

## Curfew <sup>[1]</sup>

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## Curfew

by [William S. Powell](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, 2006

Curfew is a term derived from the words "cover fire," a command issued by officials directing retirement for the night or restricting movement to a designated area or period. Authority to order this action in North Carolina was sustained by law or was provided for in a town charter. It was broadly applied on standing order; it also might be enforced when special needs prevailed to ensure public safety, to prevent looting, or for other reasons. [In 1807](#) <sup>[3]</sup> [Edenton](#) <sup>[4]</sup> had an ordinance requiring that town streets be cleared by a set time. However, free blacks with proper identification could remain out until 10:00 p.m. Many towns had curfews that applied to all blacks, free or slave. Free blacks could not be in the house of a slave without the owner's permission. It was customary for plantation overseers to ring a curfew bell at 9:30 p.m. and soon afterward to make rounds to see that occupants had retired. In 1807 children in Salisbury and [Raleigh](#) <sup>[5]</sup> became so rowdy at night that the town commissioners were asked to restrain them.

During the [Union occupation of New Bern in 1862 and 1863](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, a curfew was established for the men in uniform, and sentinels were posted in three sections of the town to enforce it. Curfews have been authorized during disasters such as fires, hurricanes, and floods to protect life and property.

### References:

John R. Barden, ed., *Letters to the Home Circle* (1998).

Guion G. Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (1937).

Alan D. Watson, "Slavery in the Lower Cape Fear," *Waves and Currents* 19 (January 1999).

### Additional Resources:

Mention of 1807 Edenton curfew, Guion Griffis Johnson Papers, DocSouth, UNC:  
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/johnson/chapter5.html> <sup>[3]</sup>

New Bern Occupation Papers, DocSouth, UNC: [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/n/New\\_Bern\\_Occupation.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/n/New_Bern_Occupation.html) <sup>[6]</sup>

### Subjects:

[Law and legal history](#) <sup>[7]</sup>

[UNC Press](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

### Authors:

[Powell, William S.](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

### Origin - location:

[Edenton](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

[Salisbury](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

[Raleigh](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

### From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

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[3] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/johnson/chapter5.html>

[4] <https://ncpedia.org/edenton>

[5] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/raleigh>

[6] [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/n/New\\_Bern\\_Occupation.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/n/New_Bern_Occupation.html)

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