

The Trading Path and North Carolina

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Frontier is a subjective term, and one that has shifted and evolved over the years. North Carolina's piedmont and mountains originally were 'frontier'. The ever shifting frontier of North Carolina was explored cautiously, and with the help of the natives. In their explorations, and settlement of North Carolina, old native "trading paths" were utilized. Although some has been written about roads and paths into this area, most of the focus has been on the "Great Wagon Road". A more fascinating look into the settlement of North Carolina's frontier is "the braided network of paths" and roads that make up what are referred to as the Great Trading Path.¹ The label, in reality, referred to any number of different paths/roads within the state. This network allowed for the settlement of far flung areas in North Carolina, laying the ground work for where towns were formed, and providing a starting point for later roads throughout the state. Trade path routes were originally buffalo paths that then became Indian trails which were taken over by European explorers and settlers. Remnants of these old roads and trails have largely been forgotten as cars speed by, but can still be seen along many roads in this state. In many places, current roads overlay the centuries old paths. "The slender paths of aboriginal intercourse have been broadened and interwoven into the complex mazes of modern commercial lines".² Not only do these old roads represent our colonial beginnings, but they are a tangible part of our history that had a direct impact on where and how North Carolina was settled. For many North Carolinians very little is known about our early roads or their importance to the settlement of the state.

The network of trading paths holds great significance to North Carolina and other states as well. Not only is this an archaeological treasure, but a historical, and public history treasure as well. One definition of public history, as defined by the National Public History Council is "a movement, methodology, and approach that promotes the collaborative study and practice of history; its practitioners embrace a mission to make their special insights accessible and useful to the public."³ This field certainly would have an interest in and use for the trading paths of North Carolina.

The tangled network of "roads" known as the Great Trading Path can confuse the modern researcher. The path most often referred to, and probably one of the earliest and most utilized, stretched from Petersburg, Virginia to near present day Charlotte, North Carolina.⁴ The Catawba Indians were originally placed somewhere near Charlotte, and the termination of this path seems to have been with them. Before reaching the Catawba Indians however, the path cut across many Piedmont counties leaving an indelible mark upon them.⁵ Other routes were available, and did wind their way into other portions of North Carolina and the back country.

¹ Magnuson, Tom. Trade Path Association. Personal Interview September 2007.

² Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, DC: GPO and American Historical Association, 1894), 199-227. p. 20

³ "What is Public History?" National Council on Public History, <http://ncph.org/Home/tabid/349/Default.aspx> (accessed May 10, 2008).

⁴ North Carolina Museum of History Web Site. Available at <http://www.ncmuseumofhistory.org>

⁵ Fowler, Tom. *Carolina Journeys: Exploring The Trails of the Carolinas*. Parkway Publishers Inc.; Boone, NC. 2004. p.12

Some of those “other routes” were settlement off shoots, meaning that they had been added on to the original Indian trails to allow for settlement, or to reach settlements not directly linked to the path. Routes, settlements, and tribes shifted, but not immeasurably so. Roads were, and still are fairly immovable. Proof of the indelible nature of roads can be seen in their use in describing plats of land. Looking through land grants the researcher invariably stumbles across mentions of the “Great Trading Path” time and again. Today’s records utilize similar traits. A search of county GIS records, or Geographic Information Systems, reveals the utilization of rivers, streams, and roads to identify land boundaries.⁶ Though not the official boundary markers of today, this way of utilizing unmoving indentifying landmarks to plot land still exists.

From above, old pathways can be viewed cutting across fields, streams and through forests. Where the terrain is steeper a topographical map will pick up the variations in elevation left by road cuts, although they are often hard to identify without some direction.⁷ While viewing aerial and topographical maps can be helpful, a study of modern and historic road maps can be a helpful tool in searching out the course of colonial transportation. Many of our modern roads follow the paths of colonial commerce and settlement, or closely mimic their movements across the state. The very nature of road placement and the resulting sprawl is a issue that is still very much alive to this day.

Settlers arrived in colonial North Carolina differently than most of the other colonies of the day. Lacking a deep water port, and a connecting river system to the interior, North Carolina flourished only through over land settlement. People primarily arrived walking, on horseback, or by wagon down one of the many trade paths that provided entry into the North Carolina interior.⁸ The back country was appealing for a variety of reasons. Some sought a new life while others sought freedom from an intrusive government or impoverishment. To aid in North Carolina’s attraction, law makers in 1667 passed measures that negated their debts, taxes, and did not allow for suits to be brought against new residents by out of state parties for five years. This was a huge draw, for many colonists carried heavy debts. While being a definite draw for a population seeking new beginnings, it must not be forgotten that the new land in the frontiers of North Carolina was cheap, and for the taking. North Carolina became a haven for debtors, rogues, and formerly indentured servants seeking a new and better life.⁹ For those “redemptioners”, or indentured servants who had redeemed themselves from their debt to their patrons, the draw was; land of their own and a fresh start where they were not deemed second class citizens.¹⁰

