

The Publications Sponsored by the Trustees of the Public Libraries of North Carolina

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Librarians and libraries are often intimately associated with the preservation of history. Manuscript or special historical collections house vast stores of material otherwise inaccessible to the public. Clio's keepers sometimes rise above their roles as conservators: they publish portions of their holdings, thereby increasing the availability of the information. At one time the North Carolina State Library actively embraced the role of purveyor of historical victuals. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the library's trustees sponsored the publication of several compilations of state documents and a new edition of John Brickell's rare history of North Carolina.

The general assembly of 1812 created what later became the state library to assist legislators in their work. Originally, it contained laws,

acts and journals of the legislature, together with other books and documents relating to the state. The librarian also collected documents from other states and the U.S. Government, received through exchange.¹ Later, however, the library acquired books of a general nature. In 1816 the general assembly appropriated an annual sum of \$250 for the purchase of books.² The amount was doubled by 1825.³

The general assembly of 1840-1841 created a board of trustees for the library. Originally composed of the governor and justices of the supreme court, the board's composition changed in 1872. Thereafter, the governor, secretary of state and superintendent of public instruction governed the library's operation. In addition to managing the library, the

trustees supervised the preservation of state documents and manuscripts.⁴

Beginning in 1881, the general assembly instructed the trustees to publish various documents of pivotal historical interest.

The first of these was John Wheeler Moore's *Roster of North Carolina Troops in the War Between the States*. Moore had been a major in the Civil War. Subsequently he published *School History of North Carolina, From 1584 to 1879* and *History of North Carolina, From the Earliest Discoveries to the Present Time* (1880).⁵ The general assembly authorized the *Roster* early in 1881, but Moore and the library trustees had difficulty agreeing upon the scope of the work and Moore's compensation.⁶ The trustees discussed these matters during March, April and May, 1881. On May 10 the board decided to require the Hertford County native to include the following information in the *Roster*: the date and place of organization of each unit; the engagements in which the unit participated; and the name, place of residence, date and place of enlistment, promotions, injuries and time of discharge of each soldier and officer. Six days later a contract was agreed upon. The editor was to receive \$2,100 in addition to postage and stationery costs. Upon completion of each volume, the trustees were to pay half of a proportional amount of the total sum. The other half was to be paid when the volumes were actually published.⁷

Because of difficulties the editor encountered, financial arrangements changed. In September 1881 Moore informed the trustees that he had discovered additional material in

Washington, D.C. The trustees agreed to increase his pay by \$300. The editor completed the first volume in March 1882, and with the help of his wife and children, finished the fourth volume by the end of the year.⁸

Moore utilized muster rolls located in the archives of the United States War Department and in the office of the Adjutant General of North Carolina in compiling the *Roster*. He also sent to surviving officers incomplete rolls, asking them to fill in the gaps. The latter approach generally failed. According to Moore, "abundant" returns of most North Carolina regiments and battalions were located.⁹

The finished work was similar to what the trustees had requested, but owing to incomplete data, full infor-

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mation was not included for all men listed. Volumes one, two and three listed executive and staff officers, general officers and regiments, by company. In addition to these facts, volume four contained lists of officers employed in conscript duty and a recapitulation giving the total number of soldiers belonging to each regiment or battalion.

On February 17, 1881 the general assembly ratified an act authorizing the trustees to publish any records belonging to the state created prior to 1781. The printing and binding were to be performed by the state printer at rates fixed by law. The general assembly gave the trustees the authority to sell any copies not reserved for use by the public libraries.¹⁰

The project was conceived and executed by Secretary of State William Laurence Saunders. Saunders, a graduate of the University of North Carolina, colonel in the Confederate Army and co-founder of the *Raleigh Observer* gained the position of secretary of state upon the death of his predecessor, Joseph A. Engelhard.¹¹

Shortly after assuming his duties in 1879 Saunders approached Governor Thomas Jordan Jarvis about the benefits of publishing the state's colonial records. Jarvis urged his friend to prepare a resolution for submission to the general assembly. In 1881 Senator Theodore F. Davidson of Buncombe County introduced a resolution created by Saunders.

