

The Tuscarora War

1711–1715: How Cape Fear Was Opened to Settlement

In September 1711, the Skarure (Tuscarora) Nation launched a coordinated attack on colonial settlements — the culmination of a decade of land encroachment, fraudulent treaty-making, and the enslavement of Skarure people by colonial traders. The war lasted four years. When it ended, the Skarure's territorial base in the Cape Fear region was broken. Thousands were dead. Hundreds had been sold into the Atlantic slave trade. The land was open.

*Cumberland County was organized in 1754 on that land. Fayetteville was built on that land.
The two tracks of Two Americas persecution converge at those falls.*

Prologue Final Entry · Persecution · Secular & Political

Pairs with C-12 NC Indigenous Peoples · Connects to ERA I · ERA II · ERA III

I.

THE WORLD BEFORE THE WAR

The Skarure Nation · Fifteen Towns · A Decade of Diplomacy Ignored

The Skarure — the people Europeans called the Tuscarora — were an Iroquoian-speaking nation whose pre-contact territory extended from the coastal plain of eastern North Carolina westward through the Piedmont, encompassing present-day Cumberland, Robeson, Sampson, Bladen, Brunswick, New Hanover, Johnston, Wayne, Lenoir, Craven, Jones, and Onslow counties. John Lawson's 1709–1710 survey documented Skarure settlements across this territory: fifteen towns, active agricultural fields, a population he estimated at approximately 1,200 warriors — suggesting a total population of perhaps 5,000–6,000 people organized with a council of chiefs and established diplomatic protocols.¹

The Skarure had not been at war with the colonial settlements before 1711. They had been at diplomacy. Through the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Skarure leadership had attempted to negotiate with colonial authorities the terms under which European settlers could occupy portions of their territory — seeking formal recognition of land boundaries, regulation of colonial trade, and protection against the enslavement of Skarure people by colonial traders who were raiding Indigenous communities and selling their members into the Atlantic slave trade.

The colonial government of North Carolina did not deliver on these negotiations. What it delivered instead was a decade of encroachment, exploitation, and the steady erosion of the diplomatic framework the Skarure had constructed.

The Skarure went to war because ten years of diplomacy had produced nothing but more encroachment.

The Causes — Documented Grievances, 1700–1711

Grievance	Documented Evidence
Land encroachment	European settlers occupying Skarure agricultural fields and hunting territories without formal purchase or treaty acknowledgment. Settler livestock destroying Skarure crops.
Enslavement of Skarure people	Colonial traders kidnapping and selling Skarure people into the Atlantic slave trade — among the most acute violations of the diplomatic terms the Skarure had sought. Documented in Gallay, <i>The Indian Slave Trade</i> (2002).
Fraudulent trade practices	Colonial traders systematically cheating Skarure trading partners. Documented in Lawson (1709) and von Graffenried (1714).

Grievance	Documented Evidence
Failed diplomatic appeals	Skarure leadership brought grievances to NC colonial government on multiple documented occasions. NC did not respond in good faith. A 1710 Skarure delegation traveled to Pennsylvania seeking intercession.
Pennsylvania intercession rejected	William Penn's Pennsylvania government sent representatives to NC on the Skarure's behalf. NC colonial government did not engage substantively. Diplomatic options exhausted.
Lawson's second survey	John Lawson captured and killed in September 1711 — allegedly for violating a territorial boundary during his second survey of Skarure territory. His 1709 map of their lands had been published in London. The timing was not coincidental.

II.

THE WAR — SEPTEMBER 1711 TO APRIL 1713

The Night of September 22, 1711 · Barnwell · Fort Neoheroka

On the night of September 22, 1711, the Skarure — coordinating with allied nations including the Coree, Neusiok, Pamlico, and Bear River peoples — launched simultaneous attacks on colonial settlements along the Neuse and Trent rivers. Approximately 130 colonists were killed in the opening night. The attacks were precise and coordinated, targeted at the specific communities most directly responsible for the encroachment and enslavement that had provoked the war.