Interestingly, in the back country, there were blended communities. People of different ethnicity, class, and race were living together cohesively and productively by the late 1700’s.¹¹ This is an interesting fact that should be explored in greater depth due to its placement in an area later torn by racial divisions. Seekers of freedoms, land, and a new start crossed a broad range of ethnicities, religions, and backgrounds. These settlers flocked to the fertile and open spaces that were the North Carolina piedmont and mountains. The nature of blended communities, during this period, in the North Carolina back country is a topic that would be fascinating in and of its

⁶ <http://www.alamance-nc.com> The GIS web site for Alamance County, which proves helpful in identifying land parcel ownership. It can also be used to identify areas of interest through aerial and topographical maps.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Wood, Peter H. Southern Colonies, <http://www.answers.com>

⁹ Elson, Henry William. History of the United States of America. The MacMillan Company; New York, 1904. pg’s. 83-88

¹⁰ Henderson, Archibald. The Conquest of the Old Southwest. The Century Co.; New York, 1920. p.6

¹¹ Arntsen, Barbara. Old roads a path to past. Goldsboro News-Argus. January 23rd, 2005.

self. From a public history stand point, race relations in the southern back country and through the contentious years of racial divides would be a fascinating topic to delve into in more detail. In the early days of American colonization the interior was a wild and scary place for settlers. Originally settlement was primarily along the coastline and its connecting waterways in large part due to a fear of leaving their known environment. Men, women, and children eventually quit hugging the coast, and began to trudge inward seeking new land and opportunities, setting the stage for American expansion westward. Migration and expansion followed the trading paths and trails that were left by the Native Americans. These Indian trails determined how and where settlers penetrated North Carolina, and were the “only road (s) worthy of mention in the Piedmont.”¹² This was not impenetrable and untrod land. The trails and “roads” followed, had been used by various animals and people for hundreds if not thousands of years.¹³

The evolution of the settler’s so called roads was from animal trail, to Indian path, to horse path, then to wagon trail, and in many cases to our modern roads. The early paths were “the trail of the American buffalo and the elk.”¹⁴ Animals moved about from place to place along the path of least resistance. Native Americans followed these same paths, and added onto them, knowing they were the quickest, easiest, and best routes.¹⁵ While Native Americans generally walked one foot in front of the other in neat lines, the Buffalo would meander in large groups providing a large, cleared, rutted path.¹⁶ One foot in front of the other was not the way Europeans traveled. Natives could walk close to 25 miles a day however it was rare to see a European traveller on foot. Europeans were not likely to venture more than a few miles on foot. Rarer still would be the European that would want to carry all of his or her possessions on their back in single file lines. “The horse was to the Colonial tar Heel what the automobile is to us today.”¹⁷ As transportation changed the roads and technology changed as well. For a historian or public historian interested in the development of technology in transportation the progression from foot to horse, wagon to coach, and eventually to automobile would be fascinating to study along these first routes of movement. Their effects on the placement, upkeep, and utilization of these old paths would prove to be a study of some use in determining why certain paths were discontinued in their use, while others flourished up until they were paved over by our modern highways and roads.

Horses were not familiar to natives before they were introduced by explorers and settlers. Even among settlers, horses were not incredibly common, being mainly for the wealthy. The horse was introduced in 1609, but the species was smaller than their modern counterparts which can trace their lineage back to 1760.¹⁸ William Byrd, in his “History of the Dividing Line” states that “For their Parts, they were utter Strangers to all our Beasts of Burthen or Carriage, before the Slothful Europeans came amongst them.”¹⁹ Beasts of burden indeed, horses greatly improved the amount of goods a trader or settler could haul. From primary documents it is able

¹² Rights, Douglas L. The American Indian in North Carolina. John F. Blair; Winston Salem, NC, 1957. p. 104

¹³ Tennent, Dr. Gail. The Indian Path In Buncombe County. The Stevens Press; Asheville, 1955. p. 2

¹⁴ Tennent, Dr. Gail. The Indian Path In Buncombe County. The Stevens Press; Asheville, 1955. p. 5

¹⁵ Lefler, Hugh T. and William S. Powell. Colonial North Carolina, A History. Charles Scribner’s Sons; New York, 1973.

¹⁶ Thompson, Roy. Before Liberty. Piedmont Publishing Company Inc.; Lexington, NC. 1977. p. 141

¹⁷ Thompson, Roy. Before Liberty. Piedmont Publishing Company Inc.; Lexington, NC. 1977.

¹⁸ Taylor, Dale. Everyday Life in Colonial America From 1607-1783. Writer’s Digest Books; Cincinnati, Ohio, 1997. p. 189

¹⁹ Byrd, William. William Byrd’s Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina. The North Carolina Historical Commission; Raleigh, NC, 1929. p. 266

to be gleaned that horses were packed with between 150 to 200 pounds of goods. The same documents also tell us that some trade caravans utilized a hundred horses, but caravans were often smaller.²⁰ The hauling capacity of 150 to 200 pounds proved useful. That usefulness would be proved by the later utilization of pack horses in trade caravans in North Carolina by Native Americans. Riding horses did not catch on with natives, in terms of travel. Horses had to be taken care of diligently so that they did not become more of a burden than a help. A horse throwing a shoe or getting injured could slow a traveller greatly and imperil the group and their journey.²¹ The use of horses actually cut down the distance that was able to be travelled. In fact, oxen were by far a better choice for the settler traveling with a wagon as they were much sturdier and hardier. More stable, oxen proved easier to use in often less than ideal conditions along paths and fords. These animals, and not horses, were the main beast of burden traveling the Great Wagon Road.²²

The advent of equine travel in the back country of North Carolina, and beyond changed everything for European settlers. A closer study of the changes wrought on Native American societies and settlement patterns due to the introduction of the horse would seem to be both profitable and interesting. For back country historians, those interested in the history of transportation, and many more, this would provide insight into a time and people that are still being discovered and explored. The horse can be seen to have been the starting point for transportation changes yet to come.

