

# Presentation of the 1972 Christopher Crittenden Memorial Award

by Dr. H. G. Jones

North Carolina State Archivist

The Christopher Crittenden Memorial Award, established in 1969, is the only adult award given directly by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association. It is awarded annually to a person, organization, institution, or corporate body engaged in the study, writing, teaching, publication, preservation, restoration, or dissemination of knowledge pertaining to North Carolina history. The award may be determined by a singular contribution to North Carolina history or by a congeries of noteworthy services that deserve recognition. The major criterion for the award is adjudged performance in the advancement of North Carolina history. The award, of course, honors the memory of the late Dr. Crittenden who served as secretary-treasurer of the association for 34 years and as head of the North Carolina Historical Commission, and its successor, the State Department of Archives and History, for 33 years. The master award is on display in the North Carolina Museum of History, and the winner of this year's award will receive this goblet, characteristic of Dr. Crittenden in its simplicity.

The association is particularly happy that Mrs. Crittenden and her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Foster Witt of Richmond, Virginia, are with us tonight, and I ask them to stand to receive your greeting.

The selection of the winner of the Christopher Crittenden Memorial Award for 1972 required a bit of deviousness. Because two voting members and one nonvoting member of the committee were in complete agreement, they simply ignored the third member, from whom the secret was kept until this evening when the newspapers required an early photograph for tomorrow morning's edition.

But then who should be surprised to hear the name of the recipient? As embarrassing as it may be for him to accept the award during the very year that he served as president of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, the remainder of the committee refused to allow him to be penalized by this coincidence.

The name William Stevens Powell has already taken its place alongside those of Connor, Newsome, Lefler, Carraway, Corbitt, and Crittenden as a significant contributor to the preservation and interpretation of North Carolina history. A former newspaper reporter and later a researcher with the State Department of Archives and History, Mr. Powell joined the staff of the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill in 1951, becoming curator in 1958. This collection, already the largest single accumulation of printed North Caroliniana, has been enriched immeasurably



Left to Right: William Powell, Daphne Athas, John F. Bivins, Jr. — 1972 recipients of the Christopher Crittenden, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Mayflower Society Awards respectively.

by the collecting instinct and the bibliographic researches of "Bill" Powell, as he is known to his friends.

Mr. Powell's published works mark him as a "working" historian — one who plows through masses of documents to bring to light new information which is interesting in itself but which also permits use by additional writers who otherwise might push ahead without it. Among such books have been *The Carolina Charter of 1663*, *Ye Countie of Albemarle in Carolina*, *The Regulators in North Carolina*, and *The First State University*. Perhaps the greatest debt is owed him for the incomparable

volume, *The North Carolina Gazetteer* — one of those books that makes us ask, "How did we ever get along without it?" Presently he is editing the papers of Governor William Tryon, writing a history of Caswell County, preparing for a dictionary of North Carolina biography, and who knows what else? Dr. Crittenden attributed Bill Powell's output to his ability to make productive use of every moment of his time.

But our recipient has not devoted all of his time to curating and writing. As a researcher for and later a member of the advisory committee on highway historical markers, he has assisted in the marking of scores of sites in North Carolina; as a member of the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina Press, he has encouraged the publication of important books on the history of the state; as a member of the editorial advisory board of the *North Carolina Historical Review*, he has helped shape that journal into one of the nation's prestigious scholarly quarterlies; and as editor for ten years of *History News*, he helped lay the foundation for a strong and vibrant American Association for State and Local History. The recitation could go on.

And not to be overlooked is Mr. Powell's teaching of North Carolina history at the University of North Carolina where he is inculcating in his students his own spirit of adventure in the heritage of his native state.

But to list all of Mr. Powell's contributions to the advancement of North Carolina history would tax his modesty, so let me conclude by saying that the Christopher Crittenden Memorial Award for 1972 honors William Stevens Powell, and he in return honors the award which it is my pleasure, on your behalf, to present to him at this time.