

North Carolina Gazetteer: Prefaces ^[1]



Average: 3.7 (3 votes)

North Carolina Gazetteer: Prefaces

[Preface to the 2nd edition](#) | [Preface to the 1st edition](#)

Return to [The North Carolina Gazetteer](#) ^[2] [main page](#) ^[2].

Preface to the Second Edition

by Michael Hill
May, 2009.

It is remarkable to consider the number of place names that derive from the difficulties that North Carolinians had in crossing creeks. Pig Basket Creek in Nash County, for example. It seems that an early settler, headed home with a basket of newborn pigs, dropped them into the water as he tried to cross the creek, which was swollen by recent rains.

Then there are the place names with unusual-often wildly -derivations: Asey Hole, Bandana, Black Ankle, Calico Creek, Cat Square, Dixie, Easy Street, Enola, Haeo, Handy, Hanging Dog, Huggins Hell, Ivanhoe, Lawyers Spring, Naked Mountain, Observer, Oriental, Revolution, Rhodo, Shakerage, Tater Hill, Virgilina, Whynot.

Look a little further and you will find 12 Concords, 11 Gum Swamps, 10 Big Laurels, 9 Tarkilns, 8 Silvermines, 7 Frying Pans, 6 Vances, 5 Milksicks, 4 Whetstones, 3 Sengs (as in ginseng), 2 Kill Quicks, and 1-and only 1-Shit-Britches Creek. Add to that 149 Bears, 103 Beavers, 85 Chestnuts, 85 Horses, 68 Wolfs, 68 Grassys, 66 White Oaks, 51 Turkeys, 49 Saints, 46 Hogs, 38 Buffalos, 35 Little Creeks, 34 Forts, 30 Wildcats, 32 Rattlesnakes, 28 mentions of Sassafras, 22 Ravens, 14 Jumping Runs, and 13 Town Creeks.

We know all of this because of William S. Powell's work on *The North Carolina Gazetteer*. Published in 1968, the book set a new standard for guides to place names. It is the most consulted book in my office and in many offices and libraries. No other state has anything to approach it. Powell's *Gazetteer* is a classic, a work of use to historians, genealogists, librarians, journalists, creative writers, geographers, urban planners, armchair travelers, and anyone with an interest in the Old North State. In working on a revised edition, I did so with the knowledge that the book is a gem, and, aside from a new polish and a few new facets, it should remain largely intact. To my mind, the *Gazetteer* provides no greater service than to preserve the memory of places already gone or in danger of disappearing due to urban growth and development-what might be called suburban swallowups.

Indeed, the question may arise about the need for this type of reference book in the Digital Age of the twenty-first century, when information is a few keystrokes away via Google Earth, MapQuest, WorldCat, and other Internet marvels. Global Positioning System (GPS) units are now inexpensive and widely used. I would argue that these new technologies and databases make the *Gazetteer* all the more valuable. New technologies can locate with precision the places we live, work, and play, but technology alone cannot tell their stories. With its focus not just on locating but on describing the origins and naming of North Carolina's cities, towns, crossroads communities, waterways, peaks, and other places and physical features, the *Gazetteer* is as valuable today as it was when first published more than forty years ago. And given the state's rapid growth over the last decades, there are many new readers who can learn from and enjoy the information contained herein.

In 2007 Professor Powell and editors at the University of North Carolina Press asked me to take on the responsibility of producing this revised edition. With 19,638 entries in the original edition, I commenced my search for additional entries. In the end, I added about 1,200. The work would involve updates of existing entries and a close examination of the criteria to determine which new entries would be logical fits. Some of these were obvious. Jordan Lake, for example, did not exist when the original edition was published but undoubtedly belonged in the *Gazetteer*. Most readers would join me in recognizing that, for the most part, we stopped making a significant number of new place names a long time ago. Some modern names do not belong in the book. This would include residential subdivisions, the kinds of communities that spell harbor with a *u* and town with an *e*.

