

The Original Location of Queen Anne's Creek

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Editor's note: For an enlarged view of figures, simply zoom in on your computer.

Introduction

The town of Edenton, North Carolina, is located on what is now called Edenton Bay, part of the Chowan River system and the Albemarle Sound. This bay is fed by two principal creeks. The one to the east is commonly called Queen Anne's Creek, while the one to the west is known as Pembroke Creek. Interestingly, a Google map detail of part of Edenton (Fig. 1) shows Queen Anne's Creek called Little Creek and more interesting is a detail of a topographical map of Edenton and surrounding area (Fig. 2) that also shows Queen Anne's Creek as Little Creek, but labels Pembroke as Queen Anne's Creek. Between 1768 and 1771, Claude Joseph Sauthier, a French surveyor and cartographer, was commissioned by North Carolina royal governor, William Tryon, to create detailed maps of the colony's chief towns. One of these was Sauthier's map of Edenton surveyed and drawn in June 1769. Shown in Figure 3, it calls the eastwardly branching creek, Queen Anne Creek, as it is generally known today. The westwardly branching creek is not given a name on this map, but there is a plantation shown there called Pembroke. This seeming confusion in naming these waterways will be addressed later in this article.

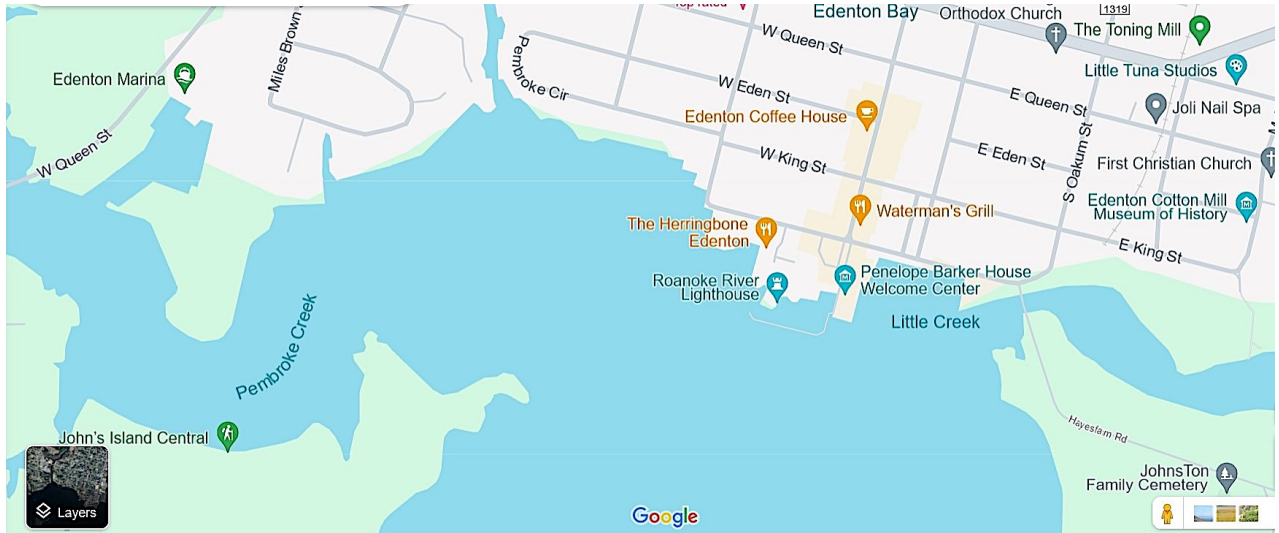


Figure 1 Google map of Edenton waterfront (2024).

