revolutionary government.

For two years these adventurers exercised full sway over Albemarle.

Meanwhile, Culpeper issued a manifesto, accusing Miller of tyranny and speculation and seeking to justify himself; but then decided to play a still bolder part. Then he went to England in the hope of persuading the lords proprietors to sanction what he had done, and to confirm him in the governorship. In London he was surprised to hear that the deposed Miller had broken jail and arrived there before him. The twain forthwith told their eloquent but conflicting tales of woe. Culpeper was more convincing to the lords proprietors and prepared to return triumphly to Carolina, when suddenly he was arrested by officers of the king for robbing the custom-house of 3000 pounds!

This led to his trial for treason during the summer of 1680 before the Kings Bench. The Earl of Shaftesbury ably defended Culpeper, and he was acquitted but not restored to power. He returned to Carolina, and in his old capacity of surveyor, it is said, laid out the plan of the city of Charleston on its present site.