

# North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society

## Winter, 2018

### Spring Tour 2018: April 6-7

## Diversity and Beauty in the Historic Port City of Wilmington

Did you know that from colonial days until 1910 Wilmington was the largest city in North Carolina? Although the area was not settled until 1732, the town soon developed trade by sea with the British Isles, the West Indies, and ports along the coast from New England to Georgia. The rivers brought naval stores, lumber, and other goods from inland, and imports traveled up the rivers to new settlers.

In 1700 the Church of England became the established church in North Carolina, and **St. James Parish** was formed in 1729. Its first building was finally completed in 1751 with the help of a special tax, and was the first church in Wilmington. Unfortunately it was taken over by Cornwallis in 1781 and used as a stable and riding school for Banastre Tarleton's dragoons. Its present sanctuary was completed in 1840. The churchyard was the town cemetery from the early years until 1850.

As we know, many thousands of Scottish and some Scotch-Irish settlers arrived in Wilmington both before and after the American Revolution, but most moved on up the Cape Fear and the Northeast Cape Fear rivers to settle inland. The earliest Presbyterian churches in the area were Grove and Rockfish in Duplin Co., Black River in Sampson, and Brown Marsh in Duplin, followed by Scottish churches in the upper Cape Fear region. However, there must have been a Presbyterian presence in the city, if not organized. Hugh McAden preached there in 1756 to a large congregation. Then in 1760 the Rev. James Tate came from the north of Ireland to establish a classical school in Wilmington. He taught there for eighteen years and made excursions into the countryside, preaching and baptizing children. Presumably he also preached occasionally in Wilmington. In 1785 the "Protestant Presbyterian Church of Wilmington" was incorporated by the General Assembly, but the **First Presbyterian Church** was not formally organized by the presbytery until 1817.

Unfortunately its first three church buildings were destroyed by fire – in about 1820, 1860, and 1925. In between the disasters, the church thrived. It



established local missions as Wilmington grew, and by 1992 there were eleven Presbyterian churches there. It also has a long history of support for missions in China. The present structure was completed in the Gothic style in 1928 and has beautiful stained glass windows.

Thousands of slaves also came by ship through the port of Wilmington. Most were purchased by plantation owners, but others were servants or laborers in the city. Free blacks from the West Indies worked there too. Like most antebellum churches, the Presbyterian Church had black members, and some of their descendants are members of Chestnut St. Presbyterian Church.

A number of German-Jewish emigrant families arrived in Wilmington in the 1840s and 1850s. They became successful merchants, and many fought for the Confederacy or invested in blockade running. In 1872 a congregation was organized, and by 1876 the present **Temple of Israel** was completed in the Moorish style. They have been very active in the life of the community.

We will begin our tour, however, in the magnificent **Thalian Hall**, completed in 1858 to house town government, the library, and a 1000-seat "opera house." As a port city, Wilmington was always more cosmopolitan than the rest of the state, and there had been early theatrical groups. But the new theater was in almost constant use for traveling shows, star attractions, and local events of all kinds, until the 1930s. Threatened with demolition, it was restored in the 1970s and expanded in the 1980s.

(continued on p. 6)



Thalian Hall, from [thalianhall.org](http://thalianhall.org)

## Board of Directors

John Goodman, President

Phone: 910-862-3730

Email: [presbypicker2@gmail.com](mailto:presbypicker2@gmail.com)

Dan and Flo Durway, Co-Secretaries

Phone: 919-846-5757

E-mail: [dandurway@bellsouth.net](mailto:dandurway@bellsouth.net),  
[flodurway@bellsouth.net](mailto:flodurway@bellsouth.net)

John Myhre, Treasurer and Past President

Phone: (919) 772-5514

E-mail: [johnmyhre@nc.rr.com](mailto:johnmyhre@nc.rr.com)

Steve McRae, Program Chair

Phone: (336) 693-1929

Email: [smcrae@stevemcraelaw.com](mailto:smcrae@stevemcraelaw.com)

Sarah Alexander, Membership Chair

Phone: (828) 698-9388

Email: [sitka@bellsouth.net](mailto:sitka@bellsouth.net)

Connie Hudson, Awards Chair

Phone: (919) 787-6638

Email: [ibchudson@webtv.com](mailto:ibchudson@webtv.com)