The Secretary of state soon discovered that very few of the state's colonial records existed in the state archives. Therefore, on March 12,

1883 the general assembly authorized the publication of any records missing from the archives. The legislators provided unlimited funds for the project.¹²

It was Saunders' intention to

Do the work in our charge thoroughly, so thoroughly, if possible, that it need never be done again and so thoroughly that the real facts may stand out so plain that no future historian need err in regard to them.¹³

In doing that he consulted documents from at least seven sources: office of the secretary of state; British Public Record Office; State Archives of South Carolina and the South Carolina Historical Society; miscellaneous locations in Virginia; county courthouses in the Albemarle; Quaker records in Philadelphia; and records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.¹⁴ The most important of these were copied from among the records of the British Public Record Office in London. W. Noel Sainsbury, senior clerk there, directed the work.¹⁵

Owing to his failing health, Saunders managed only to publish material dated through 1776. Yet the ten volumes he edited represent the herculean task of a man who did the work "without reward, or the hope of reward, and solely because of the love he bears North Carolina and her people."¹⁶

Though Saunders' work in editing *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* was impressive, it was incomplete. The torch was passed to Walter Clark, a Tar Heel of similar background. Clark had served as a major in the Confederate Army, the youngest officer on either side. After

the war he practiced law in Raleigh and edited the *Raleigh News*. In 1888 he was appointed associate justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court. In 1902 he was elected to the top position on the bench, an office he held until his death in 1924.¹⁷

After the end of the legislative session of 1893 Clark began the task of publishing the colonial records produced through 1781. He soon concluded that the end date of 1781 was meaningless and recommended to the general assembly 1789 as a more appropriate stopping point. Accordingly, in 1895 the legislature extended the scope of the work to January 1, 1790.¹⁸

Clark approached his task from many different directions. In addition to arranging and copying the records in Raleigh, he obtained copies of documents from the British Public Record Office, libraries in New York City, the David Lowry Swain collection at UNC and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Stephen B. Weeks searched for material in Maryland and Pennsylvania as well as in North Carolina. Clark also utilized the transcripts of British documents copied previously by historian John Hill Wheeler. The hard working judge received assistance from bibliographer B.F. Stevens of London.¹⁹

The first two of Clark's volumes appeared in 1895. They adhered to the format of the Saunders volumes, and constituted volumes eleven and twelve in the series. The twenty-first volume, published in 1903, brought the work through 1790. Miscellaneous documents appeared in the next volume, and laws of the period con-

stituted volumes twenty-three through twenty-five. The census of 1790, listing the heads of families, rounded out the work — fourteen years after Clark began his task.²⁰

Saunders and Clark performed a great service by assimilating so much of the state's history, but Stephen Beauregard Weeks increased the value of their labor: he compiled an index to the entire series.

Weeks, the state's first professional historian, was graduated from UNC in 1886. He received an M.A. in 1887, and the first Ph.D. given by the Department of English in 1888. He then studied under Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins, receiving the Ph.D. in history in 1891. He taught history at Trinity College from 1891 to 1893, and worked as historian in the U.S. Bureau of Education for many years.²¹

The general assembly of 1895 authorized the index, and the library trustees soon negotiated with the Pasquotank County native.²² Weeks offered to compile the index for \$1200. Confident of his fitness for the job, he stated emphatically that "I am sure that the Trustees could get an index of some sort purporting to be complete, but woefully incomplete, for much less money than the sum which I have named. But I know that the Trustees want the best work possible, for unless the index is of this character it will be of no service whatsoever."²³ On May 25, 1895 the trustees voted to accept Weeks' offer. They quickly told him of their decision and in so doing informed him that, "The index is to be made as to be a key to unlock the Records now practically sealed."²⁴

Weeks attempted to include every proper name and proper adjective found in the massive set of state records. He dispensed with cross references since he placed the items he indexed under all reasonably pertinent headings. The index was strictly alphabetical, and was compiled using Charles Ami Cutter's rules as a guide. The editor warned the readers about the possibility of errors concerning frequently called names such as John Smith. He cautioned them to think of all ways to spell personal names, since they varied considerably in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁵

Volumes one through three of the index provided access to the efforts of Saunders and Clark. A fourth volume (the thirtieth in the series), published in 1914, explained in detail the history of efforts made to preserve the state's records. The final chapter listed several sources which could yield still more valuable information about the history of the state. Though Weeks' work eventually cost more than the \$1200 originally agreed upon, the return in terms of access to the records is incalculable.

