

A Free School in Beaufort ^[1]

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In the colonial period, there were no free public schools — all education, at every level, cost money. Wealthy planters often hired tutors to live on their plantations and teach their children, and sometimes people in a community would pool their resources and hire a teacher. At this time, teachers would have been men, never women.

Occasionally, someone might leave money in a will for building a free public school and hiring a teacher. This document, the will of James Winwright in 1744, may have been the first. According to Charles Coon, who collected documents on the early history of public education in North Carolina, the school Winwright wanted was never built. There were many obstacles to running a school in the eighteenth century — poor transportation, a lack of qualified teachers, and the difficulty of finding someone to manage the school.

After the Revolution, though, several schools were successfully founded on this model. Until the 1840s, they were the only form of free public education in North Carolina.

I will and appoint that the yearly Rents and profits of all The Town land and Houses in Beaufort Town Belonging unto me with the other Land adjoining thereto (which I purchased of John Pindar) after the Decease of my wife Ann to be Applied to the Uses hereinafter Mentioned for Ever (to Wit) for The encouragement of a [Sober](#) ^[2] discreet Quallified Man to teach a School at Least Reading [Writing Vulgar](#) and [Decimal Arithmetick](#) in the aforstd. Town of Beaufort, wch said Man Shall be Chosen and appointed by the Chair Man (or the Next in Commission) of Carteret County [Court](#) ^[3] and one of [Church Wardens](#) of St. John parish in the aforesd. County and Their Successors for Ever, also I Give and Bequeath the Summ of Fifty pounds Sterling (provided that my estate Shall be Worth so much after my Just Debts and other Legacys are paid and [Discharged](#) ^[4]) to be applyed for the Building and finishing of a Creditable House for a School and Dwelling house for the said Master to be Erected and Built on Some part of my Land Near the White house Which I bought of the aforesaid Pindar, and my True Intent and Meaning is that all the yearly profits and advantages arising by the aforesd. Town Lotts and Lands thereunto adjoining as aforesd. with the Use of the sd. Land for Making and Improving a plantation for the planting and Raising of Corn, etc. (if the aforesd. Master or teacher of sd. School Shall think proper to plant and Improve the same) be entirely for the use and Benefitt of ye sd. Master and his Successors During his and their Good Behaviour, — Also that the sd. Master [Shall not be obliged to teach or take under his Care any Schoolar or Schoolars Imposed on him](#) by the Trustees herein Mentioned or their Successors or by any other person, But shall have free Liberty to teach and take under his care Such and so many Schoolars as he shall think Convenient and to Receive his Reward for the Teaching of them as he and the persons tendering them shall agree.

Aug. 13, 1744.

Probated March Court 1744/5.1

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