

Hardly anyone who has visited Ocracoke hasn't heard about Blackbeard, the fiercest seafarer ever to fly the black flag of piracy. The basic story is fairly well known:

- Although virtually everyone knew the pirate as Blackbeard, he often went by the name Edward Teach, Tatch, or Theach....or even Edward Drummond. There is little doubt that all of these monikers were aliases. His real name may be permanently lost to history, but see below for some fascinating new research.
- Historians suggest that he was of English descent, born perhaps in Bristol. Some think he was from Jamaica, or even Philadelphia. Again, no one actually knows.
- During his brief career as a pirate (about 18 months in 1717 & 1718) Blackbeard terrorized shipping from the West Indies to New England.
- Captain Teach appears to have been a close personal friend of North Carolina Governor Charles Eden and his secretary, Tobias Knight.
- In November of 1718 Virginia's governor, Alexander Spotswood, sent Lieutenant Robert Maynard of the British Royal Navy in pursuit of Blackbeard because Governor Eden was doing little or nothing to halt piracy along the Virginia - North Carolina coast.
- Maynard caught up with Blackbeard as he lay anchored in Pamlico Sound, near Ocracoke Island.
- During the battle (on November 22, 1718) Captain Teach took five pistol wounds and twenty cutlass & dagger wounds before he succumbed and had his head chopped off. His crew immediately surrendered. This effectively ended the "Golden Age of Piracy" in the colonies.

Black Beard:



There are, of course, many more stories about Blackbeard — how he got his start in piracy with Captain Hornigold in the West Indies, how he captured the French vessel, “Concorde,” and renamed her the “Queen Anne’s Revenge,” how he terrorized captains, crews, and passengers on numerous ships as he plundered their cargo, how he took fourteen wives, how he blockaded Charleston Harbor and demanded nothing more than medicines, how he scuttled the Queen Anne’s Revenge in Beaufort Inlet and marooned most of his crew, then fled to Ocracoke in the “Adventure,” as well as many other stories.

Within the last several years I was alerted to a paper published in the North Carolina Genealogical Society’s Journal entitled “Legends of Black Beard and his Ties to Bath Town: A Study of Historical Events Using Genealogical Methodology.”¹ In it the authors argue that some evidence suggests that Blackbeard may have been native to eastern North Carolina. It is a fascinating article, one worth more attention and research. I will summarize the main points below.

Governor Charles Eden and his secretary, Tobias Knight, chief justice of the colony, both owned plantations on the west side of Bath Town Creek in Bath, the colonial capital of North Carolina. Knight’s property lay at the mouth of the creek where it joined the Pamlico (Pamlico) River. Just to the north was Governor Eden’s plantation. Next in line, across the narrow Whitby Creek, was the plantation of Captain James Beard. These plantations included 300 - 400 acres each.

An intriguing aspect of Governor Eden's property is that a tunnel reputedly joined his cellar to the bank of the creek. It was by means of this tunnel, many believe, that Blackbeard secretly carried a portion of his ill-gotten gains to the governor in exchange for protection from prosecution.

Black Beard's Flag:



On September 5, 1717 King George signed his "Act of Grace," an offer of amnesty designed to pardon any piratical acts committed after Queen Anne's War. The proclamation was signed on September 5, 1717 and extended for one year.

Blackbeard accepted the king's "Act of Grace" in June of 1718. Tellingly, Captain Teach chose to accept the pardon, not from Governor Woodes Rogers in the West Indies, as did most other buccaneers, but from Governor Charles Eden in Bath, NC.

Could it be, ask the authors of the genealogical journal, that the "inhabitants of Bath County did not see Black Beard as the rogue that history records" because his home town was in Bath? This would explain why he decided to return to Bath to accept the king's pardon there. As the authors say, perhaps Black Beard "was just coming home."

Intriguingly, Captain James Beard, Governor Eden's neighbor on Bath Town Creek, had a son who was born about 1690. This son, whose name has been lost to history, died between September 1718 and sometime in 1721, according to information gleaned from various deeds. Could this son be the pirate who came to be known as Black Beard?

The Genealogical Society's Journal article points out that Captain James Beard's son may have chosen to identify himself by the appellation "Black" plus his own authentic surname. As they say, "his own beard being black, he was able to play on this concept to good advantage, using it to terrorize his victims." They go on to ask, "Was irony involved in this man's choice of an alias, just as there was irony in the selection of the name *Queen Anne's Revenge* for Black Beard's flagship?" It seems entirely plausible to me.

Perhaps Captain Edward Teach, Black Beard the pirate, was actually a native of eastern North Carolina. No doubt he knew these waters well. Ocracoke was one of his favorite anchorages. And his one-time quartermaster, William Howard, may have been the same

individual who purchased Ocracoke Island four decades later, after Lieutenant Maynard put an end to piracy at what became known as Teach's Hole.

This theory is at least worth further research.

Springer's Point (Teach's Hole channel is nearby):



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