After the advent of equine travel, carriages and wagons came into use. The road conditions had to improve for carriages to be viable, and this appears to be the case in some areas by 1730. The main place that the carriages became viable was between major cities. Many roads through the piedmont maintained their difficult and unimproved status for some time after 1730.²³ Although John Lawson, in his 1700 travels down the Trade Paths, refers to the roads as being well cared for and generally pleasant, there are many accounts that paint a very different picture. Roads were often described in such terms as “wretched and exceedingly bad” or “rough and circuitous”. However, the trade path was a well traveled route that most likely was better than many other roads of the same era.²⁴ Much better than many roads, but still rough and often hard to navigate, the modern traveller would probably be appalled. For those seeking a new life in North Carolina’s frontier the road was a means to an end. Thus they were well traveled, even if they were not well maintained.

Early recorded exploration of the North Carolina “back country” began in the late 1600’s. One of the earliest accounts of the wilds of the North Carolina frontier along the trade paths is from a party sent out by Abraham Wood from Fort Henry, Virginia. Wood employed James Needham and Gabriel Arthur as well as Indian guides and porters, to explore the North Carolina back country and the possibility of trade with its native inhabitants. Many who sought to explore North Carolina via the trade paths, travelled on portions of the main path from Virginia to the

²⁰ Rights, Douglas L. The Trading Path to the Indians. The Colonial Records Project. [Vol. 8 (1931), 403-426]

²¹ Boyd, William K. PH.D. William Byrd’s Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina. The North Carolina Historical Commission; Raleigh, 1929. p. 266

²² Taylor, Dale. Everyday Life in Colonial America From 1607-1783. Writer’s Digest Books; Cincinnati, Ohio. 1997, p.191

²³ Chitwood, Oliver Perry. A History of Colonial America. Harper & Row Publishers; New York.1961. p. 386

²⁴ Lefler, Hugh T. and William S. Powell. Colonial North Carolina, A History. Charles Scribner’s Sons; New York. 1973 p. 170

Catawba's south of present day Charlotte, North Carolina. This was in 1673, and preceded the more well known John Lawson excursion.²⁵

John Lawson worked for the "Lords Proprietors to make a reconnaissance of their Carolina Provinces back county in 1700."²⁶ Lawson wrote a book about his travels; *A New Voyage to Carolina*. In his account, Lawson travels along various trading paths, from Charleston, South Carolina, through the North Carolina interior. Lawson describes "Their Roads, with great Industry, are made very good and pleasant."²⁷ However, as was mentioned above, this was not always the prevailing view. These conflicting views would be fascinating to explore, as they may lead the researcher to a closer understanding of the possible motivations for settlement, as well as the mindset of the people approaching the arduous task of settlement.

Trading paths were labeled this way as a result of their historic use by Native Americans to trade amongst themselves, as well as with Europeans. This label was also given to many paths which have taken different names over the years, such as The Great Wagon Road and The Warrior's Path. The two are one in the same, with The Great Warrior's Path being this road's original incarnation. The original warrior's path was used by the Iroquois for both trade, and to make war in the southern colonies. However, after signing treaties, Europeans began to take over this path, and its incarnation as the Great Wagon Road began.²⁸ The Occaneechi Saponi tell of their success in regulating the early paths as merchants. In their history, it was a "mart for all Indian trade 500 miles around." This made the Occaneechi, who controlled crossings first in Virginia, and later near Hillsborough, NC, "very wealthy people being the merchant traders for all this part of the east."²⁹ The Occaneechi held a prominent point along the main path from Virginia before being pushed out by colonists. They settled "Occaneechi Island" in the James River where an important ford led into North Carolina, and regions beyond. This island has now been inundated, and is no longer visible as an important piece of early American history.³⁰

The Great Wagon Road began impacting late 18th century settlement of North Carolina's frontier as well as much of the South.³¹ Its beginnings as an Indian Path and subsequent metamorphosis into a settlement road allowed for it to be called a "trade path". During the 1700's this was the single most traveled road within North Carolina. It was arguably one of the most well traveled roads in the nation as well.³² Unlike many other Indian trails turned colonial roadways, much is known of the Great Wagon Road. Many books have been written on this subject, and several primary sources are available to tell the modern scholar about this road as well.