This matter of list making, of course, did not begin with Professor Powell. Map-makers have been at work describing, depicting, and inventorying the landscape since the days of John White and the Roanoke colonies. A substantial number of Tar Heel place names from Chicamacomico to Nantahala have Native American origins. Successive waves of settlers-the Moravians to name just one group-assigned names to places. The Revolutionary War generation left the greatest imprint on place names, having the distinction of selecting most county names. Arnold Guyot, the Harvard scientist who came south to survey the North Carolina mountains in the 1850s, kept such a list in his notebooks along with altitudes.

Today, Mount Guyot, named in his honor, stands in Haywood County and is duly recorded in the *Gazetteer*.

Professor Powell made wide use of maps in producing his original work. One that he did not consult is the 1901 *Historical Map and Gazetteer of North Carolina*, prepared by D. C. Mangum of Durham and issued by Rand McNally. It is the type of old wall map that once decorated classrooms, depots, and public buildings. For this project, the utility of the beautifully designed and richly detailed Mangum map derives from the year of its issue: 1901. The map was prepared during the heyday of small, unincorporated communities in North Carolina, after the rise of the railroads and the proliferation of post offices but, importantly, before the consolidation of post offices and the use of rural free delivery, which came about after 1915. Interested readers are invited to examine the Mangum map and other digitized maps at the North Carolina Maps project website (<http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/ncmaps/index.html>)⁽³⁾.

In his preface, Professor Powell explained why he elected not to include most post offices. In short, it was because in many cases these were not true communities but rather a store, a gristmill, or just someone's house. Still, there was inconsistency with respect to post offices. For Warren County and Caswell County, every post office is included in the original edition. Mangum's map helped separate the wheat from the chaff among the 6,900 post offices that have operated in North Carolina over the years. From the Mangum map, I could detail the section of the county where the community was located. If it was on a creek or a railroad, I could determine that. Of course, it was silent with respect to name derivation. But with a list of place names in hand from the Mangum map, I then could turn to the four-volume guide to post offices issued by the North Carolina Postal History Society in 1997 to record the years of operation.

Since 1968 other reference works have appeared that proved useful. The *Omni-Gazetteer of the United States*, a massive tome published in 1990, is among these. The *National Gazetteer of the United States* issued by the U.S. Geological Survey and updated regularly, is another. The former includes churches, water towers, dams, cemeteries, airports, schools, bridges, broadcast towers, and a host of sites not documented in Powell's book. The latter is authoritative. But these reference sources are, despite their inclusiveness, dry as dust compared to the *Gazetteer*. The stories attached to place names are at the core of Powell's book and the reason why it has stood the test of time.

In conducting an entry-by-entry examination of the old volume, I found that a few necessary changes were quickly apparent. In listings for counties and towns, for example, principal agricultural and industrial products were indicated. These include, for places both large and small, textiles, the industry so long associated with the state and one that was still relatively healthy in 1968. In many cases, I simply struck the word; in others, I changed the reference to the past tense. You cannot profile Kannapolis without noting the role of Cannon Mills and the production of towels. And, to bring the entry up to date, the town's new research campus, with its focus on nutrition, needs to be mentioned.

Other commodities are treated similarly. The updating of the agricultural and industrial production, surprisingly, was among the toughest nuts to crack. The N.C. Departments of Agriculture and Commerce keep detailed statistics, but their abstracts did not translate well to the county and town level. At any rate, I reviewed all such entries—everything from gravel to strawberries—but I know that some items must have slipped by. The presence of textile production, literally hanging by a thread in so many communities, likely will go misrepresented in some instances.

Streams and other waterways are treated fully in the original edition. I wish that I could have done more with landings and with plantation names. I am convinced that a book (or at least a scholarly article) could be written on the variations of Indian names such as Torhuntha and Ocracoke. Transliteration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not an easy or simple matter.

Occasionally, I would correct an entry. The *Gazetteer*, for example, indicates that the word "lynch" is taken from Lynch Creek, but most etymologists now agree that such is not the case. A number of terms of personal interest are also now included. These include Speculation Land, the story of Tench Coxe and the disposition of a half million acres in Henderson, Polk, and Rutherford Counties. The story of Joara, the Indian village in Burke County, upon which Juan Pardo's men built Fort San Juan, is another. I created entries for Back of Beyond, Backcountry, and Cackalacky, a popular nickname for Carolina with obscure roots. Dry Hill was a long-gone, one-room school and community in the area where I grew up in Henderson County.

