
Lagniappe* / North Caroliniana

compiled by Plummer Alston Jones, Jr.

Editor's Note: "Lagniappe/North Caroliniana," the newest feature column of *North Carolina Libraries*, is envisioned as a complement to "North Carolina Books." As such, "Lagniappe/North Caroliniana" will feature reviews of materials in various non-book formats presenting fictional or nonfictional accounts on North Carolina or the Southern regions which include North Carolina (e.g., the Appalachians, the Southeast, the Old South, the New South, etc.). Publishers and creators of non-book materials which meet these criteria should forward materials for possible review. Reviews of up to 250 words are welcomed and will be considered for publication. Send materials and reviews to Plummer Alston Jones, Jr., c/o Iris Holt McEwen Library/LaRose Resources Center, Elon College, P.O. Box 187, Elon College, NC 27244-0187.

Librarians in the Political Process: Selected Resources

by Pat Langelier

Question: How can I keep up with what the General Assembly is doing about x (x = any pending legislation)? How can I influence the outcome of this pending legislation?

Answers: Who has a stake in x? What state agencies and legislative committees influence what happens with x? Who will be affected by legislative and/or regulatory changes in x? Local government? Business? Industry? Schools? What is happening in other states with x? What is Congress doing about x?

Whether you're interested in following political news to respond to reference questions or to get involved in the political process itself, you'll find a number of resources listed here to answer your questions and to lead you to other sources of information. Librarians who are experienced with the political process in North Carolina would surely add to or subtract from this list.

To confirm my own practices, and to find out how others keep up with politics, legislation, and government at the state level, I conducted an informal survey. Included in my sample were a political scientist, public, special, and academic librarians, and attorneys. The resources cited most often are included in this guide. The name of the publisher of each resource discussed here appears in a parenthesis after the initial citation. More complete information on each of these publishers appears at the end of this review.

More sources are listed than most people are likely to use on a regular basis. Try out a new source or vary your daily news diet from time to time to broaden your familiarity with its strengths and weaknesses and to hear other viewpoints.

Newspapers

The single most important source of political information and the most readily available is the local newspaper. Some newspapers publish more state and national political news than others, although wire service stories can be found in even the smallest local papers. *The News and Observer*, the *Herald Sun's* columnist Danny Lineberry, Jack Betts of the *Charlotte Observer*, the *Greensboro News & Record*, and the Associated Press reporters Alan Boyce and Dennis Patterson were specifically mentioned as reliable sources of information. See the latest biennial *Senate Rules-Directory* (North Carolina. General Assembly. Senate. Principal Clerk) for a directory of state capital reporters and North Carolina news media.

The problems experienced by one state usually affect another state sooner or later. The *Wall Street Journal's* (Dow Jones & Co.) "Politics & Policy" section focusing on state politics appears on the last page of the first section.

*La•gniappe (lăn-yăp', lăń' yăp') n. An extra or unexpected gift or benefit. [Louisiana French]

Directories and Periodicals

The Almanac of American Politics (National Journal) is required reading for an understanding of local, state, and national politics. This biennial publication of the National Journal provides historical background, a survey of the political landscape, and demographic information about every state and Congressional district, directory information, and biographical profiles of the president, governors, big-city mayors, senators, and representatives. Legislators' votes on key issues are listed, along with effectiveness rankings and ratings by ten major lobbying organizations.

The Washington Information Directory (Congressional Quarterly, Inc.) is my all-time favorite resource. It contains listings of foundations and private, nonprofit organizations located in the D. C. area, federal government agencies, congressional committees, state officials and mayors of major cities. Its subject arrangement simplifies gathering information about all the major forces concerned with a piece of legislation. A section on libraries and information science lists relevant federal agencies and commissions, congressional committees, federal departmental and agency libraries, and nongovernmental organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA), the American Society for Information Science (ASIS), the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), the Council on Library Resources (CLR), the Information Industry Association (IIA), and the Special Libraries Association (SLA).

Request a copy of the *(Year) General Assembly of North Carolina Telephone Directory*. Compiled by the Legislative Services Office, it lists names, addresses, and phone numbers of state legislators, staff members, and committee chair assignments. The *North Carolina Legislative Directory*, published biennially by Southern Bell, contains photos, and name and address information for state legislators.

Information about lobbyists is available from the Secretary of State's office. *Legislative Agents for the (Year) General Assembly Directory* lists registered lobbyists and the businesses, industries, and organizations they represent. New editions of the directory are published as needed throughout the session.