Another eminent North Carolinian produced three works under the auspices of the trustees of the state library. Bryan Grimes, son of the Civil War general of the same name, was an alumnus of UNC. In 1900 he was elected to the position of secretary of state and subsequently secured the position four times. He also served as chairman of the N.C. Historical Commission and was a member of the State Literary and Historical Association.²⁶

Grimes' first work was entitled, *Abstract of North Carolina Wills Compiled From Original and Recorded Wills in the Office of the Secretary of State* (1910). According to the author it represented an abstract of every will then in the office of secretary of state. Grimes undertook the project because of the great interest in the old wills. Depending on the completeness of each will, the author included the following information in the abstracts: testator, place of residence, name of wife, children, legatees, witnesses and probate officers. Occasionally, names of plantations or various noteworthy items or passages were included. The earliest will bore the date of 1663, but most had been written after 1690. The *Abstract* also included an index and an appendix which indexed each book from which the wills were abstracted.

Grimes pointed out some of the problems associated with the wills. He warned readers that "X's" should not always be construed as signs of illiteracy, since known literates sometimes signed wills in that way. He noted that family relationships were often stated incorrectly (nephews or neices might be referred to as cousins). Grimes also explained the ambiguous dates caused by the failure of England to adopt the Gregorian Calendar prior to 1751.²⁷

Two years later Grimes completed a related work, *North Carolina Wills and Inventories*. The secretary felt that the publication was important, since wills opened an important window to the social and "industrial" life of North Carolina during the colonial period.

The book consisted of transcriptions of a number of wills deemed in some way representative or significant.²⁸ The compiler also included a small number of inventories, including some of private libraries. The wills and inventories were segregated, each series being ordered alphabetically. These sections were followed by an index.

In 1911 the trustees of the public libraries authorized Grimes to reprint John Brickell's *The Natural History of North Carolina*, first published in 1737. The trustees wanted to increase the accessibility of what was by then a very rare, but still important book. Grimes defended it as more than just a synopsis of John Lawson's *A new Voyage to Carolina*, and made references to its valuable information concerning the natural, economic and social conditions of early North Carolina. A brief sketch of the life of Brickell was followed by the original text (adhered to as closely as possible), maps and plates. Grimes added an index which had been penned in the copy he used in preparing the reprint.²⁹

With the exception of Stephen B. Weeks, all of the compilers of these books were amateur historians. The truth of this statement can be ascertained by looking at the works carefully. Yet, all of the men discussed provided worthwhile reference sources for countless Tar Heel historians and genealogists. They and their sponsor, the state library trustees, accomplished their goal of dissemination of knowledge. The knowledge is still circulating, and probably will for a long time to come.

Footnotes

¹See *Laws of North Carolina*, 1812, c. 16, hereafter cited as *Laws of N.C.*, with appropriate date; and *Journal of the House of Representatives of North Carolina*, 1813, p. 13, hereafter cited as *N.C. House Journal*, with appropriate date.

²See *Journal of the Senate of North Carolina*, 1816, p. 46; and *N.C. House Journal*, 1816, p. 47.

³Resolution in *Laws of N.C.*, 1825-1826, p. 90.

⁴See *Laws of N.C.*, 1840-1841, c. 46; and *Public Laws of North Carolina*, 1871-1872, c. 169.

The official title of the board was Trustees of the Public Libraries of North Carolina. However, since their jurisdiction included only the state, supreme court and legislative libraries (there were no public libraries in N.C. until the late 1890's), this writer has referred to the group loosely as the state library trustees.