The naming of a county can provide a lesson in North Carolina history. What is now Greene County was once part of Johnston, but in 1758 it became Dobbs County for royal governor Arthur Dobbs. In 1791 that name was "expunged from our map," as historian Kemp Battle phrased it, and a new county was named for Secretary of State James Glasgow. After Glasgow met an ignominious end involving land fraud, in 1799 the name was changed to Greene County to honor Nathanael Greene, the hero of Guilford Courthouse.

With details from the Mangum map and the post office guide, I was able to create about 600 new entries for the *Gazetteer*, about half of my total number of new additions. And these turned out to be some of the more fascinating place names. Moore County, for some reason, was particularly rich. There was a post office called Tempting, no doubt selected to lure the late nineteenth-century tourist trade. In 1882 in northwest Moore, there was a community with the unlikely name of Noise. The next year, just ten miles away, neighbors founded Quiet. Some post office names recall faraway places: Bombay, Klondike, Oswego, Bismarck, Shanghai, Moscow, Pomona, Berlin, Nebraska. One of those was Japan in Graham County, a community inundated by the waters of the lake behind Fontana Dam. Before it disappeared, locals during World War II began calling it MacArthur. Others paint their locality as a little piece of heaven on earth: Bliss, Breeze, Splendor, Sweet Home.

At the outset of my work, I prepared an appeal for assistance and distributed it by e-mail listservs and other means. Like

Professor Powell, I pinned my hopes largely on the community of local historians and librarians. I did not get a response from all 100 counties, but those who helped out did so with enthusiasm and respect for Powell's work. "Viva the *Gazetteer*," wrote one.

I wish to thank the dedicated researchers who responded to my call and, in some cases, shared details that they had amassed over many years working on their county: Carole Troxler and Lisa Kobrin (Alamance); Clarence Horton (Cabarrus); Victor Jones (Craven); Barbara Snowden (Currituck); David Stick and Naomi Rhodes (Dare); Jane McAllister and James Wall (Davie); Sonny Sikes (Duplin); Monika Fleming (Edgecombe); Leonard Dean (Granville); Helen Snow and Gwen Gosney Erickson (Guilford); Ronnie Faulkner (Harnett); Mary Lowder (Haywood); John Ward (Hertford); Jean Krause and Anne Swan (McDowell); Jack Thomas (Madison); Jane Johnson, Shelia Bumgarner, Linda Blackwelder, and James Williams (Mecklenburg); Sharon Faulkner (Montgomery); Mary and Charles Prevost (Moore); Bob Carter (Rockingham); Steve Shelton (Stokes); Ken Badgett (Surry); Marcy Thompson (Transylvania); Patrick Valentine (Wilson); and Andrew Mackie and Barbara Norman (Yadkin). James Wall, David Stick, and H. G. Jones were contributors to the original edition and I thank them for returning to the task. All were generous in sharing information.

Offering assistance of a more general nature were Robert Anthony, Tom Beaman, Matthew Brown, Robert Cain, Steve Case, Beth Hayden, Charles Heath, Joy Heitman, Josh Howard, H. G. Jones, Jay Lester, Vivian McDuffie, Cheryl McLean, Chris Meekins, Lynn Roundtree, Druscie Simpson, Jason Tomberlin, Pam Toms, Walter Turner, Ansley Wegner, and Ashley Yandle. Colleagues at the Office of Archives and History, at the State Library of North Carolina, and in the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill were always willing to lend a hand. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Professor Powell and his wife, Virginia. George Stevenson, assistant to Powell in the North Carolina Collection and key to development of the original book, pointed me toward valuable source material. Mark Simpson-Vos of UNC Press assisted with the loan of a laptop computer with the original text installed in Filemaker Pro. Jay Mazzocchi completed the time-consuming and tedious task of copyediting the manuscript. The foregoing deserve no responsibility for any errors which arise; such remain my doing alone. Readers who wish to share information or point out the need for a correction are invited to contact [Michael Hill](#) [4] at the N.C. Office of Archives and History, 4610 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4610.

