

21 Jun 2005

Excerpt from the diary of Rev. George Whitefield

While traveling through the area in 1740 on his way to Savannah, Georgia, the Rev. George Whitefield, an English Anglican preacher, recorded the following entries in his diary. The tavern that Whitefield lodged at was probably that of Thomas Ash. Ash had received a land grant for 350 acres on June 19, 1733. It is believed that he operated an inn or halfway house (midway between Cape Fear and Winyah Bay). The inn was in the vicinity of present day Nixon's Cross Roads.

"Tuesday, Jan. 1, 1740. Rode about ten miles, where we baited [ate], met with one who I had great reason to believe was a child of God. It grieved me that I could stay no longer, but being in haste, we passed over a half-mile ferry. About sunset, we came to a tavern, five miles within the province of South Carolina. Here I immediately perceived the people were more polite than those we generally met with, but I believe the people of the house wished I had not come to be their guest that night; for, it being New Year's Day, several of the neighbors were met together to divert themselves by dancing country dances.

By the advice of my companions, I went in amongst them whilst a woman was dancing a jig. At my first entrance I endeavoured to shew the folly of such entertainments, and to convince her how well-pleased the devil was at every step she took. For some time she endeavoured to outbrave me; neither fiddler nor she desisted, but at least she gave over and the musician laid aside his instrument...

All were soon put to silence, and were, for some time, so overawed, that after I had discoursed with them on the nature of baptism and the necessity of being born again...I baptized, at their entreaty, one of their children, and prayed afterwards, as I was enabled, and as the circumstances of the company required...but the people were so bent on their pleasure, that notwithstanding all that had been said, after I had gone to bed, I heard their music and dancing resume.

Wednesday, Jan. 2, 1740. Rose very early, prayed, sang a hymn and gave a sharp reproof to the dancers who were very attentive, and took it in good part. At break of day, we mounted our horses, and, I think, never had a more pleasant journey. For nearly twenty miles we rode over a beautiful bay as plain as a terrace walk, and as we passed along were wonderfully delighted to see the porpoises taking their pastime, and hear, as it were, shore resounding to shore the praises of Him Who hath set bounds to the sea that it cannot pass. ...At night we intended to call at a gentleman's house, where we had been recommended, about forty miles distant..."

(A highway marker south of Little River commemorates this visit.)