

BUFFALO CITY, NORTH CAROLINA

More interesting stories about Buffalo City and that immediate area learned on a return trip in November, 1987.

Buffalo City is today a non-existent town reclaimed by the swamp lands but in the early 1900's it was a thriving community of 1000-1500 people built around a lumbering operation. Miles of tram rails were built through the swamps with steam engines and cars for transporting cut logs to the mill. A saw mill on the edge of Mill Tail Creek was built with loading docks so that logs and lumber could be transported out by barge. Most of this timber was carried to Norfolk and northern cities where there were huge demands for wood for many purposes; thus sprang up the town called Buffalo City.

It was a rough wild town located on the northern side of Mill Tail Creek about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles from its entrance at the Alligator River in Dare County also called the East Lake area in the early 1900's. In general appearance it looked much like a western town you would see in old cowboy movies, with most of the buildings being built of board and batten construction and having a main street with a railroad down the center. It had its own hotel, store, etc. with the families living in their own individual houses in patterns laid off as 1st, 2nd and 3rd Streets but

different nationalities and ethnic groups living together in several different sections of town.

Seems as though there were of course native Carolinians, with large groups of Italians, Russians and Blacks working the logging operation in the swamp, running the saw mill and living in the town.

There was no real state regulated law there so the citizens took it upon them-selves to enforce some sort of law and order which, right or wrong, they certainly did. There was a whipping post in town and the last person to be whipped was Claude Duvall the owner and operator of the town's General Store. The story seems to be that Mr. Duvall delivered groceries to the ladies' homes while their husbands were working in the swamp or at the mill, and in turn these ladies showered Mr. Duvall with certain favors, gaining for him the title of womanizer which in turn led him to the town's whipping post.

It is said that on at least one occasion, (6) so called trouble-makers were forced into a building at gun point and told if they came out they would be shot, then the doors and windows were boarded up, gasoline thrown on the building and it set on fire. Apparently many men went to work in that swamp wilderness in the morning and never came home that night never to be seen again. It is said they were killed and buried in the swamp.

If one looked closely along the edges of Mill Tail Creek you could often see pieces of cord line tied to cypress knees, trees and roots, these cords led down into the dark cypress waters hiding the 5-gallon jugs of corn whiskey tied to each. This was one way of hiding the whiskey and at the same time making it quickly accessible when needed. It is said today (70) more or less years later that occasionally some of these jugs are found and in most cases the contents are just great.

We all drove to East Lake due west of Manteo and met at Alvin F. Ambrose's house where his son Alvin Jr. gave us a real tour thru the swamp. We found remains of the old Buffalo City saw mill and piers on Mill Tail Creek, where Dad tied his houseboat for hunting purposes during the late 1920's and early 1930's. We also found remains of old Buffalo City including Claude Duvall's old store just several hundred yards north of the old saw mill site; you could still follow a great deal of the old tram (railroad beds) thru the swamp. Next he took us approximately 3/4 miles east up Mill Tail Creek to a place of high ground or a ridge in the swamp, called Sandy Ridge, where reportedly families have lived and eked out a living by farming, hunting, splitting wood shingles, logging and making moon shine whiskey until the five families that still lived there just after the turn of the century found their most valuable asset was the sale of corn whiskey to the outside world. Then they began feuding and stealing whiskey from one another and this became so serious that

there was even the possibility of a shoot out, so the families moved away. Some present day natives say members of the Lost Colony settled there; they also say members of the Lost Colony settled in an area across Mill Tail. We found an ancient graveyard on the site we visited on the northside of Mill Tail Creek, it was hard to find but once discovered it proved to be pretty large containing many graves. All of the marked graves except one were marked with ballast stone markers, some at head and foot, some with just head or foot were missing stones and some with just indentations of tumbled in graves, all in at least 3 lines. Several large lighter colored stones were found at the site but they were pushed in a pile on the north end of the graveyard and no one knew what they were for. It was a beautiful day and we wore old clothes and boots of some kind, saw no snakes although Alvin Jr. saw a black bear just ahead of us. Even today this is a great place for hunting bear, deer and all kinds of animals. All natives say alligators 12 ft. to 14 ft. long are all over the swamp. An interesting observation of the many people (natives) of the East Lake - Buffalo City area that I have met recently on several trips there and on several trips 25 years or so ago is that most of the old families of the area will tell you, if asked, that they are descendants of the Lost Colonists, that their fathers, grandparents, etc. told them this and that their ancestors married into the Indians of the area. I for one believe this to be a simple truth, for one thing they don't say this with brag, just a matter of fact. Another is that you sure

can see Indian blood in many of these people, some more than others. I mean there is no doubt about it and I have come to learn that word of mouth, sometimes called unwritten history, usually proves out to be true. It's also clear to me that the people of Roanoke Island, the Lost Colony group and Dare County Historic Society want no part of any such talk, they want the colonists to remain lost, that's for sure.

Bill Linn