²⁵ Cooper, James M. The Indian Trading Path Across North Carolina. Pamphlet Like Source with no publisher, place of publishing, or date. Was found in the Burlington, NC May Memorial Library.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Lawson, John. A New Voyage To Carolina. The University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, NC, 1967. p.9

²⁸ Rouse Jr., Parke. The Great Wagon Road From Philadelphia To The South. McGraw Hill Book Co.; London, 1973. p. ix

²⁹ Richard L. Haithcock and Vicki L. Haithcock. Occaneechie Saponit and Tutelo of the Saponi Nation: aka Piedmont Catawba. P. 110

³⁰ Ibid, p. 130

³¹ Rouse Jr., Parke. The Great Wagon Road From Philadelphia To The South. McGraw Hill Book Co.; London, 1973. p. ix

³² Lefler, Hugh T. and William S. Powell. Colonial North Carolina, A History. Charles Scribner's Sons; New York, 1973. p. 170

The Great Wagon Road has the potential to appeal to public historians, historians, and genealogists alike. Many Piedmont North Carolinians ancestors traveled down this path. An organization called the Trading Path Association is in the process of trying to help develop this roadway to make it accessible to the general public, as a tourist attraction and historical monument. They seek to create a network of roads along the route to inform the public of the importance of this roadway, and to gain attention for it.³³

The Great Trading Paths have not fared well in the game of historical documentation. It is often hard to find information about them. One source that does give some indication as to where the Great Trading Paths were, and of their importance to settlers, are property records. Property demarkations, where applicable, utilized the “trading paths”. Fords, trading routes, and creeks and rivers were often the only early land marks that were available for demarkation.³⁴ Thus, fences and old fencing material is often found abutting these old roads and paths. The use of the path as a reference point was “convenient, and in their minds not likely to substantially change or completely go away.”³⁵ Unfortunately, many of these original roads have disappeared. The knowledge has, in many cases been lost over successive generations. In researching the trade path, and contacting those with portions on their properties, or who supposedly have some knowledge of it, the refrain is often the same. Repeatedly older people report that their grandparents or parents knew the location of a ford or road remnant along the land in question, but that that knowledge has passed along with the person. This along with the fact that routes shifted over time slightly as the technology shifted can challenge the seeker of these old roadways.³⁶ The oral tradition in native communities often fares better, and the documentation of the Occaneechi Saponi is a good reference point for details on the trading paths. However, the exact locations seem to matter less than the details surrounding the paths. This could be an area of study, about the oral history of the paths, and the lack of continuation into our modern age, where oral histories are often forgotten or lost.

Over time the paths, much like our modern roads, needed to be regulated to make them more passable for settlers. Militiamen were often conscripted, and used the knowledge of the time to build and maintain these “roads”. County Courts, in 1764 were tasked with road building and maintenance by the North Carolina Assembly. The courts were able to conscript “male taxables from sixteen to sixty” for about one week a year.³⁷ These men used only “their shovels, mattocks, and other” simple tools. Using the technology of the day they worked the roads into a standard 10 foot wide, passable roadbed with no more than a 12% grade.³⁸ This is, and was the limitation for horses and cars. Horses cannot be expected to go down anything much steeper without fear of “burn out”. In other words, horses would be likely at a steeper grade to fall. Damage to the horses or their burdens would occur, causing delay or a loss of resources, and money. It should also be noted that where these paths ford rivers, there are often tributary streams.³⁹ Bridges did not come about until much later, for the most part. Steel and wood were

³³ Magnuson, Tom. Trading Path Association. Interview during Trade Path section hike, October 2007.

³⁴ Southern, David. *How the Markham Maps Inform Fish Dam Road Research*. <http://www.enoriver.org>

³⁵ Hoffman, Margaret M. *Colony of North Carolina 1735-1764 Land Patents*. The Roanoke News Company; Weldon, NC.1982.

³⁶ In many interviews with older residents they continually stated that the knowledge had been lost in only one or two generations.

³⁷ Ready, Milton. *A History of North Carolina*. University of South Carolina Press; Columbia, S.C. 2005. p. 65

³⁸ Mull, J. Alexander and Gordon Boger. *Recollections of the Catawba Valley*. Appalachian Consortium Press; Boone, NC. 1983. p. 66

³⁹ Hulbert, Archer Butler. *Historic Highways Volume 2*. The Arthur H. Clark Co.; Cleveland,1902. p. 23

expensive and early on there were no engineers to build fancy spans across creeks and rivers which had been forded for hundreds of years before on foot. Thus these roads often followed the older paths to well established fords that were marked at the rivers by “feeder creeks”.⁴⁰

Feeder creeks can be identified by the way they fed into the rivers at shallow gravelly spots that were easy to cross. These streams were used to approach the river along a gentler grade, as piedmont rivers often have steep banks that do not allow for horses or men to enter the rivers easily. Fords were “choke points”. All traffic came to a stop, and would cross the river at predetermined and possibly manned fords. Rivers controlled all movement in central North Carolina. Unlike other states, North Carolina’s rivers are more barriers than methods of movement and transportation. The rivers in North Carolina, and in particular the piedmont, tend to have high slopping banks that were inhospitable to fording. Shallow rocky bottomed rivers and streams prevented much in the way of boating in Piedmont at the time.⁴¹ There are always exceptions, but for the most part in the interior rivers were not used as a source of travel.