⁵Samuel A. Ashe, Stephen B. Weeks and Charles L. Van Noppen, eds., *Biographical History of North Carolina: From Colonial Times to the Present*, 8 vols. (Greensboro: Charles L. Van Noppen, 1905-1917), VIII: 359-364, hereafter cited as Ashe, *Biographical History*.

⁶*Laws of N.C.*, 1881, c. 50.

⁷*Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees of the Public Libraries of North Carolina*, [1881-1919], pp. 5, 11-15, 17, 19-23. North Carolina State Library, Administration Division, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C., hereafter cited as *Library Board Minutes*, with appropriate page.

⁸*Library Board Minutes*, pp. 35-37, 57, 89-93.

⁹John W. Moore, *Roster of North Carolina Troops in the War Between the States*, 4 vols. (Raleigh: [State of North Carolina], 1882), I: iv.

¹⁰*Laws of N.C.*, 1881, c. 88.

¹¹Ashe, *Biographical History*, IV: 382-386.

¹²H.G. Jones, *For History's Sake: the Preservation and Publication of North Carolina History, 1663-1903* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 212-226, hereafter cited as Jones, *For History's Sake*.

¹³William L. Saunders to H.B. Ansell, 19 September 1883. *Library Board Minutes*, pp. 181-189.

¹⁴William L. Saunders to the Rev. Joseph Blunt Cheshire, Jr., 20 September 1883, *Library Board Minutes*, pp. 189-191.

¹⁵Jones, *For History's Sake*, pp. 212-226.

¹⁶William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, 10 vols. (Raleigh: [State of North Carolina], 1886-1890), I: vii-viii.

¹⁷See Jones, *For History's Sake*, p. 227; and Aubrey Lee Brooks, *Walter Clark: Fighting Judge* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), pp. 129, 140-141, 254.

¹⁸See Jones, *For History's Sake*, p. 229-230; and *Laws of N.C.*, 1895, c. 464, s. 2.

¹⁹Jones, *For History's Sake*, pp. 230-231.

²⁰See Jones, *For History's Sake*, pp. 233-234; and Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, 16 vols., numbered XI-XXVI (Winston and Goldsboro: [State of North Carolina], 1895-1906).

²¹H.G. Jones, "Stephen Beauregard Weeks: North Carolina's First Professional Historian," *N.C. HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XLI (Autumn 1965): 411-419.

²²*Laws of N.C.*, 1895, c. 464, s. 3.

²³Stephen B. Weeks to Governor Elias Carr, 11 April 1895. *Library Board Minutes*, pp. 400-401.

²⁴John C. Scarborough to Stephen B. Weeks, 27 May 1895. *Library Board Minutes*, pp. 401-402.

²⁵Stephen B. Weeks, *Index to the Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, Covering Volumes I-XXV*, 4 vols. (Goldsboro, Charlotte and Raleigh: [State of North Carolina], 1909-1914), I: [i].

²⁶See Ashe, *Biographical History*, VI: 262-264; and M.C.S. Noble, "Col. J. Bryan Grimes Dies," [UNC] *ALUMNI REVIEW* XI (February 1923): 130-131.

²⁷J. Bryan Grimes, ed., *Abstract of North Carolina Wills Compiled From Original and Recorded Wills in the Office of the Secretary of State* (Raleigh: [State of North Carolina], 1910), pp. [iii]-vi.

²⁸J. Bryan Grimes, ed., *North Carolina Wills and Inventories Copied From Original and Recorded Wills and Inventories in the Office of the Secretary of State* (Raleigh: [State of North Carolina], 1912), pp. [5]-6.

²⁹John Brickell, *The Natural History of North Carolina. With an Account of the Trade, Manners, and Customs of the Christian and Indian Inhabitants. Illustrated With Copper-Plates, Whereon are Curiously Engraved the Map of the Country, Several Strange Beasts, Birds, Fishes, Snakes, Insects, Trees and Plants*, &c. (Dublin: Printed by James Carson, 1737; reprint ed., [Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 1911]), pp. [i-iii].