Christoph von Graffenried — who had arrived recently with Swiss and German Palatine immigrants and had not participated in the prior abuses — was taken prisoner along with John Lawson. Lawson was executed. Von Graffenried negotiated separately with the Skarure leadership and was released — an act of diplomatic discrimination that the Skarure maintained even in the opening phase of the war.²

The colonial government of North Carolina had virtually no military capacity. It appealed to South Carolina. Colonel John Barnwell arrived with approximately 30 colonial militia and between 500 and 1,000 Yamasee and allied Indigenous warriors. Barnwell's first campaign forced a ceasefire in April 1712. He immediately violated it — seizing Skarure people as slaves after the agreement. The war resumed.³

Fort Neoheroka — March 1713

Date	Event	Source
September 22, 1711	Skarure coordinated attacks on Neuse and Trent river settlements. ~130 colonists killed. John Lawson executed. Von Graffenried captured, later released.	Von Graffenried (1714); Colonial records
January–April 1712	Barnwell's first campaign with Yamasee allies. Ceasefire reached. Barnwell immediately violates it by enslaving Skarure people. War resumes.	Barnwell Journal (1897)
March 1713	Colonel James Moore arrives with ~900 Cherokee, Creek, and Catawba warriors plus colonial militia. Attacks Fort Neoheroka — primary Skarure fortification.	Lee, Indian Wars in NC (1963)
March 20–23, 1713	Battle of Fort Neoheroka. Fort breached after several days. Between 800 and 1,000 Skarure killed or captured. Approximately 400 survivors enslaved and sold into the Atlantic slave trade.	Gallay, Indian Slave Trade (2002)
1715	War formally ends. Skarure confined to reduced reservation on south side of Pamlico River. Cape Fear basin open to colonial settlement.	Parramore, NC Historical Review (1982)

Date	Event	Source
1722	Surviving Skarure formally adopted into the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as the Sixth Nation (Tuscarora) in New York and Ontario.	Rights, American Indian in NC (1957)

III.

THE SKARURE AND THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

~400 Skarure Sold After Fort Neoheroka · The Traffic in Indigenous People

The Tuscarora War intersects the Atlantic slave trade at a point not widely documented in the standard curriculum. Between 1670 and 1720, the Carolina colonies were among the largest exporters of enslaved Indigenous people in the Atlantic world — a fact recovered in the scholarship of Alan Gallay (*The Indian Slave Trade*, Yale University Press, 2002, winner of the Bancroft Prize) and Robbie Ethridge (*Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 2009).⁴

The enslavement of Indigenous people was not incidental to the Tuscarora War. It was one of its structural causes — the trafficking of Skarure people by colonial traders had been among the explicit grievances the Skarure leadership raised before hostilities began. And it was among the explicit consequences: the Fort Neoheroka campaign of March 1713 generated approximately 400 enslaved Skarure people who were sold into the Atlantic trade — primarily to the sugar islands of the Caribbean.

These were not prisoners of war in any modern sense. They were free people of a sovereign nation who had been fighting to protect their territory from encroachment — sold by the colonial government's military force into plantation slavery. The colonial government recorded the transaction as a financial asset.

The 400 Skarure sold after Fort Neoheroka were transported to the Caribbean. Their names are not in the record. Their children's names are not in the record. The war that opened Fayetteville's ground also populated the slave ledgers of the Atlantic trade.

IV.

THE AFTERMATH — ENSLAVEMENT, DISPERSAL, AND THE OPENING OF THE CAPE FEAR

The Reservation · The Sixth Nation · The Open Land

The war formally ended in 1715. The Skarure who remained in North Carolina were confined to a small reservation on the south side of the Pamlico River. Within a generation, colonial pressure had reduced even this reservation. By the mid-eighteenth century it had effectively ceased to exist as a functioning territorial base.

