



NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. BOX 22, WINNABOW, NORTH CAROLINA

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COLONIAL BIBLE BOXES

The cry of "Fire!" was a frequent one in colonial times. In the days when open flame was the rule rather than the exception, houses were forever in danger of being consumed due to sputtering log fires, curtains blowing across lighted candles, and numerous other unfortunate happenings. The proximity of fire was both a comfort and a source of fear to the colonial people. Its danger was readily recognized by the exclusion of fireplaces from many important public buildings, much to the discomfort of the staff in wintertime.

Unfortunately private homes could not dispense with fire and its destructive menace when uncontrolled, but the problem was alleviated somewhat by establishing the kitchen as a separate unit some distance from the house. Still, within the house the danger was inherent in its comforts. In case of fire, one of the first things to be carried out was a large box-like container commonly known today as a "desk" or "Bible" box. While the contents of these boxes were as varied as the families, the general form was one of two styles: flat-topped or slanted-topped.

Those of the flat-topped variety are generally believed to have been used as a repository for a family's valuable personal papers. Such documents would be wills, deeds, receipts, licenses, and military commissions. As judged by the small compartments or shelves often found in this variety, it is clearly evident that they also contained writing materials as well. The flat top served as a smooth surface on which to write while placed on a table or held uncomfortably in one's lap. These boxes are also found in a slightly-slanted top form.

Those of the steeply-slanted top are considered to be the true "Bible" boxes, the slant being an aid to position the Bible during reading. The chief content of these boxes is apparent from the name. The combination of the development of speedier printing and the translation of the King James version of the Bible gave those homes of means and literacy an opportunity to have their own copy of the Holy Word. A Bible was a valuable possession, one of two books (the other being an almanac) every Colonial household hoped to possess. The "big house Bible" was vastly important in another way, for it contained the family history as recorded by the births and the all-too-frequent deaths.

Historically speaking, these boxes evolved from the mediaeval small "coffers" that were part of the portable house furniture. The range of sizes was from approximately seventeen to thirty inches in length. They were generally rectangular with roomy interiors. The construction was invariably the same: the sides and bottom were nailed together. Occasionally one finds one with dovetailed sides. The top was hinged with staples, and in later colonial times, strap hinges. In order to insure security the strap hinges were often placed inside. Locks were also another interesting feature of these boxes. The most frequent problem encountered in those times has left its mark on many of the surviving examples today. Quite often one sees desk or Bible boxes with a large and unsightly square of wood inset where the lock should be. Someone lost his key and had to punch out the lock.

The material of the boxes was usually oak, if English; and oak, maple, walnut, or pine if American. Solid boards were used. Applied decoration was very rare. Most of the extant examples today are handsomely carved (often with the owner's initials) and for this reason they survived. The plain ones undoubtedly perished because they were not considered as cherished or as valuable an item as their more elaborately adorned brethren.

The carving ranged from the simple "gouge" to the more elaborate and sophisticated styles. Most frequently one finds only the front carved, but it is not unusual to find all sides remaining done likewise. If the box were of the desk or writing variety, the top would be left uncarved for obvious reasons. The example illustrated is of English oak and dates from the third quarter of the eighteenth century. The boards are nailed and pegged together and it carries inside strap hinges. The lock plate is shown. Unfortunately on this example the hasp is missing. The carving is only on the front and may be best described as being of the vertical palmated scroll design interspersed with crude fleurs-de-lis. The interior is plain with no compartments. The dimensions are as follows: width 25½"; height 12½"; depth 18". This example is of the "desk box" variety, though it is readily apparent that it could serve the duty of a Bible box as well. As a matter of fact, this was usually the case, regardless of the type one owned.

Modern day collectors are prone to find unique ways to use them. One lady lined her recent purchase with zinc sheets for waterproofing and left it inside by her door as a receptacle for her wet overshoes.



Brunswick County Court Minutes - 1782
CR 12.301.1 - N. C. Dept. of Archives and History, Raleigh, N. C.

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Monday 16 Sept. 1782

Justices of said Court,

John BELL, Chmn.

