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Jones: Hertford had nation's 1st mixed-race community

Winton Triangle included free people of color, Indians

BY PAUL NIELSEN
Staff Writer

The oldest mixed-race community in the United States that actually predates the birth of the country is in Hertford County, according to Marvin Tupper Jones.

Jones, speaker for last week's History for Lunch program at Museum of the Albemarle, said the area known as the "Winton Triangle" is rich in history.

"I call it the Triangle because it is formed by Winton, Cofield and Ahoskie," Jones said, referring to the three small Hertford communities.

The Triangle was first settled by free, mixed-race people more than 250 years ago, said Jones, who has deep roots in northeastern North Carolina and has documented the region's history through the Chowan Discovery organization.

However, the Triangle's first residents were the Chowanoke people, who arrived around 1585, Jones said. At one time there were 18 towns along the Chowan River, but only one



Marvin Tupper Jones discusses the origins of the "Winton Triangle" in Hertford County during the History for Lunch presentation at Museum of the Albemarle, Wednesday. The Winton Triangle is made of the Hertford communities of Winton, Cofield and Ahoskie.

remained by 1744. The Meherrin Nation moved into Hertford and Gates counties around 1676, Jones said.

"Many of us are Chowanoke and Meherrin descen-

dants," Jones said.

Mixed-raced free people then starting arriving from the Chesapeake Bay region in Virginia, in part because racial laws were less harsh

in the Triangle region, he said.

"Chesapeake Bay had a lot of Africans, Native Americans, people from the British Isles," Jones said. "A

good deal of women from the British Isles married men of color and you had a lot of mixed-race children and families in the Chesapeake in the 1600s, 1700s.

When the children got established they started moving into Hertford County, northeastern North Carolina because land was cheap and taxes were low."

Jones said residents of the Winton Triangle served in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

"Two of my ancestors served in the American Revolution," he said.

Winton has a place in history as it was the first town — and only complete town — in the state to be burned down by Union troops during the Civil War. A Union gunboat approached the town in February 1862 and troops landed in what some historians contend is the first time a U.S. Army force mounted an amphibious assault with the help of the U.S. Navy.

"They heard there were Union sympathizers in Winton, and there may have been but the Confederates had flushed them out and taken over the town," Jones said. "Winton was burned."

Jones said people from his generation were taught that the burning of Winton was a "bad thing." But whether the incident was

See WINTON, B3

Brothers originally from EC earn buzz for festival song

From staff reports

Howie Stacy Darden, 17, and Hassan Brian "SaniD" Darden, 16, of Chesapeake, Virginia, but originally from Elizabeth City, recently wrote and produced a theme song, "Something in the Water," for Pharrell Williams' Something in the Water Festival in Virginia Beach.

Both Darden brothers, who attended Sheep-Harney Elementary School, produced their first album last December. Howie writes the lyrics to their songs while Hassan creates the beat. Both are singers.

Their great-grandparents are the late Mr. and Mrs. Earl Bryant and John Lister Sr.

ECSU grad attending chemical basic course

Second Lt. Lenox Poy-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Brothers Howie Stacy Darden, 17, (left) and Hassan Brian "SaniD" Darden, 16, of Chesapeake, Virginia, recently wrote and produced a theme song, "Something in the Water," for Pharrell Williams' Something in the Water Festival in Virginia Beach. The brothers are originally from Elizabeth City.

ner, a 2019 Elizabeth City State University graduate who majored in aviation management and military science, is currently stationed at U.S. Army Base Fort Leonard Wood, where

he's attending a chemical basic officer leaders course. Poyner, a member of Epsilon Alpha Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., hopes to pursue a master's degree.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Second Lt. Lenox Poyner, a 2019 Elizabeth City State University graduate who majored in aviation management and military science, is currently stationed at U.S. Army Base Fort Leonard Wood.

Residents earn online degrees from WGU

Four area residents have

earned their degree online from Western Governors University, which is based in Salt Lake City, Utah. The graduates include Hollie

Moore of Camden, who earned a bachelor of science degree in nursing; Ian Harrison of Elizabeth City, who earned a bachelor of science degree in information technology; Desiree Hooper of Hertford, who earned a bachelor of arts degree in special education; and Shelby Garrish of Hertford, who earned a bachelor of science degree in nursing.

White Named to Grace Christian Dean's list

Courtney White of Elizabeth City was named to Grace Christian University's fall 2019 Dean's list. White, who is majoring in worship arts, was among the 100 on-campus students named to the list at the university in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Like his portrait, Jacobs' life tinged with exceptionality

Among the several photographic portraits on display at the Camden County Heritage Museum is an ornately framed ambrotype depicting a male sitting with an instrument in hand.

Soberly posed, his horn at the ready, there is but the slightest hint of rose-colored tint in the mustachioed gentleman's cheeks.

This peculiar portrait, as related by county historian and museum curator Alex Leary, is of long-time South Mills resident John Jacobs.

Much like the demeanor of his portrait, Jacobs' life, lived in earnest, was tinged with an air of exceptionality.

Hailing from Saxony, Germany, Jacobs left his homeland to avoid compulsory military duty. Landing in the United States at the height of the Mexican War, the young German, not yet acclimated to his new environs, unwittingly enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. Jacobs' pension file shows him

MUSEUM OF THE ALBEMARLE



PAUL VINCENT

having served aboard the USS Germantown, a U.S. Navy sloop-of-war attached to Commodore Matthew Perry's Home Squadron.

Following the war, Jacobs

settled to North Carolina and took on a series of odd jobs and varying, short-lived occupations around the Albemarle region. Jacobs' work history included operating bakeries in Edenton and Plymouth as well as co-managing the Old Nags Head Hotel, for a time, in the mid-1850s.

It was also during this period of his life, in 1854, that he became a naturalized U.S. citizen. By 1860, Jacobs had arrived in South Mills where he



PHOTO COURTESY ALEX LEARY

This ornately framed ambrotype of Mexican War and Civil War veteran John Jacobs of South Mills is on display at the Camden County Heritage Museum.

would make his home for the next 35 years.

The outbreak of another war eventually brought a unique hardship upon John Jacobs and his family, though it was one he remedied through re-

markable means.

Jacobs' enlistment in the Confederate Army on May 30, 1861, would have left his young son, George, without a guardian to watch over him. Rather than leave the boy, Jacobs enlisted with his son and the two served as musicians over the course of the war; John Jacobs serving as chief musician of the Thirty-Second North Carolina Infantry. George Jacobs' role in all of this earned him the distinction of being one of the youngest Confederate soldiers mustered into service.

Now a veteran twice over, Jacobs returned to South Mills with the ambition to improve both his business interests and social standing within the Camden community.

In September 1865, he petitioned to join Widow's Son Lodge in Camden and was duly received. By December of 1871, Jacobs demitted from that lodge to become a charter member of the newly formed New Lebanon

Lodge in South Mills.

Between 1877 and 1894, the year before his death, the diligent Jacobs would serve as an 11-time Past Master of this lodge. Moreover, an article in the Dec. 21, 1880 issue of The Weekly Economist touted his entrepreneurial spirit by reporting that, "Jacobs, one of our most enterprising, and best citizens... proposes to put up a bakery, and he already has the nicest bar in town."

If you happen to be visiting the Camden Museum, remember John Jacobs; a soldier-musician, shrewd merchant, dedicated Mason, and devoted father; that soberly posed, mustachioed gentleman with the slight blush.

The Camden County Heritage Museum is open to the public Fridays and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., March through December.

Paul Vincent is the registrar at Museum of the Albemarle, as well as a docent at the Camden County Heritage Museum.