The majority of the surviving Skarure traveled north through Virginia and in 1722 were formally adopted into the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as its Sixth Nation — the Tuscarora — completing the confederacy's expansion from the original Five Nations. The Tuscarora Nation in New York and Ontario is the direct institutional successor of the Skarure people who left North Carolina after 1715.

Their departure left the Cape Fear basin politically open. Colonial settlement moved rapidly. By the 1720s, plantations were being established along the lower Cape Fear. By the 1730s, settlement had moved inland toward the falls of the Cape Fear — the site that would become Fayetteville. The crop economy of these plantations was built on the labor of enslaved Africans, specifically selected from the West African populations whose agricultural knowledge made them economically valuable. The land those plantations occupied was the land the Tuscarora War had opened.

The Falls of the Cape Fear · Where Both Persecutions Meet

The Two Americas Tracks Converge at This Precise Location The land the Tuscarora War opened and the labor the Atlantic slave trade provided are not parallel stories. They are the same story, told from two directions, arriving at the same place. The falls of the Cape Fear River — where Cumberland County was organized in 1754, where Campbellton was established in 1762, where Fayetteville was incorporated in 1783 — sit on land that was Skarure agricultural territory before the Tuscarora War removed the people who farmed it. The plantations established in that territory after the war were worked by enslaved Africans whose civilizational origins are documented in C-1 through C-6 of this Prologue — people from the sphere of Mali, Songhai, Timbuktu, and the Wolof and Mande agricultural traditions whose rice and indigo knowledge made them economically valuable to planters who could not have grown the crops without them. The antebellum slave market of Fayetteville — where Omar ibn Said was sold in 1807 — operated on land where Skarure people had farmed for generations before the Tuscarora War removed them. Indigenous dispossession and African enslavement are the two founding acts of Cumberland County. They happened on the same ground. They happened in sequence. The archive holds both.

What Was Built on What Was Taken — Cumberland County

Date	Event	Track
Pre-1711	Skarure (Tuscarora) agricultural territory. Fifteen towns. Established governance. Fourteen thousand years of prior occupation.	Indigenous Contribution
1711–1715	Tuscarora War. Skarure territorial base broken. ~400 enslaved and sold. Cape Fear basin opened.	Indigenous Persecution
1720s–1730s	Plantation establishment along lower and middle Cape Fear. Enslaved Africans from Senegambia ("Rice Coast") brought specifically for agricultural knowledge.	African Persecution
1754	Cumberland County organized from territory opened by the Tuscarora War.	Colonial Infrastructure
1762	Campbellton established at the falls of the Cape Fear — on former Skarure territory.	Colonial Infrastructure
1783	Campbellton becomes Fayetteville.	Colonial Infrastructure

Date	Event	Track
c. 1807	Omar ibn Said — West African Muslim scholar, educated in the tradition of Timbuktu — sold at auction on Hay Street, Fayetteville.	African Persecution · Direct Documentation
Present	Lumbee Tribe (descended in part from Skarure) holds territorial base including Cumberland County. Federal recognition pending.	Indigenous Survival · Living Record

VI.

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

What the Tuscarora War Produced — And Who Lives With It

The Tuscarora War destroyed the Skarure's territorial base in the Cape Fear region, killed between 1,000 and 2,000 people, enslaved several hundred more, and dispersed the surviving population between a reduced NC reservation and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in the north. It opened the Cape Fear basin to plantation agriculture.

The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina — descended in part from Skarure and related peoples who remained in the region after 1715 — has been fighting for full federal recognition for decades, on land that was Skarure territory before the war. The Tuscarora Nation in New York maintains its sovereign existence and its connection to North Carolina as the place of origin. The land between the Lumber River and the Cape Fear River is the direct product of what the Tuscarora War destroyed and what the plantation economy built in its place.

The Prologue of Two Americas begins with the origin of the human species in Africa — 300,000 years ago — and ends here, at the falls of the Cape Fear River, where the land was taken and what was done with it.

VII.