My habit, as I worked on this project, was to highlight entries in the old edition with an exclamation point if a humorous or intriguing story was attached. My copy therefore is dotted with such marks. Two new ones came to me from my correspondents in Davie County: Bullhole, a site on the Yadkin River where an early settler fell through the crude bridge with his team of cattle; and Turkeyfoot, the convergence of several roads that, when viewed from the air, resembles a gobbler's appendage. I invite the reader to dip into the new edition for such revelations.

Preface: North Carolina Gazetteer (1st edition)

by William S. Powell
Chapel Hill, March 30, 1968.

The North Carolina Gazetteer is a geographical dictionary in which an attempt has been made to list all of the geographic features of the state in one alphabet. It is current, and it is historical as well. Many features and places that no longer exist are included; many towns and counties for which plans were made but which never materialized are also included. Some names appearing on old maps may have been imaginary, but many of them also appear in this gazetteer.

Each entry is located according to the county in which it is found. I have not felt obliged to keep entries uniform. The altitude of a place, the date of incorporation of a city or town, may appear in the beginning of one entry and at the end of another. Some entries may appear more complete than others. I have included whatever information I could find. If there is no comment on the origin or meaning of a name, it is because the information was not available. In some cases, however, resort to an unabridged dictionary may suggest the meaning of many names.

Names of former post offices have been included only when the name was more than a convenience for delivering mail. If a post office name was attached to a community, it probably will appear. In the days before rural free delivery, however, hundreds of post offices existed in private homes or in stores. When a postmaster died or retired, the post office would be moved to the home or the store of the new postmaster, and frequently this meant that it would be in another county. The post office name was nothing more than a means of distributing mail. Lists of post offices will be found in postal directories. I do not consider them of importance in a gazetteer.

How the *Gazetteer* developed

In 1951, when I was a member of the staff of the State Department of Archives and History, I read an interesting manuscript journal kept in the early eighteenth century by a British merchant who visited North Carolina seeking a suitable location for a retail store. He mentioned several people with whom he talked and a number of creeks and small communities. The journal was unsigned, the people it mentioned were obscure, and the place names are no longer shown on maps. I returned the journal to its proper box and gave up my hopes of editing it for publication.

A few months later a commercial airplane exploded over eastern North Carolina, and a small community whose name appeared on no maps of the state suddenly was in newspaper headlines throughout the United States. At about the same time, the name of a mountain in western North Carolina appeared in the state newspapers for some reason that I no longer remember; perhaps it was mentioned in a syndicated feature story on moonshiners. My attempts to locate the

mountain on maps or in books was fruitless.

As a member of the Archives staff and later at the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill, I realized how futile it was to search for the names of small communities, streams, and other geographical features in any logical manner. No national gazetteer lists them. Many maps, even county maps, do not name them.

It was to meet such needs as this that I began the compilation of *The North Carolina Gazetteer* some fifteen years ago. I cannot recall the circumstances of its beginning. For more than thirty years, I have maintained an organized card file of notes on subjects of historical and bibliographical interest to me, and at first I simply dropped possible gazetteer entries into this file. Somewhere along the way, the idea for a more serious use of these cards developed, and I began to think about how to proceed.

In response to a request from a patron directed to the North Carolina Collection for information concerning townships in the state, I compiled an alphabetical list of all townships. I do not think that such a list had been compiled previously. It was made from census reports in which townships are listed only by county. Entered on cards, this list soon became a part of the developing gazetteer file.

A request for information concerning the colonial parishes of eighteenth-century North Carolina led me to examine the laws creating counties and parishes. (The parish as a unit of local administration was abolished in 1776 with the adoption of the state constitution and the disestablishment of the Church of England.) A list of parishes was the result, and this also was soon incorporated into my file.

