

Crooked Tree—A Short Historical Note

By: Hart Tillett

Rev. John Warner, an Anglican Cleric, visited “Crooked Tree” in 1844 at the invitation of Mr. William Tillett. At the time, the village (which Mr. Tillett described as “an elevated island fronted by a beautiful lagoon”) was inhabited by only twenty families and Mr. Tillett himself. Mr. Tillett and his wife Mary Jones Tillett, had a family of fifteen children, and at this time they were the chief residents of the settlement.

Perhaps owing to the growing size of the settlement, Rev. Warner suggested to William that he establish a township and give it a name. Mr. Tillett coined the name “Tillettton” but died four years later, before the town could be established. For decades thereafter, official references to the village invariably included the alternate name of ‘Tillettton’.

‘Tillettton’ is only one of the possible original names for the village we now know as Crooked Tree—the other circulating names are all connected to the rich early history of our village.

In a 1799 letter written by Mr. Tillett—only a year after the Battle of St George’s Caye—he claims to have occupied Tillett’s Old Bank from as early as 1792. The exact location of this ‘Bank’, and whether this was an earlier name for Crooked Tree, has not yet been established, but the available evidence certainly points that way.

It also seems probable that the original name of the village may have been Birkenhead. “Birkhead”, which now applies to the drowned reef in front of Tillettton, is a contraction of Birkenhead, the village in North Wales from which William’s father originated.

Two years before Mary died in 1870, she got well-known surveyor Henry Maskall to do a survey of ‘Crooked Tree aka Tillettton’. Maskall used a huge Bullett Tree located midway of the shoreline of Tillettton as his surveyor’s Point of Reference. A young Bullet Tree sapling now grows on that shoreline, not too far from the surveyor’s reference point. It is my belief that the name “Crooked Tree” was indeed coined from the presence of that magnificent tree.

So there were a variety of names circulating at the time-- Birkenhead, Tillett’s Old Bank, Crooked Tree, and Tillettton—take your pick!