A good example of a feeder creek situation existed in Haw River, in Alamance County according to one local family. This family has owned large tracts of land there for as long as their members can remember. They describe a crossing that utilized feeder creeks on their holdings. The exact location of this crossing has faded from memory. As one member described, it passed with his father, but was well known to him and the previous generations. It is easy to see, when viewing possible candidates for this type of crossing, why they were so helpful. A small creek with gently slopping sides and a pebbled bottom that spills gently into the faster moving and less easily navigable river is infinitely better than attempting to drag a stubborn horse or mule down a steep embankment, while risking both the animal and its load.⁴² Thus, feeder creeks, at least in terms of horse crossings were a much safer and surer bet.

When seeking a ford, factors that need to be addressed are; “Angle of entrance and exit, solidity of bottom, depth, and speed of water”. The differing needs of a person, a pack animal, and a wagon must be considered when searching out these fords. As technology changed, so would the ford. A person is more agile at scrambling across rocks than a horse or a cumbersome wagon would be, but a wagon and horse have the advantage of being able to ford where humans would fear to.⁴³ It stands to reason that as “choke points”, fords would be the most appropriate place to seek archaeological evidence of this era. Waiting to ford a river or ferry could be time consuming. Thus a great deal of time was spent at these fords allowing for a great deal of cast off and residual items.⁴⁴ These treasure troves of the past have largely been ignored. Unfortunately, at least one important ford in the Piedmont area has been destroyed for development purposes without benefit of investigation or excavation previously. These areas should be studied to further our knowledge of the contact and settlement eras of North Carolina’s history.

Although largely ignored, the 1764 Road Acts allowed for a system to license ferry operators and road signs to be erected. “Overseers of Highways or Roads” were appointed and were to maintain the standards, licenses and signs. This, by and large, did not happen in the North Carolina back country. Mile posts probably would not have mattered to most early

⁴⁰ Magnuson, Tom. Trading Path Association. Interview during Trade Path section hike, October 2007.

⁴¹ Magnuson, Tom. Trading Path Association. Interview during Trade Path section hike, October 2007.

⁴² Personal Interview with Haw River resident Herman Johnson, 2007.

⁴³ Magnuson, Tom. Trading Path Association. “The Roads Made the Town”. October 2005.

⁴⁴ Tom Magnuson Interview 2007.

travellers, as the distance they could cover in a day was about the distance between towns. Towns sprang up along the roads for that very reason.⁴⁵

Settlers followed these “Indian Trade Paths” into the interior seeking new land and opportunities. Along the way they founded towns and villages. “By 1740 the Piedmont of North Carolina was a very settled place. It was profoundly uncivilized, but it was thoroughly settled.”⁴⁶ Many early towns were founded along the trading paths as respite sites. These sites were about 15 to 20 miles apart, as that is about the limit of early settlers ability for a days worth of travel. Enterprising individuals set up early homesteads and towns along the banks of rivers where they could easily be forded; such is the case with the town of Haw River. This town grew up around the homestead and factory that the Trollinger family set up along the Haw River’s banks at an easily fordable site known as Piney Ford. It quickly took on the name of its host and curator, becoming known more famously as Trollinger’s Ford. Some of the earliest settlements in the “back country” of North Carolina are; Charlotte, Salisbury, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and Hillsborough. These settlements can be found to be directly on, or very closely related to the trading paths.⁴⁷

An interesting dichotomy would be the study of settlement and ethnic identity in that settlement in the period of the trading paths, and the settlement of the west later on. Connections could be drawn in the two cases, almost assuredly. Also interesting would be a study of the ethnic and religious nature of settlement throughout U.S. history, in the back country and major cities.

Many present day towns can be labeled “Trading Path Towns”. Among those in North Carolina, Hillsborough and Salisbury stand out. Salisbury is laid out along two intersecting trading paths and is situated very close to an important trading ford. Later maps of Salisbury show multiple “roads” intersecting at this town. A courthouse, jail, and inn sprang up here and are recorded in land deeds as abutting the trading path.⁴⁸ Hillsborough was also a diverging point for multiple roads and is situated right on a ford. This town sprang up as a wayside rest and trading spot, and maintained its importance for a very long time due almost entirely to the multitude of roads. The importance of its ford on the Eno River cannot be negated, and helped to firmly establish this town. Residence gained economically by hosting travelers along the various routes that diverged here.⁴⁹

Towns along the trading path would invariably have had a tavern. As colonial life went, this was a center for social life and information. Taverns were not the same as the taverns and bars of today, but were a combination of a hotel and a restaurant. These roadside stops would accommodate the weary traveller providing information, rest, and supplies, much like the rest stops of today.⁵⁰ Mainly places for men, rooming accommodations often housed up to six men in one bed. Women could find private rooms, but were more apt to stay in homes of friends.⁵¹ These primitive hotels were a common feature along the roads. They were a commonality to all

⁴⁵ Ready, Milton. *The Tar Heel State, A History of North Carolina*. University of South Carolina Press.;Columbia, S.C. 2005.p. 64

⁴⁶ Magnuson, Tom. Trading Path Association. “The Roads Made the Town”. October 2005.

⁴⁷ Rights, Douglas L. *The Trading Path To The Indians*. The Colonial Records Project. North Carolina Historical Review. Updated 5/21/01.