To lobby effectively, learn as much as possible about our state legislators. *Article II: A Guide to the 1991-1992 N. C. Legislature* (North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research), published biennially in odd-numbered years, contains legislator profiles that include a photo, date of birth, home, business, and legislative addresses and phone numbers, political affiliation, district represented, committee assignments, legislative service, occupation, educational background, a selective list of bills introduced, key votes, and effectiveness rankings (as judged by colleagues, lobbyists, and capital news correspondents). *Article II* also contains a list of representatives by district, demographic information (sex, race, and political affiliation statistics), and a list of House, Senate, and joint legislative committees. The biennial *North Carolina Manual* (N. C. Department of the Secretary of State) duplicates some of this information and provides additional information, such as service on boards, military service, and family information, but is published too late to be relied on for current information. The Manual is useful primarily as an official historical record.

Other publications of the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research that should be on your reading list include their quarterly magazine *North Carolina Insight*. It contains timely, well-researched articles on issues of public policy. *NC Focus: An Anthology on State Government, Politics, and Policy* (1989) is a compilation of articles from *North Carolina Insight* that offers a basic education on state government and politics. For example, one chapter describes the complex process of determining how legislators voted on an issue; another chapter explains how to evaluate the results of a political poll.

Understanding how the North Carolina legislature works is essential. *The General Assembly of North Carolina: A Handbook for Legislators* (Institute of Government), the sixth edition published in 1990 being the latest, describes legislative organization and process in North Carolina. It contains a chapter that illustrates the steps in the legislative process, and another that explains the budget process.

In addition to the news it offers, each issue of *Governing the States and Localities* (Congressional Quarterly, Inc.) will help you understand more about the operations of state and local government. For example, the June 1991 issue contained a special "Governing Guide" entitled "Managing Public Money." It explains how the budget process works in state and local governments, describes the accounting and reporting functions and the responsibilities of finance officers, provides the questions to ask to measure your government's fiscal health, and lists twenty-nine organizations, corporations, and educational institutions to contact for further information. At the national level, *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* is another excellent source of news about politics and government from Congressional Quarterly, Inc. It provides detailed coverage of presidential activities and congressional legislation.

Tracking the General Assembly

Each day the North Carolina General Assembly is in session, the Institute of Government's *Daily Bulletin* reports on the General Assembly's activities for members of the legislature and others interested in the course of legislation. The *Daily Bulletin* contains digests of each bill, amendments, and committee substitutes introduced, and a comprehensive calendar of daily actions. From time to time the *Daily Bulletin* lists committee assignments, summarizes messages by the governor, and reports other actions relating to the structure or organization of the General Assembly. The legislative reporting service of the Institute also publishes periodic status reports, an index of legislation, and a summary of each session's accomplishments, entitled *North Carolina Legislation*. Another handy Institute of Government publication is the *Chart of the Administrative Organization of North Carolina State Government* (1992) which lists all agencies created by the state constitution, statute, or executive order. It shows in table form the location of each department within the executive, legislative, or judicial branch of government. Other Institute publications, including the quarterly *Popular Government*, carry articles on North Carolina state and local government.

Electronic information sources

Real-time reference requires use of one or more of the following sources. Electronic bulletin board systems such as the statewide North Carolina Information Network (NCIN) and RESPOND, sponsored by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, offer quick, free access to news and a means to communicate with one another. On NCIN, you will find NCNEWS and the NCGOV bulletin boards prepared by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. NCNEWS is a summary of each bill affecting counties and its status; NCGOV provides news of interest to local government officials.

The databases provided by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, available through NCIN, are also accessible directly from the RESPOND bulletin board. In addition, RESPOND offers other features, such as the Annual Financial Information Reports (AFIR). Filed annually in the State Treasurer's Office, AFIR reports summarize annual budgets and revenues of each municipality and county. So far, the AFIR reports file contains data for two fiscal years. LOGIN (Local Government Information Network) is a national fee-based information system for local governments. It offers many interactive services and electronic versions of several periodicals including *City & State* and *Governing*.

Computer conferencing and e-mail (electronic mail) are becoming more popular as means of communicating and are being used by librarians to alert colleagues about pending legislation. One such computer conference is GOVDOC-L@psvm.bitnet. It allows librarians to spread news quickly about changes in federal legislation, and pending votes. E-mail is another means used by librarians to exchange news about legislative activity. As more North Carolina librarians connect to e-mail, it will become an important means of sharing news of pending state legislation.

Radio

Tune in to local radio stations that are committed to reporting state and local government news. At the national level, National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* has a huge listening audience, many of whom are frequent library users. NPR encourages local affiliates to contribute stories. Contact your local station to report newsworthy events and issues.