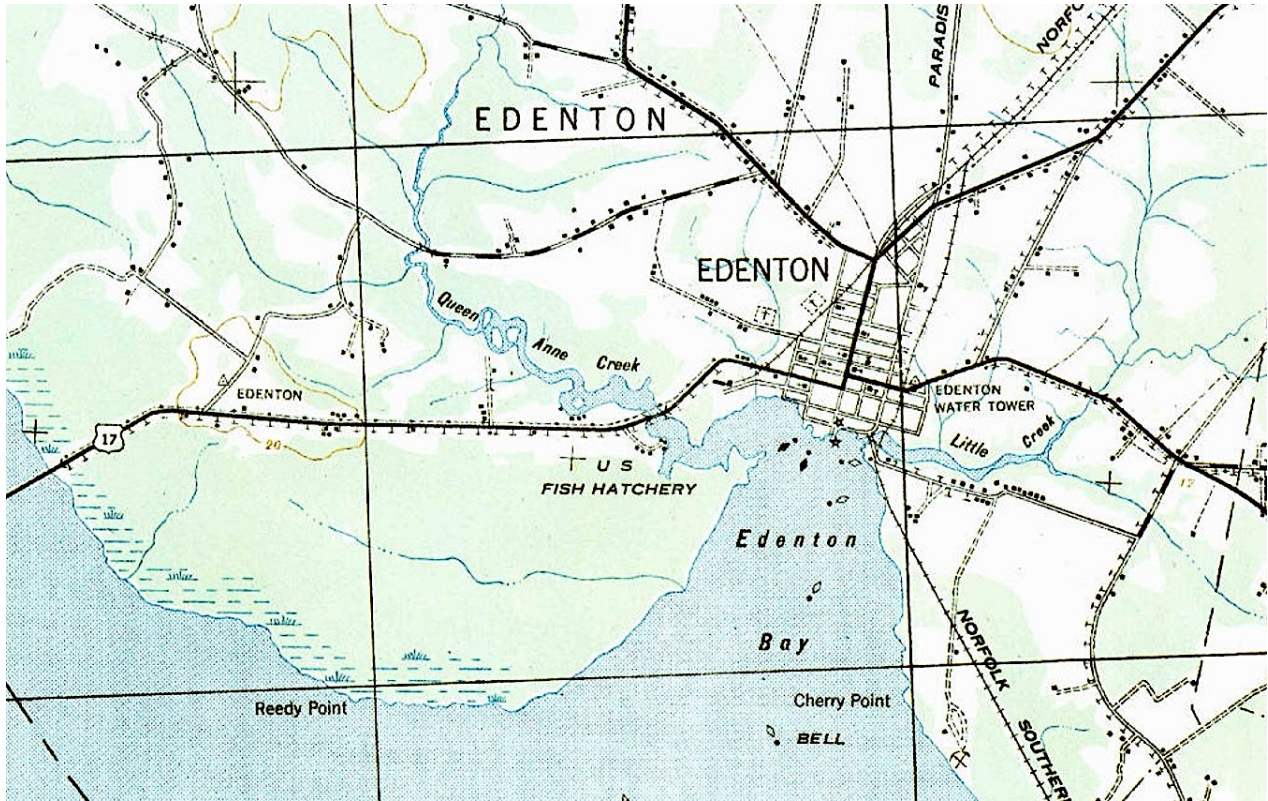


Figure 2 Topographical map showing Edenton and surrounding area, U.S. Geological Survey (1942).