⁴⁸ Ramsey, Robert W. *Carolina Cradle*. University of North Carolina Press;Chapel Hill.1964.p.155

⁴⁹ Tom Magnuson Interview. 2007.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Taylor, Dale. *Everyday Life in Colonial America From 1607-1783*. Writer’s Digest Books; Cincinnati, Ohio. 1997. p. 194

trade path towns and were used as a sort of social and political center for the towns as well as a haven for outsiders. This served a number of purposes, including gathering information from travellers, and providing them with it as well.⁵² Taverns played a significant role, in this way, in the Revolutionary War. A visible tavern foundation can be found along a portion of road on the lands of Ayr Mount, a historic home in Hillsborough, North Carolina. Although just a foundation, this speaks volumes as to its use as a stopping point along this section of road.⁵³

County court houses in North Carolina often sprang up along the trading routes because of their ease of access to settlers. In 1752 Orange County was created, encompassing wholly the Alamance County of today. The need for a courthouse was addressed by centrally placing one on the trading path near an important ford on the Haw River near the present town of Haw River. Land records indicate its proximity to the trade path and the trading ford.⁵⁴ This courthouse, situated on the trading path in the center of the new county, was a very important colonial institution indeed. The fact that this very important political, economic, and social institution was placed along the trading path, and at a well known, and often utilized ford speaks to the importance of this path and ford, at that time.

Towns, taverns, and court houses were not the only things to be found in abundance along the trading paths. Many early churches and grave yards have been found to be in very close proximity, if not directly off of, the trading paths. A good example of this is the Hawfields Presbyterian Church. Established in 1755, it was originally directly linked with a trading path cutting through this section of current day Alamance County.⁵⁵ The old church foundation and cemetery still exist, in a fashion, close to a remnant of the trading path. Now a plowed farm field and wooded lot, the church has since moved to a more prominent and central location, but at one time this church was a “trade path” entity. There are many such church remnants and tattered remains of cemeteries that lay alongside forgotten remnants of the trade path past.

Early routes to settlement are a very important part of our history, and one which has been marginalized and glossed over. Unfortunately the remnants of these roads are largely unrecognized and unprotected by the public. The Hillsborough, North Carolina based “Trade Path Association” is chartered with the location and preservation of old roads, trails, and paths. They “assist counties and towns in the locating and authentication of 16th through 19th century path, trail, and road remnants.” They also work to help provide interpretations that could be of use in “park and tourism development efforts.”⁵⁶ Not only were these roads the basis for colonization of the interior, but they are an important link to our past, and understanding it. If any sites deserve press and protection these old road beds and paths certainly should.

Interestingly enough, for those with the time and inclination, portions of these old roads can still be found and explored. Such portions provide insights into transportation, the difficulties that must have been faced, and a tangible link to the past. Upon climbing down into one such road bed near Ayr Mount, in Hillsborough, North Carolina, ruts could still be observed to exist in the soil, packed by years of heavy use and abuse. The sides of the road bed were worn down by the years, but bore silent tribute to the wear and tear of countless horses and passing

⁵² Chitwood, Oliver Perry. *A History of Colonial America*. Harper&Row Publishers; New York.1961. p. 389

⁵³ Observed on a visit to the Ayr Mount property in Hillsborough, NC

⁵⁴ Troxler, Carole Watterson and William Murray Vincent. *Shuttle & Plow, A History of Alamance County, North Carolina*. Alamance County Historical Association, Inc. 1999. p. 54

⁵⁵ “The Churches of Orange County” L.J. Phipps, <http://www.thepastwhispers.com>

⁵⁶ Tom Magnuson, “Trading Path Association Information and Facts,” Trading Path Association, <http://www.tradingpath.org> (accessed May 08, 2008).

wagons. Dependent upon the terrain, these road beds can be so low in the ground that a wagon, man, or horse may not have been visible from a distance. As well as being deeply eroded, the road bed in question was also close to ten feet wide with only small newer growth trees littering its way.⁵⁷

An overwhelming sense of awe can be felt from standing deep in the woods in a trench dug by thousands of feet, hooves and wagon wheels over the years. Our ancestors traveled these same roads with their hopes, dreams, and possessions on their backs or in their wagons, moving to an unknown interior and forming a state and a nation. Walking away from the modern road and entering the rough wooded tract near Hillsborough, a distinct road “bed” can be observed. With walls stretching almost five feet on both sides and an eight foot wide bed, this clearly is a well defined road. Looking closely ruts can, in places, still be observed. Along this section of road can still be seen the remnants of an old tavern. This is often the case, as was previously mentioned, with taverns being built along these old roads as a “rest stop” for weary travelers. Not only could the traveler find food and shelter for himself and his horse,” but could himself gain a measure of rest and refreshment.⁵⁸ The roads, as can somewhat be experienced by exploring a remnant, were exhausting and primitive. The early traveler would have relished a stop along the way no matter how rough or primitive it may have been.

A study of modern road maps will provide the modern driver with various routes that incorporate pieces of the old trading paths. Many roads bear the names “Old Trail”, “Indian Path”, and the like. Comparing modern maps and old maps such as Henry Mouzon’s 1775 map of North and South Carolina, a clear comparison can be seen to the old “Trade Path” routes and more modern highways that run on, or close to the same path these older roads followed.⁵⁹ In 1733 Edward Mosley mapped the North Carolina area, and laid out a clear roadway for the trade path.⁶⁰ Its passage through the piedmont of North Carolina was well defined, and precise. It does not vary much from Mouzon’s map 42 years later. This path, although shifting slightly due to the changing technology, and possible road conditions, stayed very much the same until the advent of the automobile. Even now, there has only, in most cases, been a slight shift away from the old routes.