Cable TV

C-Span (Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network) has been called the "television newspaper of record," because it provides "a daily, unedited chronicle of the nation's public life."¹ A not-for-profit cooperative of the cable industry, C-Span and C-Span 2 are known primarily for gavel-to-gavel coverage of the House of Representatives and Senate. The two C-Span channels also broadcast political party conventions, presidential campaign events, and committee proceedings. C-Span also offers daily call-in programs featuring guests from the federal government, press conferences, debates, and think-tank panels.

C-Span has been emulated by several states, including North Carolina. *Open Public Events Network*, operated by the North Carolina Agency for Public Telecommunications (North Carolina Department of Administration), airs every Tuesday and Thursday from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. on local cable television stations. Programs include *OPEN/Net* and *Inside North Carolina*, live call-in programs connecting viewers with top state officials to discuss state government services and issues, and *State to State*, a national live call-in program. CNN (Cable News Network) offers twenty-four-hour news programming to cable viewers.

Network TV

When the General Assembly is in session, *Legislative Report* is television worth watching, especially as a complement to local newspapers, to monitor current legislation. The program, produced by the North Carolina Center for Public Television, provides daily coverage of legislative activities. *Stateline* airs weekly when the Legislature is not in session. A third program on North Carolina Public Television with news about government and politics is *North Carolina People*, a show that focuses on North Carolina's leading citizens. *Washington Week in Review* (Corporation for Public Broadcasting) covers the activities of the federal government and Congress.

Online networks

DataTimes, DIALOG, Dow Jones News/Retrieval, Legi-Slate (Washington Post), LEXIS/NEXIS (MeadData Central), NewsNet, VU/TEXT, Washington Alert Service (Congressional Quarterly, Inc.), and Westlaw (West Publishing Co.) are excellent sources of current news. For example, the Washington Alert Service provides full text of the Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report. It also provides access to committee reports and bill digests, the full text of bills, the Congressional Record, and the Federal Register, daily news summaries, the Billtrack service, the Reuter Transcript Service, and committee and floor schedules.²

Washington Alert Service and similar databases are very expensive and hence inaccessible to many librarians and end users. CompuServe and GENie are consumer-oriented database services offering access to news at a lower cost.³

If we are to have strong effective libraries in North Carolina, we must have librarians who are able individually and collectively to influence public policy and community action. The resources listed here will help us further develop this individual and collective influence.

Publishers

CompuServe, Inc., 5000 Arlington Centre Boulevard, Columbus, OH 43220,
1-800-848-8199.

Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1414 22nd St., N.W., Washington, D. C. 20037,
1-800-543-7793.

Dow Jones & Co., Inc., 200 Liberty Street, New York, NY 10281,
1-800-841-8000, ext. 248.

GENie (General Electric Network for Information Exchange), 401 N. Washington Boulevard,
Rockville, MD 20850, 1-301-340-4000.

Institute of Government, CB #3330, Knapp Bldg., University of North Carolina at Chapel
Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3330, 1-919-966-4119.

Legislative Services Office, 2129 State Legislative Building, Raleigh, NC 27601-1096,
1-919-733-7044.

LOGIN Information Services, 245 6th St. East, Suite 809, St. Paul, MN 55101-9006,
1-800-328-1921.

National Journal, 1730 M Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036, 1-800-424-2921.

North Carolina Agency for Public Telecommunications, 116 W. Jones St., Raleigh, NC 27603-
8003, 1-919-733-6341.

North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, P. O. Box 1488, Raleigh, NC 27602-
1488, 1-919-832-2893, (Contact: Debra Holley).

North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, P. O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602,
1-919-832-2839.

North Carolina. Department of the Secretary of State, 300 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC 27603,
1-919-733-7355.

North Carolina. General Assembly. Senate. Principal Clerk, 2020 State Legislative Building,
Raleigh, NC 27601-1096, 1-919-733-7761.

Southern Bell Telephone Company, P. O. Box 30188, Charlotte, NC 28230, 1-704-378-7799.

References

¹Thomas J. Meyer, *The New York Times Magazine* (15 Mar. 1992), Section 6, 46.

²For information on uses of the Washington Alert Service at the Perkins Library of Duke University, see Stuart Basefsky, "University [Duke] Use of CQ's Washington Alert Service," *The Docket: Newsletter of the Documents Section of the North Carolina Library Association* 19 (Winter 1992): 8.

³For an evaluation of online news sources, see Ellen D. Briscoe and Catherine Wall, "Inexpensive News Sources," *Database* 15 (Feb. 1992): 28-35.