
Alan Watson has written another useful county history, his fifth in the Department of Cultural Resources “Brief History” series, although at 214 pages of text and notes, it is not as concise as some earlier titles. Dr. Watson, a master of colonial and early Carolina history, follows the documentary evidence closely but also brings the story forward to the present. Tyrrell County, once including Washington County and much of Martin and Dare counties too, has been throughout its history a place with “a scattered populace, difficult transportation, and a lack of urbanization [which] hampered social interaction.” (73).

Nonetheless, under Watson’s careful hand, the story of this swampy land on the Atlantic comes alive with often striking detail. One benefit for the historian are the extensive Pettigrew family papers which have been used so often for antebellum history but here are also mined for the locality in which they were set.

The publishers have done their usual fine job in including maps and pictures, indeed, many more illustrations than one might expect in this direful days of print. All the expected subjects, agriculture, education, politics, social class, war, are covered. Librarians will be delighted that note is taken of the public library in Watson’s pages. Transportation, so important in this land split by waterways, receives considerable attention although the story of the last couple decades is rather, perhaps inevitably, sketchy. Public and academic libraries will want to add this volume and many high school libraries consider it depending on their location.

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