Old paths are often located near current roads, as the needs of those utilizing the roads changed, so did the roads themselves. The paths that a horse or a man could use might be well and truly useless to a wagon and later a car, so the roads would have been moved to an easier and more access-able locale for the technology. As is the case in Hillsborough, numerous fords can be seen in the same general vicinity where crossings moved ever so slightly to keep up with the change in technology and the resulting need for change in terrain.⁶¹ Often while traveling roads in the Piedmont, drivers will pass on and off of paved sections of the old paths. It has been speculated that portions of Interstate 40/85 indeed closely mimic, or are, paved portions of the trading paths.⁶² When crossing over the modern bridge from Haw River into Graham, a look to

⁵⁷ Multiple notations from hikes along known sections of the Trading Path throughout Alamance, Orange, and Rockingham Counties.

⁵⁸ Chitwood, Oliver Perry. *A History of Colonial America*. Harper & Row Publishers; New York, 1961. p. 388

⁵⁹ Henry Mouzon. *An Accurate Map of North and South Carolina, with their Indian Frontiers*. 1775. Cummings, William P. *The Southeast in Early American Maps*. 3rd Ed. The University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, NC.1986. Plate 50 A

⁶⁰ Moseley, Edward. *A New and Correct Map of the Province of North Carolina*. 1733.

⁶¹ Tom Magnuson Interview 2007.

⁶² Fowler, Tom. *Carolina Journeys: Exploring The Trails of the Carolinas*. Parkways Publishers Inc.; Boone, NC. 2004. p.13

the right can reveal a trace of old trade path remnants. In the middle of the river lies a small island which, with careful scanning, reveals slight impressions left by years of crossings.

To highlight the historical significance of this network of roads, the curious only have to look to several North Carolina Piedmont Revolutionary War sites. Several battles were fought for control of sections of road or because troops encountered each other while traveling portions of these roads. Fords and road remnants can be found at important sites such as; Pyle's Defeat in Alamance County. Pyle's Defeat is along a section of the Trading Path passing just west of present day Graham, and proceeding into Burlington. Portions of both the ford and the various sections of road can still be found in the woods near the site of the battle, as well as various remnants of the battle itself, including a mass grave. Much of the road remnants at this site are threatened as this area has seen much industrialization since the remnants were last mapped.⁶³ Utilizing this previous research provides the sad realization that urban and industrialization often trumps the more susceptible historical assets. Alamance Battle Ground, also in Alamance County, is situated along the same trade path, but is being preserved to a certain extent by the battle fields protected status.⁶⁴ The battle of Guilford Courthouse, in present day Greensboro, in Guilford County was also fought along the path near the trade path town of New Garden.⁶⁵

The previously mentioned battles occurred on or very close to trade paths that became roads, and it stands to reason that this is because the troops were following these roads.⁶⁶ The Battle of Weitzel's Mill was fought for control of the crucial ford at High Rock Creek in Rockingham County.⁶⁷ These roadways set the stage for many important battles, setting up where and how the troops would meet thus being vitally important to colonial society in more than one way. Trading Paths have played a significant role in North Carolina's history, and one that is not often mentioned or studied.

The history of these roads is fascinating as it tells the story of how and why different cities and towns were formed. While much of this history has been forgotten or ignored it is, in places, still available to see and understand. Much of the path has succumbed to urbanization, and a lack of understanding and respect. However, this is not exclusively the case. Many portions remain, although hidden and overgrown; and they are often close at hand. One such portion to the north east of modern Hillsborough, North Carolina is located just off of the main body of the road. The careful passerby can catch a glimpse of the old road bed, and in one portion, the driver will indeed be traveling on the original road bed. Turning off onto a gravel side street the curious can still see, overgrown and barely visible to passing motorists, a wide road bed leading back towards the town. Unfortunately, due either to a lack of understanding or education on the historical significance of these assets, many have chosen to use the deep road cuts as trash dumps making them unsightly and unnavigable to those who wish to study them on foot.⁶⁸

Simplistically put, trade paths changed North Carolina. Not only did settlers flood in on these paths, but the face of trade and relations with native tribes changed. Trade had once been a

⁶³ Troxler, Carole Watterson. Pyle's Defeat: Deception at the Racepath. Alamance County Historical Association; Graham, NC. 2003.

⁶⁴ <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/Sections/hs/alamance/alamanc.htm>

⁶⁵ Hughes, Fred. Guilford County, NC; a map supplement. The Custom House, Jamestown, NC. 1988.

⁶⁶ Troxler, Carole Watterson. Pyle's Defeat: Deception at the Racepath. Alamance County Historical Association; Graham, NC. 2003.

⁶⁷ Magnuson, Tom. Trade Path Association. Personal Interview During Trade Path/Ford Hike on High Rock Rd. Rockingham County, NC 12/2/2007.

