LIVING ARCHIVES

A Message from the President

Only in very recent years has the role North Carolina played in the American Revolution been recognized by national writers of history and fiction. The state has produced good local historians but only a few popular writers who have been able to dramatize historical events and thus impress a large audience with the actions which took place in North Carolina during her struggle for independence.

Several novels of recent publication have dealt with the South in the Revolution. With these in mind it was with great interest the writer happened on a letter written to James Iredell by his friend William Hooper in 1782 describing the British occupation of Wilmington.1

Because of Hooper's unusual prominence as a revolutionary and as a signer of the Declaration of Independence, he had moved his family for protection from his residence, Finian, on Masonboro Sound, to Wilmington in the early days of the war. Finian was situated agreeably upon the sound, in sight of the sea.2 It was there that one of the first Masonic Lodges in the Province was organized by the group of Masons who gave Masonboro its name. Unfortunately, although Finian was mentioned often in correspondence of the period, nothing is known of its architectural style. Edwin A. Alderman states that "Finian was meanly fired by the British in 1776, and the last remains were destroyed by fire a few years ago." This was written 1894.3

Wilmington was taken by the British in January, 1781, under the command of Major Craig, an officer on the staff of General Burgoyne, and then for a period of ten months suffered the humiliations and privations characteristic of most enemy occupations. Nowhere in recent fiction has the agony of these trying days been more graphically described than by William Hooper who returned to Wilmington after wandering about the Eastern part of the state as a hunted exile with only the clothes on his back, dependent for food and lodging on sympathetic strangers and friends. He heard in Newbern that his wife, Anne, had been expelled from the town of Wilmington where she had sought safety.4

Hooper wrote: "I immediately made provisions for following, but before I got off, the evacuation of Wilmington was announced to me. I then resolved to take that in my route, to secure, if possible, some of my negroes, and to collect what I could from the wreck of my property. I found that Mrs. Hooper had managed, with so much address, as to carry off all our household linen; blankets and all,—the wearing apparel of herself and children; but had been obliged to leave behind all her furniture, both standing and movable. This, as well as my books, the British pretended they had left in the situation it was when Mrs. Hooper went out of town. But this I found to be far from the truth. Except a few articles which Mrs. Hooper had secreted among the friends she parted from at Wilmington, the British had borne off every article of house and kitchen furniture, knives, forks, plates and spoons,—an almost general sweep; nor had they spared the beds to finish the business."

An even more distressing sequel occurred following the British looting, when the "liberating" forces of the North Carolina Militia arrived under General Rutherford and completed the destruction of Hooper's personal property. He grieved most for his books and made no mention of the ingratitude of his fellow countrymen. "Two nights before I arrived in Wilmington, Rutherford's militia had broken open my house, cut open the feather beds that remained, plundered the tickings, and given the feathers to the wind. My library, except as to law books, is shamefully injured, and above 100 valuable volumes taken away. What vexes me most of all is that they have broken several sets of books, where the volumes were so necessarily dependent on the other, as to make what remains useless lumber. You know my partiality to my books—of course my chagrin at the loss of them."

Leaving Wilmington, scene of the vandalism inflicted by both friend and foe, he went to Hillsboro where he found his wife and children under the protection of Col. Clark, Mrs. Hooper's brother.5 It was only then that he heard his wife's story. "Mrs. Hooper had been ill for several months before she left Wilmington, and when she came out, was so much reduced by disease that there was very little reason to believe that she would have reached Hillsboro alive. My son Tom was under the influence of a high fever. Craig, immediately upon issuing his edict of expulsion, had ordered a sergeant and a superior officer to take a list of my property, and Mrs. Hooper was enjoined to quit the town in a certain number of hours, under pain of the Provost. She was not allowed to carry out of it a riding carriage, though she had two, nor a horse, though Captain Leggett and two others offered their horses to forward her to the American camp. In this melancholy situation, Mr. James Walker offered a boat and Mr. William Campbell's hands to row it as high up as Mr. Swann's on the Northeast. The ladies were seated in the boat, and passed through the painful scene of bidding adieu to their few friends, who were not permitted to accompany them, when Craig, who had not yet filled up the meas-

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MEETING

Place and Time: Sorosis Club, 116 North Third Street, November 4, 1959, at 8 P.M.

