

Rich, Joseph Hampton ^[1]

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by H. G. Jones, 1994

14 July 1874–1 Dec. 1949

See also: [Arrowhead Marker](#) ^[2] and [Daniel Boone Trail Marker](#) ^[3].

Joseph Hampton Rich, editor and promoter, was born in [Davie County](#) ^[4], the son of Samuel Chase and Betty Carolina McMahan Rich. He was graduated from [Wake Forest College](#) ^[5] in 1898. For a short time he was a Baptist preacher and schoolteacher, then acquired a small press and operated a print shop in [Winston-Salem](#) ^[6]. By 1913 he was general manager of the Southern Agricultural Advertising Bureau, and in 1919 he listed himself as president of the Piedmont Printing Company. For a while he published a small weekly newspaper, the *Labor Leader*.

Rich's name is associated with highways, an interest reflected in two organizations that he formed and managed almost single-handedly. The first of these, the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association, he organized in North Wilkesboro on 13 Oct. 1913. Its original purpose was to promote the building of "an arterial highway to reclaim the counties of the northwestern part of the state," but this goal was soon extended to the promotion of additional routes and to the construction of markers commemorating [Daniel Boone](#) ^[7]. At first he cooperated with the Daniel Boone Trail Committee of the Daughters of the American Revolution, but within a few years the flamboyant Rich took over the effort. About 1916 he went to Washington, D.C., and engaged a sculptor named Henley to prepare a model for a tablet showing Boone sitting on a boulder with his dog, rifle, and powder horn—looking westward, of course. He persuaded the navy to give him four hundred pounds of metal from the gun carriage of the USS *Maine*, a bit of which he mixed into the metal tablets cast from the model. The tablets were reproduced by the dozens. Many were placed on concrete and stone arrowheads constructed along the supposed travel routes of Daniel Boone; others were bolted to granite slabs or walls of buildings.

For more than twenty-five years Rich made his living visiting communities, stirring the imaginations of civic leaders and schoolchildren, raising funds, constructing arrowheads, conducting colorful unveiling ceremonies, and issuing carefully prepared press releases. The Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association's *Boone Trail Herald*, published sporadically from 1924 to 1938, recorded the proliferation of the increasingly familiar arrowheads and reported on "Major" Rich's speech-making and promotional activities.

Once markers had been placed along the highways leading from the Yadkin Valley to Kentucky, Rich turned his attention to other routes. There were the "Coal-to-Cotton Highway" from West Virginia to the Carolinas, the "Detroit to St. Augustine Cross-Line," and a trans-continental "Boone Trail" from Virginia Beach to San Francisco. In placing a Boone marker at the Golden Gate, he wrote, "The spot was never reached by Boone perhaps except in his dreams but we know that he longed to reach the Pacific and asked many questions about the far famed country of California." Along all these routes he stimulated interest and financial support for the construction of markers, each dedicated with patriotic fervor. On the Georgia state capitol grounds, for instance, a torchlight ceremony "gave a fine imitation of a campfire scene with Daniel Boone as the central figure."

Having marked the South and West with scores of Boone monuments, the director of the Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association took his movement to New England, enlisting civic clubs and schoolchildren in the construction of two Boone markers in Boston. He wrote that in one of them was "a rock from the summit of Mt. Washington where the director spent a very delightful night, seeing a glorious sunrise." He claimed to have discovered in his research that an ancient route called the Sokoki Trail from Boston to New York had been used by the Apanake Tribe a thousand years ago, and that it was the southern leg of this trail through Pennsylvania that the Boone family followed to North Carolina. Naturally, Boone arrowheads were placed along the route.

By 1930 Rich had decided to honor other white pioneers, Indians, and animals. He drew a map naming the highway from Winston-Salem to Bryson City (one route via [Asheville](#) ^[8], one via [Hendersonville](#) ^[9]) the "Appalachian Indian Road and Buffalo Trail." Monuments along these routes sometimes held two metal tablets—one honoring the Indian chief, Sequoyah, the other a buffalo. In Davie County he built a monument to Nathaniel Brock; in [Orange](#) ^[10], to [Thomas Burke](#) ^[11]; in [Catawba](#) ^[12], to David Crockett. In the Joppa Cemetery in Davie, he marked the graves of Daniel Boone's parents.

In 1925 Rich persuaded the [General Assembly](#) ^[13] to charter the Daniel Boone High School at Deep Gap, to be used as a consolidated school under the administration of the [Watauga County](#) ^[14] Board of Education for eight or nine months of the year and as a Boy Scout training camp in the summer. His plans to establish a Daniel Boone Boy Scout Camp in Yellowstone Park apparently failed.

Rich's other consuming interest was the Boys' Road Patrol, which was chartered by the General Assembly of 1915 "to look after the maintenance of the stretch of road indigenous to each member of the patrol, dragging and ditching same by

the use of machinery placed in the care of the patrol by the State and county." For ten years the program was under the Department of Agriculture, but in 1925 it was transferred to the State Board of Education. It apparently was most active in the counties of Forsyth ^[15] and Davie where Rich personally oversaw the work. In the days before paved roads, the patrol, with the slogan, "A Boy on Every Mile," helped keep country roads dragged and drained. A simple road drag formed the patrol's seal. With the advent of improved roads in the 1930s, the organization (in essence, Rich himself) preached traffic and pedestrian safety.

About 1934 Rich headed the American Institute of Heraldry in North Carolina, offering to research and register arms as a "token of the achievement of blood." In the following decade in Chapel Hill ^[16] he built inexpensive log cabins for students at the university, and in 1945 he served on the staff of the General Assembly.

Rich married Ino Bagby and they had four children—Katherine Elizabeth, Edith Huldoh, Charles Hampton, and Samuel Frederick Chase. He died in Duke Hospital and was buried at Eaton's Church in Davie County.

J. Hampton Rich, who claimed to have placed more than 350 metal tablets throughout the country and to have addressed more than 50,000 schoolchildren on just one cross-country tour, was an enigma. Given to exaggerations, less than scholarly in his research, and not above a little chicanery, Rich was nevertheless a gentle and generous man who enjoyed the luxury of making his hobby his career. For more than two decades he stirred the interest of countless schoolchildren in what he called "pioneer lore," which formed the "mud-sill of our republic." Many of his markers may still be seen from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Florida to Michigan and Massachusetts. In memorializing Daniel Boone, Hamp Rich probably exceeded the old pioneer in both travel and exploration.

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