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Historical Commission [1]

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by H. G. Jones, 2006



Dr. Richard D. Starnes, Prof. William S. Powell (emeritus), Dr. David C. Dennard, Dr. Harry L. Watson, Dr. Valerie A. Johnson, Dr. Mary Lynn Bryan, Mr. B. Perry Morrison Jr., Dr. Jerry C. Cashion (Chair), Dr. Jeffrey J. Crow (Secretary), Secretary Linda A. Carlisle, Department of Cultural Resources, Mrs. Millie Barbee (Vice-Chair), Mrs. Barbara Blythe Snowden, Dr. H. G. Jones (emeritus), Dr. Freddie L. Parker. Image from the North Carolina Office of Archives and History.

[2]In 1903, at the behest of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association [3], the General Assembly [4] established [5] the North Carolina Historical Commission to collect and print "from the files of old newspapers, from court records, church records and elsewhere valuable documents pertaining to the history of the State." Its gubernatorially appointed members served without salary, and its initial annual appropriation was $500. William J. Peele [6] was the commission's first chairman, and R. D. W. Connor [7] served as secretary. During its first four years, the commission's chief accomplishment was publishing *Literary and Historical Activities in North Carolina, 1900-1905* [8]. In 1907 the legislature expanded the commission's authority, and with a tenfold increase in appropriated funds, the commission engaged Connor as its first paid secretary. From that date North Carolina retained a true state archival agency, successfully guided by Connor until 1921, when he resigned to become a history professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [9].



Photo of Dr. Christopher Crittenden, Director of the State Dept. of Archives & History, Summer, 1952. Studio Portrait.

[10]During his tenure, Connor launched an aggressive campaign to acquire private

manuscripts and to transfer county and state records to the State Archives. Oversight of the Hall of History [11], a museum started by Frederick A. Olds [12], was transferred to the commission in 1914. The entire agency moved into the new State Administration Building (later known as the State Library Building and now the Court of Appeals Building), where it remained until moving to the first floor of the new Education Building in 1939. Meanwhile, from 1915 to 1933 the commission also administered the Legislative Reference Library.

Following Connor's departure, secretaries D. H. Hill (1921-24), Robert B. House (1924-26),Albert Ray Newsome [13] (1926-35), and C. Christopher Crittenden [14] (1935-68) carried on the various programs of the Historical Commission. The distinguished series of documentary publications continued, the quarterly *North Carolina Historical Review* [15] began in 1924, and public records legislation in 1935 gave the commission authority over the disposal of all public records: local, county [16], and state. During the Depression [17]the commission administered several federal relief projects that inventoried and publicized the state's historical resources, most notably the county records. During both world wars it collected war-related records for future research, and, after 1935 the commission erected highway historical markers [18] throughout the state. Its record has been summarized in *The North Carolina Historical Commission: Forty Years of Public Service, 1903-1943* [19](1943).

The name of the agency changed in 1943 to the State Department of Archives and History, and two years later the name of the seven-member commission changed to Executive Board and the secretary became the director. After the Department of Archives and History became a division of the new Department of Art, Culture, and History (later renamed the Department of Cultural Resources [20]), however, the name North Carolina Historical Commission was revived in 1973 and applied to a professional body [21] with broad policymaking powers over the Office of Archives and History.

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Additional Resources:

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