⁶⁸ Multiple notations from hikes along known sections of Trading Paths in Orange County.

stinted and isolated affair with Europeans setting up shop in “trading posts”. Natives had long traded along these routes, but integration seems to have been limited at first. With the utilization of trading paths came a mixing of cultures, and an opening of a trade market. Trade did not have to be a one sided affair with a limited reach. Now extensive trade routes could be established reaching even the most isolated of settlers and Native Americans creating more supply and demand. With trade improvements and expansion, came improvements in many other areas of colonial life in well established towns and far flung settlements. In fact, agriculture in the back country, or frontier, took off with this expansion and trade. These newly settled and economically developing regions were fertile and ripe for both traders and settler’s plans.⁶⁹ With traders and their goods able to reach even far flung settlers, the quality of life improved, and the technology of the day allowed for improvements in multiple areas.

Although networks of paths crisscross this state, clearly many are of a less historic and more mundane use. Maps and knowledge of the original routes of these old roads are needed to accurately identify a road as being part of the original trading paths, or the supplementary settlement routes that sprang up along and between them. Often a closer study of the area in question is needed. As was previously mentioned, county GIS information can be helpful in this pursuit. For instance, logging roads may on the surface appear to be something of interest. With a study of land deeds and county GIS information, the researcher can determine if the land has been used for logging or not.⁷⁰ When in question a study of older maps, a study of the surrounding areas, and a closer look at the road bed remnants are called for. A road must lead somewhere!

Unfortunately studying trading paths and their relevance to North Carolina’s settlement and history is a messy business. Often records are inconsistent and much of the information that is presented as fact seems to be a misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the facts. The Trading Path Association provides helpful and insightful information that can be both easily understood and easily utilized.⁷¹ Unfortunately the same does not hold true for most books which mention the subject. Residents of the various localities that host remnants of fords and the various trading paths are by turns incredibly helpful and knowledgeable or completely ignorant of the cultural heritage in their own back yards. Many residents are willing to regale the listener with tales of remnants and their experiences with them. Some are even generous enough to attempt to muck about finding fords and remnants that may be of interest. With permission and guidance these kind folks provide insight and tangible evidence of their historical knowledge and land holdings. These men and women prove that the southern hospitality experienced by the back country settlers on the trading path is still alive and well. Other references to the network of paths can be found as asides in books and articles about early explorers, and the travels of ordinary men and women. When reading books about Roanoke and Jamestown’s search for the survivors of the early settlement, one comes across references to travel through North Carolina while being guided by natives.⁷² Almost certainly they travelled the network of trading paths whose remnants can still be seen today.

⁶⁹ Hinderaker, Eric and Peter C. Mancall. *At the Edge of Empire; The Backcountry in British North America*. The John Hopkins University Press; London. 2003. p.164-165

⁷⁰ <http://www.mapcard.com/>

⁷¹ Tom Magnuson, “Trading Path Association Information and Facts,” Trading Path Association, <http://www.tradingpath.org> (accessed December, 2007).

⁷² Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Roanoke, The Abandoned Colony*. Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; New York. 2007.

A study of early North Carolina maps shows the evolution of the system of roads into the interior. Both John Collet's 1770 and Henry Mouzon's 1775 map of North Carolina show trading path routes.⁷³ With a little bit of work these maps can provide some answers for the modern researcher as to the location of these road remains. Many of our current highways and roads show marked similarities to the old paths, and many still bear the names of early settlers to the area, or references to the roads former use. Urbanization and industrialization often impedes the search for the locations of fords and path remnants. A look into this phenomenon should be done, and would prove useful to the possibility of saving other threatened historical treasures. Why should we care about the trading paths? Simply put because they are an important piece of our nation, and states past. These roads brought our ancestors into this state, and laid the basis for where they would settle. As historians, public historians, genealogists, or simply those interested in this topic, we have a duty to explore areas of our past that remain in obscurity. So little is concretely known about the early days of settlement in this nation, and state, that delving into the resources we have can only benefit the researcher and the public. North Carolina's citizens and others as well, deserve to know about this important part of the state's history. Groups such as the Trade Path Association and their Great Wagon Road development project seek to walk the line between tourism and history.⁷⁴ The potential for an educational, historically significant, and bankable project is real.

The braided networks of paths that make up what is now referred to as the "Great Trading Path" are a cultural and historical treasure for the state of North Carolina. These roads are the basis for the exploration and settlement of the North Carolina "frontier". Today's highways and side streets incorporate sections of these old paths, and form a continuous bond with our past. Many modern towns and cities were formed on the basis of these old roads and their usefulness along them as rest stops and trading stations. Groups such as the Trade Path Association, based in the Trading Path town of Hillsborough, North Carolina, need the support of the state and local governments as well as the public to help preserve this fast disappearing portion of our past. Such a rich part of our history has been left to nature, and its cultural and historical resources have barely been studied or acknowledged.

⁷³ David Rumsey, "David Rumsey Map Collection," David Rumsey Map Collection, <http://davidrumsey.com/> (accessed February 2008).

⁷⁴ Tom Magnuson, "Trading Path Association Information and Facts," Trading Path Association, <http://www.tradingpath.org> (accessed May 08, 2008).