Sally MacLeod Owens, Historian

Phone: (919)-835-0920

Email: [sally.owens76@gmail.com](mailto:sally.owens76@gmail.com)

Sam Martin, Publicity Chair

Phone: (910) 428-4165

Email: [smartin8@embarqmail.com](mailto:smartin8@embarqmail.com)

Barbara T. Cain, Newsletter Editor

Phone: (919)-782-0944

E-mail: [btcain@nc.rr.com](mailto:btcain@nc.rr.com)

**Awards: If you know of a recently published church history or a completed church history project that you feel is worthy of consideration for an award, please send the book or a description of the project to Awards Chairman Mrs. Connie Hudson, 2305 Byrd St., Raleigh, NC 27608. Her other contact information is above. Awards are given in the spring for works published or completed in the previous year or in a recent year.**

## Meeting of the Board of Directors January 20, 2018

On the third Saturday in January, the board met at The Cypress, a retirement community in Raleigh, arranged for us by Dan and Flo Durway. President John Goodman opened the meeting with prayer. The appointed officers – historian, newsletter editor, and publicity chairman – were approved without change for another year.

The discussion then turned to the need to increase the number of active members in the society. It was agreed that we should reach out more to the presidents and historians of Presbyterian Women, to church groups for retirees, to retirement communities, and to churches celebrating significant anniversaries. We will also see if we can provide some transportation from an area such as Raleigh. Most effective, however, is simply asking someone to come along.

At the fall meeting it had been proposed to change the society's bylaws to allow officers to stay in office longer. This is because we have only a small pool of active members now. Sam Martin drew up suggestions for changes to the bylaws, and they were discussed by the board. The changes agreed to are printed here in the newsletter on page 4 and will be presented to the membership for a vote at the Spring Meeting.

Program Chair Steve McRae then brought to the board several suggestions for the Spring Tour, to be in eastern NC this year. These included Robeson Co. and perhaps Hoke or Scotland; Washington, NC; Raleigh; or Wilmington. Another suggestion was the area around Nutbush, Oxford, and Henderson. So many good choices! Finally the decision was made to visit Wilmington in April and Raleigh this fall. Wilmington has such interesting churches and should be beautiful this spring.

Sam Martin said that seven churches have significant anniversaries this year (see p. 5). We had no nominees this year for church history awards. Sarah Alexander reported that we have 65 individual memberships, 21 family memberships, and 32 life members – but a much smaller number come to our meetings. We are hoping to change that!

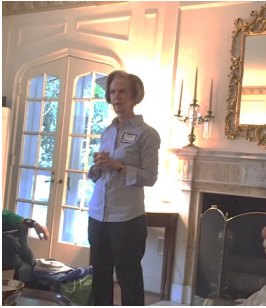
The meeting was adjourned with prayer.

# **Report on the Fall Meeting, Oct. 14, 2017**

## **First Presbyterian Church, Concord**

### **Cabarrus County**

Photos and text by Barbara Cain

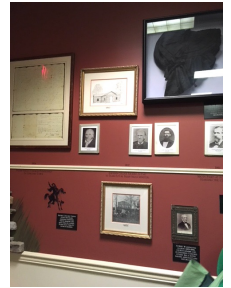


Concord is a beautiful small city!! Our society met there last fall at the First Presbyterian Church, which was organized in 1804, soon after the town was established as the county seat of Cabarrus County. Mrs. Peg Morrison was our wonderful hostess, who told us so much about the history of Concord, the church, and the community.

Our meeting began in the elegant Fellowship House next to the church, built in the 1920s as the home of one of J. W. Cannon's six sons. The house is quite beautiful with original furnishings, large windows, wrought iron throughout the house, and its own chapel. Weddings, receptions, and other meetings often take place here.



The lovely sanctuary was built in 1927, the fifth structure. In the education building, named for their sexton of 70 years, is a wall of historic pictures, text, and objects.