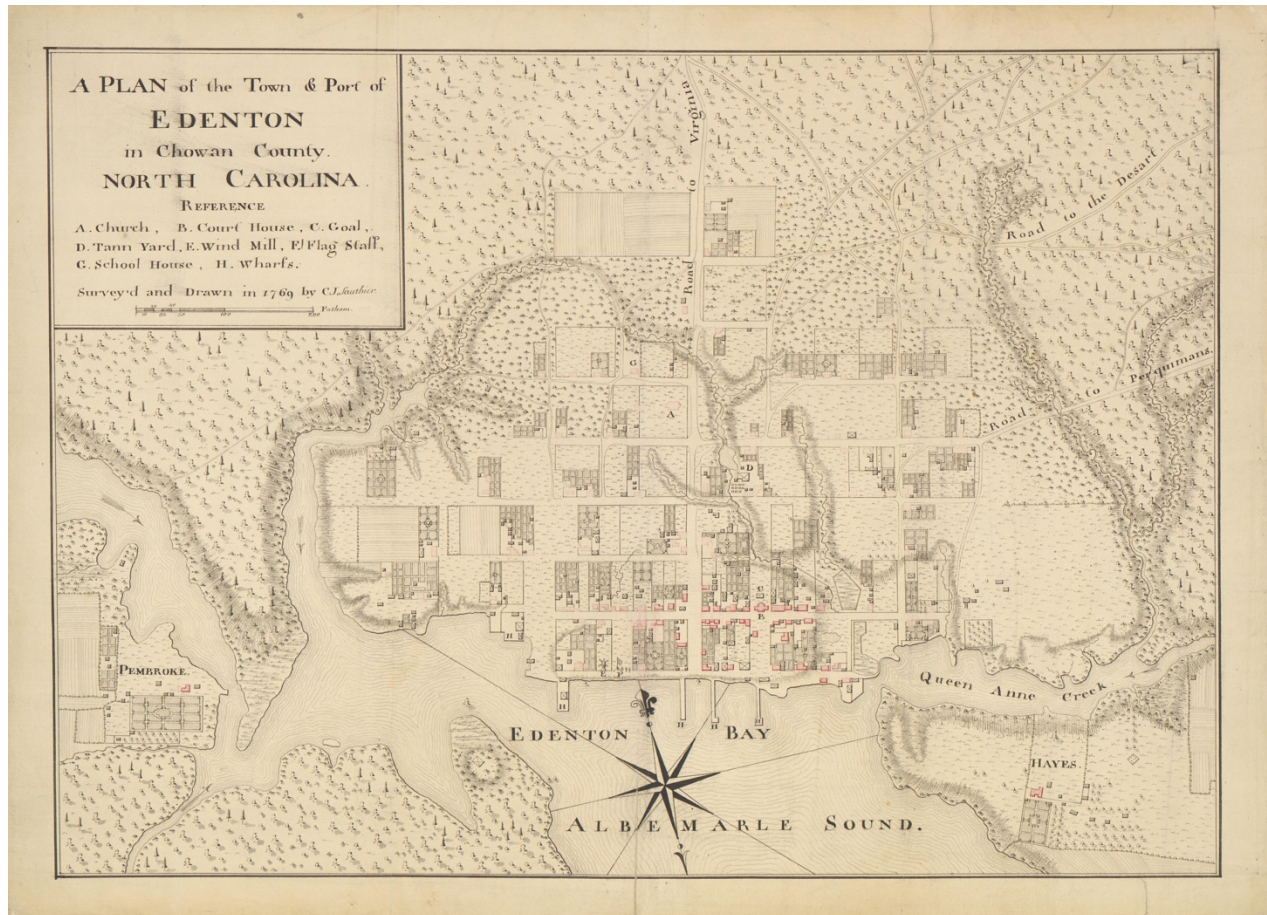


Figure 3 *Sauthier map of Edenton (1769), courtesy East Carolina University.*

Edenton's Founding

The earliest part of present-day Edenton was surveyed and laid out into town lots by Edward Moseley in 1712. This was done in response to an act of the Colonial Assembly passed in November 1712 “for the building of a court-house and house to hold the Assembly in at the Fork of Queen Anne’s Creek, and to such persons as are minded to build on said creek,” a habitable house not less in size that fifteen by twenty feet.¹ Two men, Nathaniel Chevin and Thomas Peterson, had offered land for a town and were named as commissioners and appointed to sell the lots at a cost of twenty shillings each. These first lots were on the east side of present-day South Broad Street, the terminus of the old colonial “Virginia Road.” Each lot was one-half acre in size and ran sixty-six feet east to west and three hundred and thirty feet north to south. Moseley’s original survey has been lost, but some years ago Edenton’s well-known resident historian, Miss Elizabeth Vann Moore, reconstructed it based on descriptions in deeds and other historical records. This map is shown in Figure 4. The modern street names were added to help orient users. Lots on the east side are referred to as those in the “old plan.”