Joseph EAGLES

Jacob LEONARD

William MOONEY, Qualified as a Justice of Peace.

William WATTERS

William MIMS

Dennis HANKINS

Elizabeth HINES, widow presented Inventory of the Estate of Daniel HINES, dec'd,
letters of Admn. granted, with Thomas RUSS and Samuel LEONARD, sureties.

Ann SIMMONS, widow presented Inventory of the Estate of Isaac SIMMONS, Jr. dec'd,
letters of Admn. granted with William GORE and William MOONEY, sureties.

Margaret STANLAND, presented Inventory of the Estate of John STANLAND, dec'd,
letters of Admn. granted, William MOON(EY) and William GORE, sureties.

not legible - Last Will and Test. was presented _____ John GALLOWAY and
William DRY, sureties.

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The Court then appointed William DRY, Entry Taker for the County of Brunswick in
the room of Stephen DENNING, dec'd.

Joseph HUMPHRIES granted letters of Admn. on the Estate of William GALLOWAY, gave
bond with John CAIN and John GALLOWAY.

Tuesday 17 Sept. 1782

Court met according to adjournment - present were

John BELL, Chmn., William WATTERS, Esq.

William GAUSE, Esq., William MOONEY, Esq.

Dennis HANKINS, Esq., Jacob LEONARD, Esq.

Return of the Jury

Benjamin SMITH

David FLOWERS - Defaultee

John GRANGE, Sr. - "

Drury ALLEN - "

John MONOUGH - "

Jacob HEWET - "

Joseph HEWET - "

Needham GAUSE - "

John STANTON - "

Charles KEETER - "

Joseph HEWET - "

John WARD - "

William VERNON

Henry WATTERS

William LORD

Miles POTTER, Sr.

Henry LEONARD

Samuel BELL

David SWAIN

John GALLOWAY

John GAUSE

John ROBERTSON

Samuel STANLAND

Elisha SELLERS

Aaron ROBERTS

Hugh STANLAND

Wi-----m GRE-----?

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Henry WATTERS, Foreman

William VERNON

William LORD

Miles POTTER, Sr.

Henry LEONARD

Samuel BELL (?)

David SWAIN (Swann)

John GALLOWAY

John GAUSE

Joseph HEWET

Samuel STANLAND

Elisha SELLERS

Aaron ROBERTS

Hugh Standland

Benjamin SMITH asks permission for his negro man named Joe to carry a gun on his plantation.

Ann WILLETS, widow presented Inventory of the Estate of Samuel WILLETS. Admn. granted, Thomas RUSS and John GAUSE, Sr. sureties. Court appointed John MARTIN, William GAUSE and Aaron ROBERTS to appraise and divide said Estate. Titus HOWARD summoned before the Court.

Phebe BASHFORD presented Inventory of the Estate of James BASHFORD, dec'd, Letters of Admn. granted, Samuel LEONARD and Samuel STANLAD, sureties.

Delilah GRISSET, widow exhibited Inventory of the Estate of Jesse GRISSET. Admn. granted, Wm. GRISSET and Ruben GRISSET, sureties.

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Mary CLIFTON, widow presented Inventory of the Estate of John CLIFTON, dec'd. Henry LEONARD came into Court and prayed to have his mark and brand recorded. His mark, a crop and 2 slits in the left ear. His brand HL.

Priscillah CHURCH came into Court and prayed an order to sell perishable part of the Estate of Thomas GALLOWAY - granted.

Ordered that a road be laid off from Pyreway Ferry on Waccamaw to the Seashore Road near Little River. The following men to lay off same; to wit,

William MOONEY	Needham GAUSE
William GRISSET	John COX
Hardy BENTON	John SMITH
Hugh STANLAND	John LAY
James SMITH	David SMITH
William TOWNSHEND	John THOMAS

A return thereof to be made to next Court.