Peg Morrison led us on a brief walking tour to see and hear stories about some of the lovely old homes near the church. We then walked or rode a few blocks to the center of Concord, to the site of the earliest sanctuaries and the 200-year-old cemetery. After the church moved in 1874, the cemetery became neglected and overgrown. In 1930 Mrs. Sarah Phifer Williamson began to restore it as a Memorial Garden, and the work was continued by her son, who created a trust to maintain it. It is now a magnificent garden that complements the old grave markers, some of them beautifully carved. A lovely winding brick columbarium has been added at one side. It was beautiful in the fall, and is said to be spectacular in the spring with thousands of bulbs blooming.



Our meeting ended with lunch in the Fellowship House, and our annual business meeting (see p. 4).



### Annual Business Meeting, October 14, 2017

After lunch in the Fellowship House, the society's annual business meeting with the membership took place. John Goodman opened the meeting with prayer, and minutes of the meeting in April were distributed. Then President John Goodman recognized **the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Johnson C. Smith University** in Charlotte, and he presented the certificate of recognition to Kendall Mobley, professor of social ethics and history at JCSU. Begun in 1867 by the Presbyterian Church (USA), the institution was first known as Freedmen's College, then Biddle Institute, Biddle University, and in 1922, Johnson C. Smith University.

There followed reports from the treasurer, the membership chair, and the historian. Barbara Cain, chair of the nominating committee, reported that no nominees for office had been found, primarily because the organization has a shrinking pool of members from which to select new officers. Therefore, the current president, membership chair, and treasurer were asked to continue in office until the Spring 2018 meeting. They agreed, and the measure was approved.

There followed a discussion about changes that could be made to the by-laws, such as extending or abandoning the term limits for officers and having the treasurer be an appointed officer. It was moved that proposed changes to the by-laws be agreed by the Board of Directors and published in the next newsletter, to be voted on by membership at the Spring Meeting. The motion was seconded and approved on a voice vote. John Goodman announced that the next Board Meeting would be held on January 20, 2018. There being no further business, he then closed the meeting with prayer.

### RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO THE NCPHS BY-LAWS

In accordance with the discussion at the Fall Meeting (above), Sam Martin brought to the Board of Directors' meeting in January 2018 proposals for changes to the society's by-laws. These were discussed by the board, which directed that the following proposed changes be printed in the *Newsletter* and distributed to members before the Spring Meeting. A vote will be taken at that time.

#### "Article IV: Officers.

Officers shall be elected biennially at the fall meeting and shall take office immediately thereafter. They shall be elected for terms of two years and may be reelected for one additional term of office...." Change to:  
"additional terms of office....."

In the subsequent list of elected officers and their duties, the office of Treasurer would be moved from Article IV to Article V, *making the Treasurer an appointed official*.

#### "Article V: Appointed Officials.

The following officials shall be appointed [*annually*] by the Board of Directors to serve at the pleasure of the board; they shall be ex officio members of the board of directors." The word *annually* would be inserted.

In the subsequent list of appointed officers and their duties, the Treasurer would be included as an appointed officer. The Publicity Chair would also be added as an appointed officer, with the following wording:

**"Publicity Chair**, who shall prepare and distribute brochures and informational lists representing the Society, informational displays for regional or local interest groups, certificates of appreciation for churches and institutions hosting Society meetings, and certificates celebrating 100, 150, 200, and 250 (significant) anniversaries of churches."

### CHANGES TO POLICIES

The policies of the society are set by the Board of Directors and are published with the by-laws on our website ([www.ncphsociety.org](http://www.ncphsociety.org)). However, several changes made by the board in recent years had not shown up in the policies on-line. These include the increase in annual dues and life memberships, made several years ago; giving the Program Chairman the authority to set the registration fees for meetings; and straightening out which officers are to be elected in even years and which in odd years. These changes have now been made on the website.

## Significant Presbyterian Anniversaries in 2018

This year our program chairman, Mr. Sam Martin, will be delivering certificates of recognition and congratulation from the North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society to each of the following:

<u>Presbytery of Charlotte</u>	
Matthews Murkland Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC	150 years
<u>Presbytery of Coastal Carolina</u>	
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church, Pollocksville, NC	150 years
Salem Presbyterian Church, Sanford, NC	150 years
<u>Presbytery of New Hope</u>	
None	
<u>Salem Presbytery</u>	
Mebane Presbyterian Church, Mebane, NC	150 years
Springwood Presbyterian Church, Burlington, NC	150 years
<u>Presbytery of Western North Carolina</u>	
Crossnore Presbyterian Church, Crossnore, NC	100 years
Brittain Presbyterian Church, Rutherfordton, NC	250 years

Congratulations to all of these congregations! We hope you will let us know how you are celebrating your anniversary; send us a copy of any published history; and describe for us any historical project completed as part of your celebration. We'd like to share this information and recognize your good work.