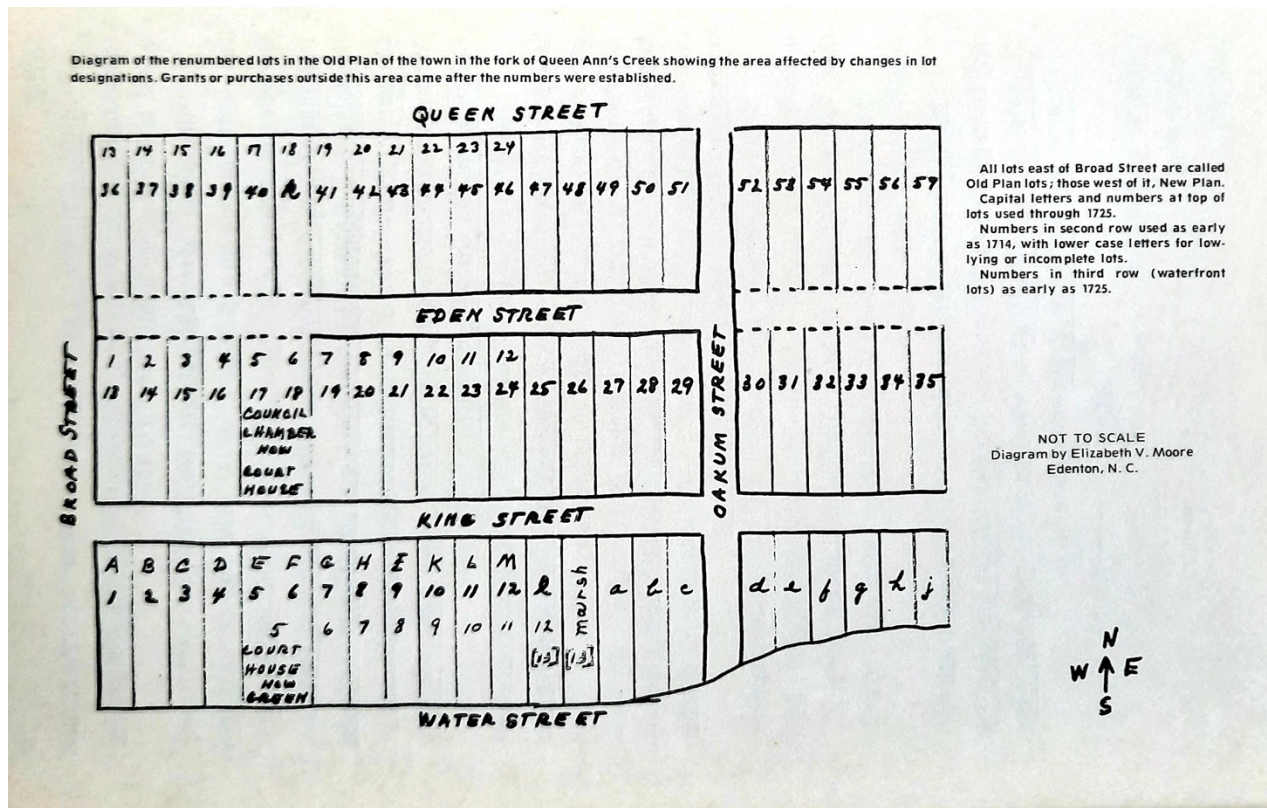


Figure 4 Elizabeth Vann Moore map of old plan lots, courtesy Thomas Butchko, *The Historic Architecture of Edenton, North Carolina*.

Lots “At the Fork” of Queen Anne’s Creek

During 2022, the author spent several months in the deed office of the Chowan County Courthouse in an effort to determine the original owners of all the lots in the original Moseley survey as depicted on Miss Moore’s map. The motivation for this effort will be discussed in detail in a forthcoming article by Tom Newbern, this author, and Jim Melchor. However, one thing this author noted while examining the old plan deeds is that many of them described the lot as “at” or “on” the fork of

Queen Anne's Creek. For example, by several deeds dated 27 July 1718, commissioner, Nathaniel Chevin, conveyed a number of lots "at the fork of Queen Anne's Creek" to William Branch (lot 15), to Robert Calfe, of Boston, merchant (lots K & 20), and to Robert Hicks (lot H).² Clearly, by reference to the Moore map, these lots don't seem to be on or at the fork of what we now call Queen Anne's Creek. Another thing noticed during the author's research is that the term "bay" also appears in some of the deed descriptions such as the one to Richard Grills made 30 July 1718 for lots 3(C) and 4(D) and described as "one acre at the fork of Queen Anne's Creek fronting to the street and Bay."³ Indeed, as noted earlier the act of the Colonial Assembly passed in November of 1712 called for building a courthouse and council chambers at the "Fork of Queen Anne's Creek," and early on this old plan part of what is now Edenton was called by such names as "Queen Anne's town" and "ye town on Queen Anne's Creek." All this raises an interesting question and that is, where was this fork and what exactly was the creek? It also seems odd that Queen Anne's name would be invoked and attached to a creek as inconsequential as what is now called Queen Anne's Creek. It seems as if a more substantial body of water should be required if it was to be named after a favored monarch of Great Britain and Ireland.