Court finds Estate of Charles KEETER and Solomon TAYLOR falls under the Confiscation Act. (They attached themselves to the Enemies of the U. S. A.). Thomas BROWN, Esquire of Bladen County, exhibited an account against the said Charles KEETER and Solomon TAYLOR. Won judgement, 128 Pounds, Specie. Orphans of William CAMPBELL, judgement against Charles KEETER and Solomon TAYLOR.

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Ordered that Phebe BASHFORD sell perishable part of Estate of James BASHFORD. William GAUSE, Esq. brought deed from him to Dennis HANKINS to be proved and registered. William GAUSE, Esq., and Alex M. FORSTER to Joseph THEMIS (?) deed and ordered to be registered.

Luke SWAIN with Joseph HUMPHRIES aksed for Admn. of the Estate of Jonathan SWAIN, dec'd. John BELL and Samuel BELL as sureties.

18 September 1782 - Wednesday morning the Court met according to adjournment. Present were;

John BELL, Chmn.	Dennis HANKINS
Joseph EAGLES	Jacob LEONARD
William WATTERS	William MOONEY

Court appointed Bryan GAUSE, Surveyer for the said County; he qualified according to law.

Joseph HUMPHRIES and Luke SWAIN ordered to sell perishables of Estate of Jonathan SWAIN.

John CAIN, Esq., Sheriff came into Court and prays a protest against the insufficiency of a Goal in the said County and was intered accordingly.

The County laid a County Tax of one farthing in the Pound of all Taxable Property in the County for the year 1782. For the purpose of defraying the Contingencies of the said County.

Ordered that John WARD be appointed overseer of the Newbrittain Road in the Room of William MOONEY.

Jacob LEONARD, Esq. made a return of the Jury appointed to lay off road leading from Seashore Road to the Northwest over Town Creek at Col. LEONARDS.

The Court proved that Christopher CAINS attached himself to the Enemies of the U. S. and that his Estate falls under the Confiscation Act. A parcel of land was laid off for his wife and family.

Thomas STANDLAND, Thomas TAYLOR and Henry FLOWERS ordered to work on the Seashore Road.

Ordered that the Jury defaultees of this Court have notice to appear next Court and make their excuse for non-attendance.

The following appointed Jurors for the next Term;

Edward WINGATE	William GRISSET, Sr.
James CORBET	Ruben GRISSET
Cochnius WINGATE	John LAY
George GRISSET	John SMITH
Matthew SELLERS	Benjamin MILLIKEN
Arthur ROBBINS	David SMITH
Jethro ROBBINS	Joseph DEMOT
Joseph SOWL	John COOS
Samuel ETHRIDGE	Thomas WARD
Sullivanus SOWE	John RUSS

Thomas SIMMONDS
Isaac SIMMONDS
Allen WINGATE
John WARD
Drury ALLEN
Roger ROOTS
John GRANGE, Sr.
Aaron ROBERTS
Needham GAUSE
John MARTIN, Sr.

Then the Court adjourned 'till the next in the County.

Wm. GAUSE, Clerk

Abstracted by Mrs. Lucille D. Blake, Leland, N. C.

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NOVEMBER MEETING

TIME: November 10, 1969 at 8:00 P. M.
PLACE: Woodburn Presbyterian Church, Leland, N. C.
PROGRAM: Unknown to editor at time of printing
Newsletter

Memberships are greatly needed to build a stronger Society for
the preservation of the county history.

SOCIETY OFFICERS FOR 1969

Mrs. Marie H. Rourk, President
Mrs. Jeannette Driscoll, Vice-President
Miss Helen Taylor, Secretary-Treasurer
Mrs. Harry Mintz, Program Committee
R. V. Asbury, Jr., Director and Editor of Newsletter
Mrs. J. L. Blake, Director
Harry Mintz, Chairman of Brunswick Town Preservation Committee

NEWSLETTER NEEDS YOUR ASSISTANCE

Anyone who has information concerning old documents, photographs,
artifacts (Indian and Colonial) or other pertinent material which might be
used in this newsletter, please send them to the address below. This is
your paper as a member of the Society, and you are urged to contribute
any material which would be appropriate and interesting for our readers.

R. V. Asbury, Jr., Editor
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