

Blue Laws ^[1]

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by Wiley J. Williams, 2006



1741 Act. Click Thumbnail to see larger image.

^[2]"Blue laws" refer to statutes designed to enforce morality as some lawmakers understand it, such as restricting the hours that stores can open on Sundays or the sale of alcoholic beverages. The term "blue law" originated in the eighteenth-century New Haven colony in Connecticut, where the laws were so called because of the color of paper on which they were printed or bound. In the early 1960s North Carolina experimented briefly with a statewide Sunday blue law (effective October 1961) that had the support of the [North Carolina Merchants Association](#) ^[3] and various religious groups. Four Charlotte discount stores-G.I. Surplus Store, Mecklenburg Surplus Company, Clark's Charlotte, Inc., and Atlantic Mills of North Carolina-brought an action to toss out the law, and in May 1962 the [North Carolina Supreme Court](#) ^[4] ruled unanimously that it was "unconstitutionally vague, uncertain, and indefinite."

Local jurisdictions continued to maintain an array of blue laws, particularly those related to Sundays. In Lincolnton and elsewhere, an ordinance at one time permitted convenience stores, but not supermarkets, to open on Sunday mornings. For a while in Goldsboro and [Wilmington](#) ^[5], certain types of businesses-such as cigar and tobacco shops, fruit stands, service stations, auto parts stores, grocery stores, hotels, motels, restaurants, and pharmacies-could open on Sundays, whereas clothing, appliance, hardware, and musical instrument stores could not. Businesses with "[brown-bagging](#)" ^[6] permits authorized by local ordinances could operate, but stores and restaurants could not sell alcoholic beverages. Because of the inequities in these Sunday blue laws, such regulations were abolished in most cities and towns by the end of the twentieth century, though a number of them remain in force.

Reference:

David N. Laband and Deborah Hendry Heinbuch, *Blue Laws: The History, Economics, and Politics of Sunday Closing Laws* (1987).

Image Credit:

1741 Act relating to Blue Laws. Image courtesy of the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Available from <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/nchistory/jan2010/index.html> ^[7] (accessed August 27, 2012).

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#)^[12]

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