## Anniversary Celebrations

Our special congratulations go to **Brittain Presbyterian Church**, celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary! Organized in 1768, Brittain is reputed to be the oldest church of any denomination west of the Catawba River. Its founding members were among the Scotch-Irish who had come down the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania and Virginia. It had twenty charter members and three elders, and the Rev. Daniel Thatcher served as its minister. Their present church building was built in 1852 and brick-veneered in 1940. Located on Hwy 64 in Rutherfordton, the church has a very large cemetery, in which are buried soldiers from a number of wars, including several casualties from the Battle of Kings Mountain. Others who lie there were important in the history of Rutherford County. Their homecoming the first Sunday in August.



The **Murkland Presbyterian Church** in Charlotte was formed primarily by former slaves who had attended or been members of Providence Presbyterian. The date of its organization was not recorded, but it was soon after the end of the Civil War. In 1876 **Matthews Chapel Presbyterian Church** was organized for the convenience of Murkland's members who lived in Matthews. The two congregations were reunited in 1969 to form **Matthews Murkland Presbyterian Church**. The church was a member of Catawba Presbytery of the UPUSA (Northern) denomination until Charlotte Presbytery was formed in 1990 after reunion. A terrible fire destroyed their original building in 1996, but their new building survived.

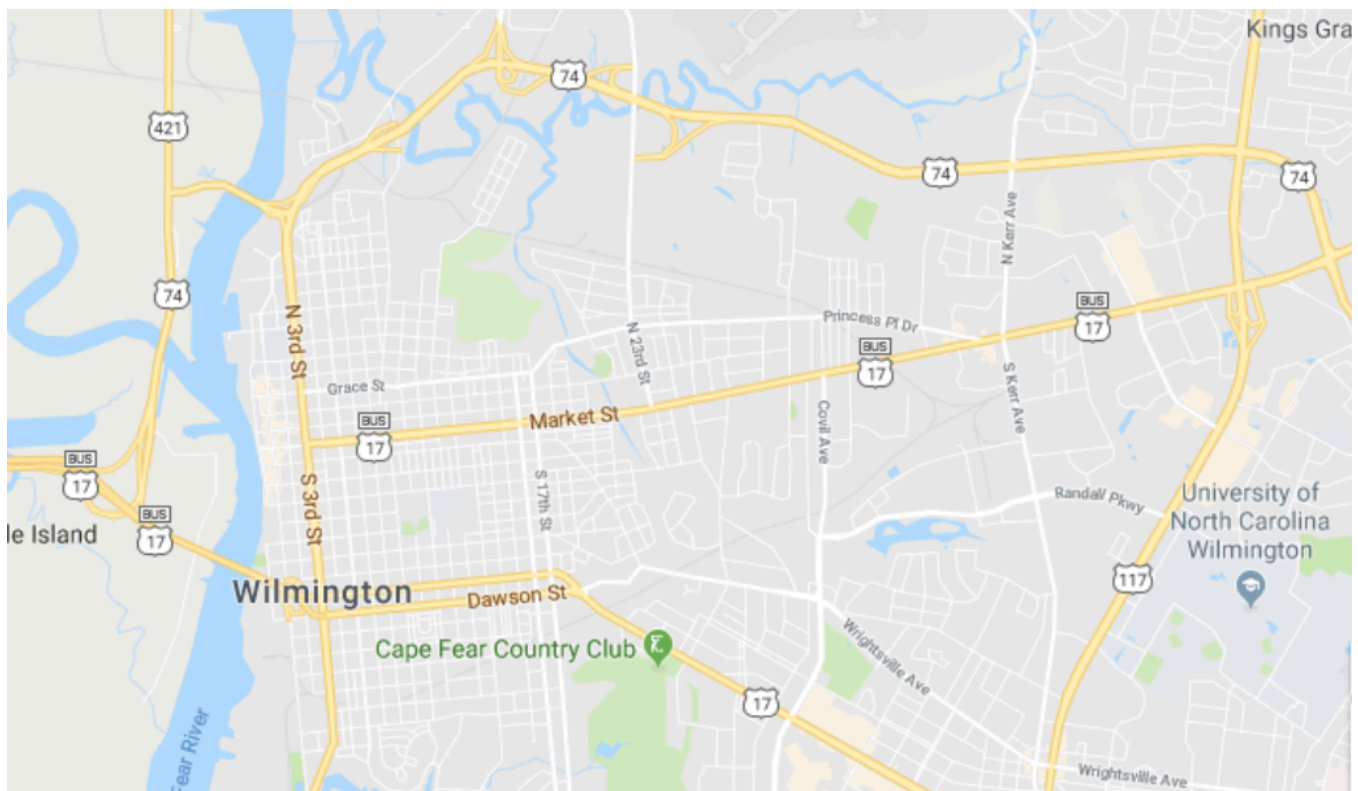
ALL ARE INVITED by **St. Pauls Presbyterian Church** to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Gathering at the monument to Duncan McNair, an immigrant from Scotland and the first elder of the church. His monument is in Rennert, just east of town. On **Saturday, April 28**, registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. and events begin at 2:00. There will be bagpiping and highland dancing, and Native American drumming and dancing from members of the Lumbee nation. There will also be several informational talks, and greetings from officials. Refreshments will be served. For more information, contact Thomas Hall at 910-323-2844 or at [TJHALL@gwnsecurities.com](mailto:TJHALL@gwnsecurities.com).

