

Cat-Throwing Incident ^[1]

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by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 2006

The Cat-Throwing Incident in the [colonial](#) ^[3] Assembly of North Carolina is an example of the disorderly behavior of legislators and of the arbitrary response to personal comments among them. The incident was mentioned in political discussions and personal correspondence at various times after its occurrence, creating more interest than it probably warranted. Charles Cogdell of [Carteret County](#) ^[4] apparently was present merely as an observer at the session of the Assembly meeting in [Wilmington](#) ^[5] in April 1761. [James Hasell](#) ^[6], president of the council, was speaking in the temporary absence of the governor in favor of raising troops in support of the [French and Indian War](#) ^[7]. A disturbance arose in which Cogdell was described as being "guilty of a contempt and indignity of this House by throwing a Cat upon Mr. Charles Robinson," a member of the House.

Taken into custody by the sergeant at arms, Cogdell was escorted to the bar of the House, where he "Confest that a Cat leaping upon his shoulders from a Stare Case, he on a surprise, threw her from him, which might fall on Mr. Robinson, but with no design or contempt to any of the Members of the House." It was ordered that Cogdell withdraw and remain in custody until further instructed. Later Cogdell was called in and reprimanded by the Speaker of the House. He also asked the pardon of the House in general and of Robinson in particular. After paying the fees imposed, he was discharged.

At the next meeting of the House, member [Blake Baker](#) ^[8] of [Halifax County](#) ^[9] charged that one John Fergus, not a member, was also guilty of contempt and breach of the privileges of the House for saying that he, Baker, was a scoundrel for moving the House against Cogdell. Fergus also said that if he were Cogdell, he would give Robinson "a genteel flogging." Fergus was subsequently brought before the House, and it was revealed that he had, indeed, spoken in support of Cogdell. By way of punishment, Fergus was ordered on his knees to ask forgiveness of the House in general and of the Speaker in particular. Having done so, he was returned to the custody of the sergeant at arms until he paid the fees for his offense.

References:

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William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 6 (1888).

Subjects:

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[Politics and government](#) ^[11]

Authors:

[Powell, William S.](#) ^[12]

Origin - location:

[Wilmington](#) ^[13]

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[14]

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