NORTH CAROLINA LOCAL LENS

This Entry Is Cumberland County

Connection	Documentation
Skarure territory · Cumberland County	Pre-contact Skarure (Tuscarora) territory included present-day Cumberland, Robeson, Sampson, Bladen, Brunswick, and New Hanover counties. Fayetteville sits on former Skarure agricultural land.
Fort Neoheroka · Greene County, NC	The decisive military engagement of the Tuscarora War took place at Fort Neoheroka, in what is now Greene County, NC. The NC Office of State Archaeology has documented the site. archaeology.ncdcr.gov .
Cumberland County · 1754	Cumberland County was organized in 1754 from territory opened by the Tuscarora War. The county's founding is a direct consequence of the Skarure's forced removal from the Cape Fear basin.
Campbellton / Fayetteville · 1762 / 1783	The town at the falls of the Cape Fear — established 1762 as Campbellton, incorporated 1783 as Fayetteville — was built on former Skarure territory, worked by enslaved Africans, in a county created by the war's outcome.
Omar ibn Said · Hay Street · 1807	Omar ibn Said — a West African Muslim scholar from the tradition of Sankore — was sold at auction in Fayetteville circa 1807. The ground of the sale was Skarure territory before the Tuscarora War. The labor of the Atlantic slave trade and the land of the Tuscarora War are the same story at the same address.
Lumbee Tribe · Cumberland County · Present	The Lumbee Tribe's territorial base includes Cumberland County — descended in part from Skarure and related peoples who remained after 1715. The Lumbee Recognition Act is pending in the Senate. The nations are still here.
Skarure Nation of NC · Eastern NC	The Skarure (Tuscarora) Nation of North Carolina maintains tribal organization in eastern NC, the homeland from which the war dispersed their ancestors. tuscaroranationnc.com .

CITATIONS

Chicago Manual of Style • Primary and Peer-Reviewed Sources

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Primary Source • Colonial Survey • Pre-war Skarure record
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3. Barnwell, John. "Journal of John Barnwell." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 5 (1897–1898): 391–402; 6 (1898–1899): 42–55.
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4. Galloway, Alan. *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. Winner of the Bancroft Prize.
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9. Merrell, James H. *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
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10. Rights, Douglas L. *The American Indian in North Carolina*. 2nd ed. Winston-Salem: John F. Blair Publisher, 1957.
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11. NC Office of State Archaeology. "Fort Neoheroka." Site documentation. archaeology.ncdcr.gov.
Government Document • Archaeological Record

PAIRED ENTRY REFERENCE

entry_related / entry_see_also

C-12	Contribution • The Lumbee, Tuscarora, Cherokee, Catawba & Cape Fear Peoples • Prologue • Direct Pair
ERA I	Persecution • Entry 6: The Triangular Trade • ERA I • The trade that populated the land P-4 opened
ERA II	Persecution • Entry 8: Slave Codes • ERA II • The legal architecture built on the land P-4 opened
C-6	Contribution • Songhai: Africa's Largest Empire • Prologue • The civilization whose collapse fed the slave trade that filled P-4's vacuum

The Prologue Is Complete The Two Americas Prologue began 300,000 years ago at Jebel Irhoud, Morocco, where the first Homo sapiens looked out across the African continent. It moved through the cradle of humanity, through Kemet and Kush and Aksum, through Mali and Timbuktu and Songhai, through the burning of the scholar class and the scholarly project that finished the burning, through the fourteen-thousand-year occupation of the land where the reader stands. It ends here — at the falls of the Cape Fear River, where the land was taken from one people and worked by another, on the ground where Fayetteville was built, in the county where the Two Americas archive is rooted. The seven Eras that follow are the continuation of both tracks. Everything documented in those Eras happened to the descendants of the peoples documented in this Prologue. The archive is one continuous story. The Prologue is where it begins.

TWO AMERICAS · twoamericas.us · P-4 The Tuscarora War (1711–1715) · Prologue Final Entry · Persecution