

Literary Fund ^[1]

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by Elmer Lawson, 2006

The Literary Fund was a term used in the nineteenth century to denote a financial account created to establish and maintain a rudimentary educational system. Each of the original colonies had such a fund, with those of Virginia, Massachusetts, New York, and North Carolina being the most notable. Although schools and education were mentioned in the [General Assembly](#) ^[2] occasionally after 1802, it was not until 1815 that a joint committee under the chairmanship of [Archibald D. Murphey](#) ^[3] issued a report on education in the state. In 1825 provision was made for the creation of a fund to support schools and a Literary Board to administer the money. Money in the fund came from stock owned by the state in two banks, navigation companies, the sale of public land (particularly [swampland](#) ^[4]), and direct appropriation. Yet no precise provision was made for the creation of a system of schools.

The Literary Fund was used for purposes other than education, including loans to individuals, current state expenses in anticipation of tax receipts, and the purchase of a library for the state following the [burning](#) ^[5] of the capitol building in 1831. Surplus revenue from the federal treasury in 1836 and 1838 brought additional income to the Literary Fund and a reorganization of the Literary Board.

On 8 Jan. 1839 the General Assembly enacted North Carolina's first [public school](#) ^[6] law. Local funds were to be employed, but money from the Literary Fund was also to be granted each school district. The Literary Fund remained a significant part of the system until after the end of the [Civil War](#) ^[7], when the Literary Board was dissolved by the legislature effective in May 1868.

Reference:

Elmer Lawson, "[History of the North Carolina Literary Fund, 1776-1868](#)" ^[8] (Ph.D. diss., UNC-Chapel Hill, 1956).

Additional Resources:

Coon, Charles L. *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: a Documentary History 1790-1840* Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co. 1908. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/beginnings-of-public-education-in-north-carolina-a-documentary-history-1790-1840-vol.-1/2255770?item=2261233> ^[9]

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Authors:

[Lawson, Elmer](#) ^[11]

From:

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

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