

CHAPTER XXIV - “TOMAHAWK DICK” PERKINS 1713-1789

As a family historian I couldn't resist making a pilgrimage to Lincolnton, North Carolina to visit the final resting place of one of my most colorful ancestors Richard “Tomahawk Dick” Perkins. It is said that Richard Perkins, my GGGGGG Grandfather, was murdered at the Lincoln County Court House. Because it happened almost 290 years ago, I should have known that the old Court House wouldn't still be there. I had secretly hoped to take a picture of that historic old building. Maybe I could even get a close-up of the window my ancestor was thrown out of. The old Court House no longer exists, of course. It burned to the ground ages ago. That old building has been replaced again and again. The present Court House is the fourth one built by Lincoln County and bears little resemblance to the one I had hoped to visit.

My ancestor, Richard Perkins was born on December 18, 1713 in Baltimore, Maryland. He grew up to be a big powerful man who often carried a tomahawk in his belt. This habit earned him the notorious nickname, “Tomahawk Dick.” Richard's ancestors had migrated to the Colonies from England and he was very proud of being English. His fierce pride in his heritage often led to trouble with the Irish. Nothing made him happier than going to town, getting drunk and beating up on Irishmen. It is said that on a good night, he would beat up a dozen or more.

On a hot summer day in 1789, the 76-year-old Richard went into town for a couple of snorts and a few laughs. After having a few drinks at the local tavern, he decided to wander over to the Court House.

Ezekiel Polk, Jr. and John Hunter, not caring much for Richard in the first place, began making uncomplimentary remarks about the old man's heritage. Richard replied in kind. Tempers flared and hot words turned into physical action. Ezekiel and John somehow managed to wrestle Richard to the floor. Not satisfied with their victory over the old Englishman, they proceeded to toss him out of the second story window. The 17 foot 9 inch fall killed the once powerful man. Richard then gained the dubious honor of being the first person buried in the Old White Church Cemetery. It is said that a crude stone marks his grave. There were so many stones and so many graves. With all the unmarked graves, I could not begin to guess which one might be his. Visiting the cemetery, all I could do was say a quiet prayer of thanks to my ancestors. I owe them everything, for without them I wouldn't be here.