Speaker: Mr. H. G. Jones, the State Archivist of North Carolina.

Topic: Living Archives.

Mr. H. G. Jones was born in 1924 in Caswell County. After serving in the U. S. Navy in World War II, he received his B.S. degree from Appalachian State College in 1949, and his M.A. from Peabody College and Vanderbilt University in 1956. He is the author of Bedford Brown: State Rights Unionist, a brief biography of the North Carolina Unionist and United States Senator. This study won the R. D. W. Connor Award in 1956. In June of 1956, Mr. Jones gave up the teaching of History to become State Archivist.

HISTORIC SITES BOND ISSUE

On October 27, the people of North Carolina will have an opportunity to vote on a bond issue of $250,000 for capital improvements in the Historic Sites Program. This amount is included in a total bond issue of $34,400,000, the bulk of which will go to aid higher education and the State's mental institutions. The sites are located over the entire State. Most interesting to our membership: $20,000 to Old Brunswick Town for a museum and general purpose building; $30,000 to Fort Fisher for restoration, a supplement to local funds. As it is noted in Carolina Comments, which is published by the State Department of Archives and History: "These improvements will go far toward making the State's Historic Sites a real Statewide attraction for tourists and all North Carolinians interested in their history."

BOOKS


James Forte bears the subtitle: a 17th Century Settlement, possibly pre-1625, from the earliest known map of the Cape Fear River, the John Locke pen and pencil sketch of the Shapely Map, 1682, with the Lancaster Map of the Cape Fear River, 1670, and the Hilton Pamphlet, 1664, printed from the originals.

A few copies of James Forte were issued in an Advance Printing for subscribers last March. These are paper-bound and incomplete, but one is on file in the Wilmington Public Library for those interested in seeing it. The regular first edition was published October 12. The cover is made of Invicta parchment with a detail from the Lancaster Map, which Mr. Thomas describes as "one of the four most beautiful of the Colonial maps." It is a handsome publication, and the "Enigma presented in booklet form," as it is called, is a valuable contribution to the historical bibliography of the Cape Fear.

ERRATA IN THE HANDBOOK 1959

Page 22. Duval, Miss Frances Formy. Correction: Formy-Duval, Miss Frances.

Page 24. James, Mrs. James McCutchen, 604 Central Blvd., inadvertently omitted.


Any other errors are regretted and will be corrected in the Handbook for 1960.
"There is no new thing under the sun," says part of the ninth verse of the First chapter of Ecclesiastes.

That fact was emphasized anew to us a few days ago while reading the New Hanover County Minutes, from 1771 to 1785, as recently abstracted, compiled and edited by Alexander M. Walker, of Bethesda, Maryland.

This is Part 2, or the second volume, of Mr. Walker's commendable work in this highly interesting field. Each is separate with a distinct index.

The first, or pilot part of the series, entitled "New Hanover County Court Minutes, 1738-1769," was published in 1958.

"The purpose of these abstracts is to provide, in readily accessible, indexed and substantially reduced form, a convenient record of all the proceedings of the powerful New Hanover County, North Carolina, Inferior Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions that has heretofore been available for scholarly use by genealogists, historians and other researchers only by personal examination of the manuscript court minutes extending from 1738 to 1868 which are lodged with the North Carolina Department of Archives and History in Raleigh," Mr. Walker said in the preface to Part 2.

"Any reader may wish to examine the first part. It contains a brief introductory description of the court's extraordinary power and the scope of the abstracts, accompanied by an illustrative chart and set of maps. It also identifies various officials who not only furnish invaluable assistance and advice which enabled the editor to produce the first part but who have continued their significant help undiminished to encourage him in the publication of this Part 2," Mr. Walker added.

Incidentally, Mr. Walker's exact address is 4887 Battery Lane, Apt. 21, Bethesda 14, Maryland.