Queen Anne's Creek at Edenton's Founding

In the introduction of this paper, there was discussion of various names given to present-day waterways and bodies of water such as Queen

Anne's and Pembroke Creeks, Edenton Bay, the Chowan River, Albemarle Sound, etc. It was also noted earlier that in 1712 the first lots in the present-day town of Edenton were surveyed and that in 1722 additional lots were laid out on the west side of South Broad Street. It was also in 1722 that the town first came to be called Edenton in honor of North Carolina colonial governor, Charles Eden, who died in that year. Early Chowan County land records show that what is now called Queen Anne's Creek was originally known by its Indian name, Mattacomack Creek, and land conveyances made in the seventeenth century tended to use this Indian name. However, as time passed the name, Queen Anne's Creek, came into wider use in the old land records. The act of the Colonial Assembly passed in 1712 called for building a courthouse and council chambers at the "Fork of Queen Anne's Creek." So, whatever Mattacomack Creek denoted in those early days had become known as Queen Anne's Creek by the time the old plan lots were surveyed. J. R. B. Hathaway, noted author and publisher of the three volumes of the *North Carolina Historical and Genealogical Register*, in discussing a 1694 land grant to Edward Smithwick of three hundred eighty acres noted that *Mattacomack Creek is now known as Edenton Bay* [emphasis added].⁴ This bit of interesting information coupled with the fact that so many of the old plan deeds examined by the author described the lot being conveyed as "at the fork of Queen Anne's Creek," or "on the fork of Queen Anne's Creek," provided the

significant insight that the entirety of what is now called Edenton Bay was in earlier days known as Queen Anne's Creek. Its eastern branch is still called by that name, but its western branch is now called Pembroke Creek. How and when did the western branch acquire that name? The answer can be found in the *North Carolina Gazetteer*, which has this to say about Pembroke Creek. It rises in Pollock Swamp in eastern Chowan County and flows south and southeast into the western side of the head of Edenton Bay, which was formerly known as the western branch of Mattacomack Creek and later as Queen Anne's Creek. It took its present name from Thomas Barker's plantation, Pembroke, which was named for his birthplace, Pembroke, Massachusetts. Barker acquired this large tract of land from Edmund Gale about 1751.⁵ Thomas Barker was born in Pembroke, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 17 Feb. 1712/13, the son of Capt. Thomas Barker and his wife, Bethia Little. He left Massachusetts and moved to North Carolina in the 1730s following the death of his father.⁶ According to his *NCpedia* entry, Barker arrived in Edenton in 1735 and immediately entered upon a career of public service. In April 1741, he secured from Governor Gabriel Johnston a six-hundred acre grant of land in Bertie County and not long afterwards moved there.⁷ In fact, Barker had been acquiring land in Bertie as early as 1738 and there are several deeds to him for property there before 1741.⁸ In any case, early in 1742 having settled his plantation there, he married Pheribee Pugh (née Savage), widow of Francis Pugh, a wealthy

planter, ship owner and member of the governor's council, and to this marriage, one daughter named Betsy was born. However, around 1751, following the death of his first wife, Barker moved back to Edenton and resided on a plantation he called Pembroke, which he had purchased from Edmund Gale, who patented the tract 28 Oct. 1728.⁹ This plantation was where the Edenton Station fish hatchery was later located. Later in the 1750s, Barker sold this plantation to Joshua Bodley and moved into the town of Edenton.¹⁰ Bodley, one of the Granville land agents, resided on this plantation until his death there in 1775.¹¹ When this property was included by Sauthier on his 1769 map of Edenton, the tract as depicted contained a large dwelling house, at least fourteen other buildings and a formal arrangement of gardens and orchards.¹²

Understanding that today's Edenton Bay is what was known as Queen Anne's Creek at the time of Edenton's founding makes sense. That is, its fork would have abutted the town's entire waterfront from its western branch, now called Pembroke Creek, to its eastern branch, still called Queen Anne's Creek. Thinking of Edenton Bay as a creek may seem less odd if one looks at a map showing the mouths of various rivers such as the Roanoke, Chowan, and Cashie and creeks such as Salmon Creek (Avoca) and Edenton Bay (formerly Queen Anne's Creek) that come together to form the Albemarle Sound and how similar they are (Fig. 5).

