

Bland Expedition ^[1]

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Bland Expedition

by Thomas C. Parramore, 2006

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[Edward Bland](#) ^[3], a Virginia merchant, explored the region between the Meherrin and [Roanoke Rivers](#) ^[4] in North Carolina in the late summer of 1650. A Tuscarora Indian chief in the lower Roanoke River country had invited trade with Virginia, and Bland hoped to negotiate with the Tuscarora for that purpose. Leaving Fort Henry (now Petersburg, Va.) in August, Bland and a party of Virginians rode southeast on horseback along the north side of Blackwater River, turned south through Nottoway Indian country, and crossed the Nottoway and Meherrin Rivers before entering present-day North Carolina on 31 August. The party's immediate destination was what was known to Bland as the Hocomawananck (Roanoke) River and renamed by him Blandina River.

After a night camping three or four miles above the falls of the Roanoke, the party moved south to the falls and approximately opposite the present town of [Roanoke Rapids](#) ^[5]. Here they were disappointed in not making contact with the Tuscarora chief who had invited the Virginians to his territory. Warned that the Indians might have dangerous suspicions as to the whites' intentions, Bland's expedition turned back northward on 1 September. They made inquiries among the Roanoke [Tuscarora](#) ^[6] about an unidentified "Englishman amongst them, and . . . an English woman cast away long since." Although apparently nothing was learned of the woman, the man was said to be at a Tuscarora village some distance farther on. Before leaving, Bland's party wrote "to the Englishman in English, Latin, Spanish, French and Dutch," there being evidently some question as to his nationality. (Three years later, explorers from Lynnhaven River learned from Tuscarora near the mouth of the Roanoke that a Spaniard lived at a nearby Tuscarora village.)

The Bland Expedition is of interest because it establishes the location of the Tuscarora village known to the first [Jamestown](#) ^[7] settlers as Ocamahawan. It was the understanding of John Smith and others that not only some Spaniards but also several refugees from [John White](#) ^[8]'s 1587 [Lost Colony](#) ^[9] resided at one time or another at Ocamahawan during or before 1611. In any event, soon after 1650 Virginia traders were successful in establishing a fur trade with the Tuscarora, and for the next half century this tribe remained an important factor in Virginia's commerce.

References:

Clarence Alvord and Lee Bidgood, eds., *The First Explorations of the Trans-Allegheny Region by the Virginians*(1912).

Lewis R. Binford, "An Ethnohistory of the Nottoway, Meherrin and Weanock Indians of Southeastern Virginia," *Ethnohistory* 14 (Summer-Fall 1967).

Additional Resources:

Early Exploration, NC Historical Marker A-31 :<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=search&k=Markers&sv=A-31> ^[10]

"[The Search of Edward Bland's New Britain.](#)"^[11]The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography Publication Info
Subscribe or Renew Published by: Virginia Historical Society.

[The discovery of New Brittain](#) ^[3]. Began August 27, Anno Dom. 1650 (1873); By: Bland, Edward, d. 1653; Woode, Abraham; Brewster, Sackford; Pennant, Elias.

Subjects:

[Colonial period \(1600-1763\)](#) ^[12]

[UNC Press](#) ^[13]

Authors:

[Parramore, Thomas C.](#) ^[14]

Origin - location:

[Halifax County](#) ^[15]

[Roanoke Rapids](#) ^[16]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#)^[17]

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