The terms of court of particular interest were those following the Colonies' Declaration of Independence. Whereas the date of the opening of court was referred to, as example, "Tuesday the Second day of January in the 16th year of the Reign of Our Sovereign Lord King George the third ... in the year of our Lord 1776" the following January's term was opened with "Tuesday the Seventh day of January, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy-seven. And in the first year of our independence."

A review of subsequent terms showed fair trade prices, loyalty oaths, ad valorem taxation, insufficient public warehouses, appointment of highway officials and public works projects were as much a part of Colonial life as these activities are today.

In those long ago days, the Court and not the County Commission set the tax rate.

So, at the January term of 1779, this entry was made in the minutes:

"Ordered that a County Tax of One Shilling be levied on every hundred pounds value in this County. And that those who are not possessed of the value of one-hundred pounds to pay a Poll tax of one shilling each agreeable to law ..."

As to price control, the same session set the charges taverns could levy for meals, lodging, grog, rum and stabling and feed of horses. Incidentally, seldom did a term of court pass without the granting of a license for a tavern.

And, in those days, the State required an oath of loyalty. A resident either took the oath or gave bond, with security, to leave North Carolina in 60 days.

At the January term of 1779, the following justices of the county were appointed to receive the oath: John Lillington, Benjamin Robinson, Fred Simpson, Wm. Moseley, Jno. Lillington, John Campbell, Wm. Purvis, Jno. Walker and Jno. Ancrum.

Wilmington apparently was just as port conscious then as it is today.

According to the court records, early in 1779, "Arthur Benning, Esq., qualified as an Inspector of Tobacco in Wilmington vice Thomas Bloodworth who was an Inspector and 'hath resigned.' Much of the tobacco exported to England moved through the port.

Squire Benning immediately protested against the sufficiency of the public warehouse, rented from Mr. Charles Jewkes. The court ordered Benning and Jewkes to put the "said public warehouse in sufficient repair as soon as possible."

Apparently a disagreement arose over the warehouse and the April, 1779, term of court ordered the Tobacco Inspector to return it to its owners immediately. County Trustee Nixon also was instructed to pay Mr. Jewkes two quarters' rent. At the July term, the court ordered discontinuance of the inspection of tobacco for the town.

As to highway supervision, the April 7, 1779, court appointed Thomas Rogers an overseer of the roads of the upper part of Black river and William Hemmesey overseer for the lower part of Black river. The maintenance of ferries and toll bridges and appointment of operators together with the fixing of charges, was another responsibility of the court. At the July, 1779, term, William Hooper, Esq., applied to "increase the toll charged at Henon's Bridge over the N. E. Cape Fear river, to provide sufficient revenue to keep it in safe repair for passengers." Certain charges were authorized.

Public works came in for attention, too.

In January, 1777, Sheriff James Bloodworth protested that the Wilmington jail was "totally unfit for the safe keeping of prisoners."

Two and one-half years later, the court minutes read:

"The Commissioners appointed by law for building a jail in Wilmington are hereby impowered to purchase a convenient lot in the town of Wilmington if to be got—if not a jail to be built on the same place where the jail that was burned formerly stood. And that the said Commissioners do agree with workmen and provide materials for building the said jail as soon as possible—The expense of said jail to be paid out of the County tax."

The Sheriff also was ordered to "get the necessary repairs made on this courthouse."

But a year later the jail had not been built. Sheriff Owen Kenan told the court there was "no place to confine prisoners, who may be committed to his care." However, in 1782, the court ordered a temporary jail erected and that "Archibald Ronaldson be hereby empowered to undertake the same."

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ure of cruelty allotted for these distressed women, forbade the boat to proceed. Again they came on shore—no house to shelter them, of their own—few that were hardy enough to receive them into theirs. They stood in the sun for several hours, when my daughter, overcome with the heat, called out ‘Mama, let us go home.’ Mrs. Hooper, whose firmness never forsook her in the severest moment of trial, answered—‘My dear, we have no home.’ Betsy could not support it. She burst into tears. Several British officers publicly abused Craig’s conduct, and said that such cruelty would disgrace a savage. Craig again shifted like the weathercock, and ordered the boat to go on, but would not suffer any gentleman to attend them, although James Walker requested it. A boy of about ten years old was sent up as their escort."