Piecemeal work would accomplish little and might even be wasted, so I decided to approach the problem of compiling a gazetteer county by county. With a manageable unit, I undertook to gain some experience and to work out some standards. I began with Iredell County, where I grew up, and with Johnston County, where I was born. My personal knowledge of the face of the land in these counties was helpful in attempting to work out a plan for writing descriptions from information shown on maps. I next undertook an unfamiliar county-Alamance, the first in the alphabet and also conveniently nearby so that I could easily visit with map and note card in hand for an on-the-scene comparison.

Since soil survey maps are available for nearly all of the counties and show a large amount of detailed information, they became the basic map with which I worked. Although rather uniform in the amount and type of information shown, their chief drawback is that they have appeared sporadically from the early twentieth century until 1967. I supplemented them with large county maps prepared by the State Highway Commission, and for the county whose soil survey map was quite old, the highway map was of great importance. These two maps were used in compiling the basic entries for each county. Supplementary entries were prepared from such diverse sources as the reports of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, county histories, geological surveys, lists of post offices, lists of streams compiled by the N.C. Department of Water Resources, entries in the North Carolina Guide, and other general printed works. Federal and state reports listing altitudes were combed for supplementary information. Inscriptions of historical markers along the highways of the state frequently provided additional facts. When I happened to be traveling in the state, I made notes for entries on named communities, streams, and other features as I encountered them.

During this period, the county remained the basic unit by which I worked. Cards containing entries for each county were filed in alphabetical order by county. In 1960 I sought out men and women who were authorities on local history and geography in each county and asked that each examine my file for the particular county. Many new entries resulted from their contributions, but many were also eliminated. The problem of the changing of county lines through the years, as well as the creation of new counties from old, meant that I had not always properly located geographic features. Many errors were corrected.

When the cards were returned to me from the counties, they were microfilmed in their original county arrangement for security purposes and to provide a means of checking them in this order at a later date if that became necessary. The cards for all of the counties were then filed in one alphabet. At this stage it became possible to combine entries for streams flowing through one or more counties and for mountains that cross county lines. Many duplications and errors were discovered and eliminated.

At this time, historical maps were examined and entries were made showing the earliest appearance of a name, changes in name that could be determined from maps, and the names of features that no longer appear on modern maps. Although the state is inadequately covered by U.S. Geological Survey and Army Map Service maps, they were also examined at this stage of the development of the *Gazetteer*. They were not a major source of information, however, because to take detailed information from those that were available would have produced an unbalanced coverage of the state. Nevertheless, the place names (streams and communities, for example) that seemed to be of Indian origin and suggested early settlement were included because of their particular interest to historians, folklorists, geologists, and botanists. These were included in the *Gazetteer* as they were discovered by chance while comparing soil survey and state highway maps with geological survey or army map-service maps. It is hoped that this arbitrary decision will not make use of the *Gazetteer* difficult.

Terms

Numerous generic terms form a part of the specific name of many geographic features in North Carolina. A few of them will be unfamiliar to some readers, but reference to a dictionary will provide definitions of most. Among these might be considered bald; butt or butte; cove (both in the mountains and along the bank of a stream or the ocean); face (generally

an exposed rock surface on a mountain); flat (often any level place in the mountains); hollow (in the sense of a valley or mountain cove); knob; lead (which may be unique to North Carolina and for which I have been unable to get an entirely satisfactory definition, although it seems to be a mountain term for a lesser mountain or spur "leading" off the larger mountain); pocosin (a swamp or boggy place that may also run or flow as a stream); run (generally an eastern term to be equated with creek or branch); spur; stamp (in the mountains, apparently a place devoid of trees); and top.

The term "brook" occurs only three times in the *Gazetteer*; creek and branch are the forms used for small streams. The term "village" apparently was used a few times before the Civil War, but in a very loose way, and it is not used today as applied to a municipality. All municipalities are incorporated either as cities or as towns, and I have attempted to use the proper term in the descriptions. Apparently the term "city" was first used in North Carolina in the laws of 1881. Unincorporated places dignified by a name are described simply as communities.