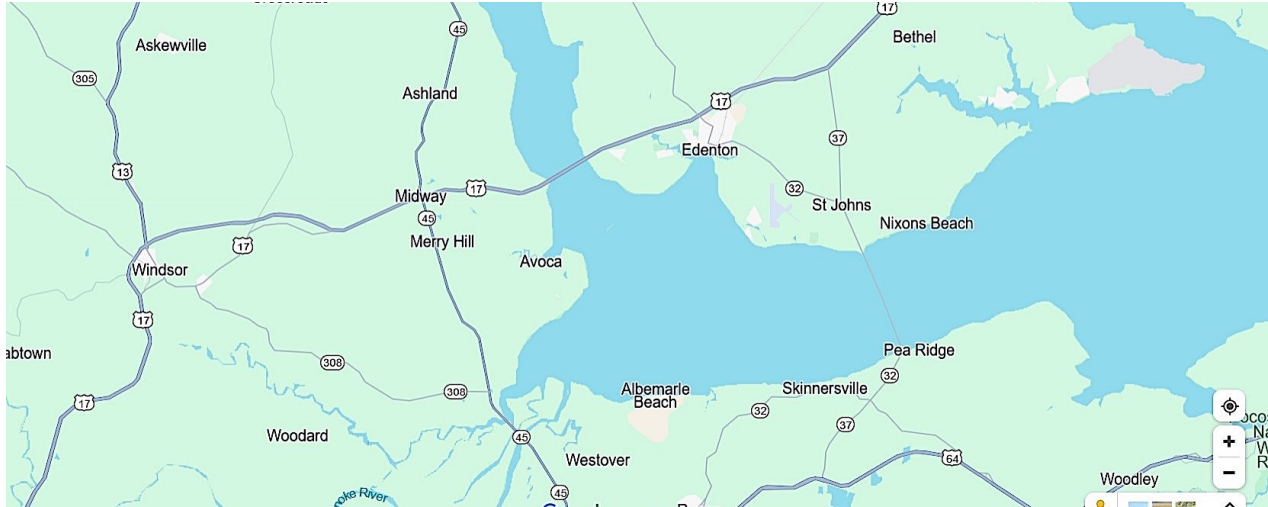


Figure 5 Google map of waterways of Albemarle Sound (2024).

It should also be understood that at the time the “Lost Colony” was planted on Roanoke Island in 1587, led by John White, sea levels were lower than today. Riggs in an article on the history of sea level rise in North Carolina tells us that when the colonists were exploring coastal North Carolina in the late sixteenth century, the sea level was at least three feet lower than today and that the Pamlico and Albemarle Sounds were two saltwater estuaries barely connected to each other by only a few channels for small boats.¹³ Consequently, Croatan Sound was a marsh at that time and is so depicted on the 1585 *La Virginea Pars* map drawn by John White (Fig. 6). Importantly, on this map, Queen Anne’s looks much more like a creek than what is today called Edenton Bay.



Figure 6 *La Virginea Pars* map (1585) drawn by John White, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, Current names & locations shown in bold black type.

With lower water levels, the two branches of Queen Anne’s Creek would have been physically closer to each other than they are today and the fork of the creek would have been narrower as well. This new understanding explains why the town of Edenton at its founding in 1712 was called by terms such as “ye town on Queen Anne’s Creek,” and why this creek was one indeed worthy of being called by the name of that beloved monarch, Queen Anne.

Endnotes:

[1] J. R. B. Hathaway, ed. *The North Carolina Historical and Genealogical Register*. Edenton, NC: Published by Author, 1900, vol. 1, nos. 1-4, p. 120.

[2] Chowan County Deed Book B1, p. 621; Deed Book B1 p. 622; Deed Book B1, p. 623.

[3] Chowan County Deed Book B1, p. 624.

[4] Hathaway, vol. 1, nos. 1-4, p. 4.

[5] North Carolina Gazetteer, available online at <https://ncpedia.org/gazetteer/search/Pembroke>.

[6] Pane-Joyce Genealogy, Massachusetts Society of Genealogists, available online at http://aleph0.clarku.edu/~djoyce/gen/report/rr18/rr18_342.html.

[7] Michael G. Martin, Jr., *NCpedia* entry for Thomas Baker (1713-89), available online at <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/barker-thomas>.

[8] Edythe Smith Dunstan. *The Bertie Index For Courthouse Records of Bertie County, North Carolina, 1720-1875*. Windsor, NC: Published by Author, 1966, p. 15.

[9] Chowan County Deed Book H1, page 442.

[10] National Register of Historic Places, Edenton Station, United States Fish and Fisheries Commission Chowan County, North Carolina, listing CO 0750, 9/14/2002, available online at <https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/CO0750.pdf>.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Stanley R. Riggs, “A Brief History of Sea Level Rise in North Carolina,” *Coastwatch*, Winter 2019, p. 8, available online at <https://ncseagrant.ncsu.edu/coastwatch/a-brief-history-of-sea-level-rise-in-north-carolina/>.