The devotion of a servant to his master helped restore to William Hooper his faith in human nature, which must have been badly shaken after few of their friends were "hardy enough to receive" his ill wife and his children into their homes and after the destruction of his possessions by American troops, the "rabble in arms" for whom he had given his greatest efforts and placed his life in jeopardy. It is strangely prophetic of the struggle eighty years later when stories were repeated many times over of faithful slaves who, even after freedom was proclaimed for them, chose to share their masters’ tragedies. "I must not fail," Hooper wrote, "to do just honor to my servant John. You remember him a boy about my house, to whom I was partial. He was not suffered to come out with his mistress; but after her departure, everything was attempted to attach him to the service of the British. He was offered clothes, money, freedom—everything that could captivate a youthful mind. He pretended to acquiesce, and affected a perfect satisfaction at this change of situation; but in the evening of the day after Mrs. Hooper left the town, he stole through the British sentries, and without a pass, accompanied by a wench of Mrs. Allen’s. He followed Mrs. Hooper seventy miles on foot, and overtook her, to the great joy of himself and my family."

This picture of the trying days of the Revolution in Wilmington and the suffering of its citizens is an illustration of the value of preserving the documents which have come down to us. It is through their preservation that the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society can keep green in memory the stirring events of our history. The eye-witness accounts of those who took an active part in the drama surpass in interest the work of writers of fiction because of their authenticity and sense of immediacy. Let us not think of archives as mere dusty papers. They have a life of their own. To us they make history live.

—HENRY JAY MacMILLAN

1. All quotations are from the Hooper letter in Griffith J. McRae’s Life and Correspondence of James Iredell, Vol. II, pp. 1-6.
   It seems unnecessary to provide biographical data on Iredell and Hooper, two of the greatest patriots and statesmen of their period.

2. Finian is now the residence of Henry B. Pechau, Jr.

3. William Hooper, Signer of the Declaration of Independence. This is an address by Edwin A. Alderman at Guilford Battle Ground July 4, 1894, p. 43.

4. Anne Clark married William Hooper in 1637. She was the daughter of Thomas Clark, Senior, and Barbara Murray, his wife. Thomas Clark the Elder was High Sheriff of New Hanover County when that position was held by one of the first gentlemen of the Province. Barbara’s brother James Murray was a wealthy merchant and a member of the Council of both Governor Johnston and Governor Dobbs. Anne Clark Hooper had no personal beauty but she was a woman of great magnetism and character. Her will was made at Byrnehaw, the plantation of her son-in-law, Henry Hyrne Watters, and it was probated at the Orange County Courthouse in Hillsboro in 1766.

5. Col. Clark, Mrs. Hooper’s brother, was Thomas Clark, Junior. He was later Brigadier General by-Browe. He must have resembled his sister since the beauty and strength of their characters was often commented upon in contemporary correspondence. When his loyalist uncle James Murray’s property was confiscated, Gen. Clark bought it and lived at Point Repose, the Murray seat on the Cape Fear River near Oakland. It was at Point Repose that General Robert Howe died.

General Clark married Sarah Moore, called Sally, the sister of Judge Alfred Moore, Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, and widow of General Francis Nash. These two gentlemen have counties of this state named for them and Nashville, Tenn., is named in honor of General Nash. These memorials perpetuate their names, but unfortunately both General Clark and his wife were buried at Point Repose and their tombs have long since disappeared as has that of their guest, General Howe, who was buried at nearby George Farm, home of his estranged wife.

6. Betsy was Elizabeth Hooper who married Henry Hyrne Watters in 1709, the year her father died. She survived her husband and her only son, who died as a young man. She died in 1844 and is buried in the Watters lot in the Weyman churchyard, Brunswick County, where her gravestone may still be seen.