A number of general entries have been made that may be found useful. They include Coastal Plain, fall line, General Assembly (listing the places at which the legislature has met), geographic center, Mountain Region, Piedmont, thermal belt, and Welsh Tract, among numerous others.

Alphabetizing, Spelling, and Abbreviations

The *Gazetteer* is arranged in straight, letter-by-letter alphabetical order whether the name consists of one word or more. The generic term is considered in this arrangement to be part of the name, as in Collett Creek and Collett Ridge. Collinstown follows Collins Mountain because *t* follows *m*. The fact that Collinstown is one word and Collins Mountain two is not considered. In the case of duplicate names (Grassy Branch, for example), the arrangement under the name is alphabetical by county: Grassy Branch in Buncombe County will precede Grassy Branch in Cleveland County. If there were a community named Grassy Branch, it would follow all of the entries for branches of that name. The feature described by the generic name is listed before all other uses of the name: all mountains named Black Mountain are entered ahead of the town named Black Mountain.

An effort has been made to use the spelling preferred at or near the feature described. When obvious errors have been made in recent years by mapmakers in Raleigh, New York, or Chicago, I have followed the local usage, often with mention of the error. Sometimes historical precedent for a different form than that used on modern maps is so strong that I have commented on it.

A few abbreviations have been used: Alt.-altitude; approx.-approximate or approximately; Inc.-incorporated; n-north; s-south; e-east; w-west; ne-northeast; etc.

Maps

Throughout the *Gazetteer*, references will be found to early usage of names or locations of features on certain maps. Further information on these maps will be found in William P. Cumming, *The Southeast in Early Maps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962) or in standard bibliographies of American maps available in most libraries of the state. A number of the maps cited have been reproduced in facsimile by the State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.

The maps that I have most often cited are: White (1585), De Bry's engraving of White (1590), Velasco (1611), Smith (1624), Comberford (1657), Ogilby (1671), Hack (1684), Moll (1729), Moseley (1733), Collet (1770), Price (1808), and MacRae (1833). The *Gazetteer* may be found to be virtually an index to these maps. In addition, many other maps are cited in occasional entries.

Other Sources

The need for a reference book such as this has been recognized for many years. *The Peoples Press* (Salem) for March 7, 1856, and the *American Advocate* (Kinston) for September 11, 1856, contained an advertisement in which William D. Cooke of Raleigh sought information for a North Carolina gazetteer. He asked for lists of post offices by county with distance and direction of each from the "county town," the names of rivers and creeks with the direction in which they flowed, the names and locations of mills and factories, the schools and colleges with the number of teachers and pupils, and the churches and their denominations. There is no evidence that Cooke's interest in the subject ever produced a book.

North Carolina entries in national gazetteers have always been brief and limited. The first publication to do more than list the counties and the larger cities and rivers was *How They Began: The Story of North Carolina County, Town, and Other Place Names*, compiled by workers of the WPA Writers' Program and published in New York in 1941 under the sponsorship of the State Department of Conservation and Development. Long out of print, it contained only 73 pages and numerous errors.

A useful source for information on counties and county seats is D. L. Corbitt's *The Formation of the North Carolina Counties* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1950). Based on the laws of North Carolina and on the published *Colonial and State Records* ⁽⁵⁾, it contains detailed information on both the formation of the counties and the subsequent changes in their boundaries.

Corrections

In a work such as this, opportunities for error abound. I can only hope that I have avoided careless errors. Poor judgment may account for some, but in the face of conflicting evidence, I have often had to make arbitrary decisions. Many possible entries have been omitted simply because I was uncertain of the reliability of the information.

Authors:

Hill, Michael ^[6]

Powell, William S. ^[7]

From:

North Carolina Gazetteer, University of North Carolina Press. ^[8]

1 May 2009 | Hill, Michael; Powell, William S.

Source URL: <https://ncpedia.org/gazetteer/prefaces>

Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/gazetteer/prefaces> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/gazetteer> [3] <http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/ncmaps/index.html> [4] <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/contact.aspx> [5] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/hill-michael> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/powell-william-s-0> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/north-0>