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The most spectacular of the antebellum homes in Wilmington is the **Bellamy Mansion**, now maintained as a museum. The colonnaded house, built 1859-1860, has twenty-two rooms, with a carriage house and slave quarters behind. Dr. John and Eliza Bellamy lived there with their nine children and nine household slaves. The last surviving child lived there until 1946, when the house was already in disrepair, and three of the grandchildren eventually created a foundation to care for it. A fire did considerable damage in 1972, but Preservation North Carolina has painstakingly restored it to its antebellum splendor.

Finally, **Airlie Gardens** is the place to be during azalea time! Although not officially on the tour, we hope you can arrive early on Friday or leave later on Saturday afternoon to give yourself time to enjoy strolling along the paths or taking the trolley through the gardens. The African-American folk artist Minnie Evans was the gatekeeper there for many years, and there is a sculpture garden near the gate in her memory. Also within the gardens is **Mt. Lebanon Chapel**, built in 1835 for members of St. James Parish who lived near the sounds. The gardens are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (last entry 4:30). Tickets are \$9 and may be purchased online ahead of time.



Directions: Registration will be at **Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St.** Actually, the building faces North Third St., but the entrance to parking is on Chestnut St.

--Coming from I-40, turn right onto the MLK, Jr., Parkway (Hwy. 74) across the northern part of the city. This becomes N. 3<sup>rd</sup> St.

--From west of the river, cross the bridge and turn left onto South 3<sup>rd</sup> St.

--To Airlie, take Hwy 74 East, which becomes Eastwood, going toward Wrightsville Beach. Turn right on the Military Cutoff Road to Airlie.



## North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society 2018 Spring Tour, Wilmington

### Friday, April 6

- 12:00 – 2:00 Registration and social time, Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington 28401.  
Tour of Thalian Hall – Tony Rivenbark
- 2:30 – 4:00 History and tour of the Temple of Israel, 1 South Fourth St., Wilmington 28401.
- 4:30 Check in at Comfort Suites, 4721 Market St., Wilmington.
- 5:30 – 6:30 Supper at The Basics, 319 Front St., Wilmington (beside the Cotton Exchange).
- 6:30 – 7:00 General Business Meeting, to vote on by-laws and officers.
- 7:30 Meeting of the Executive Board at Comfort Inn.

### Saturday, April 7

- 7:00 – 9:00 Breakfast and check out
- 8:30 – 9:20 Optional walk from First Presbyterian parking lot down to the riverfront.
- 9:30 – 10:45 History and tour of First Presbyterian Church, 125 S. Third St., Wilmington  
Dr. Walter Conser, Professor of History, UNC-W
- 11:00 – 12:15 Tour of the Bellamy Mansion Museum, 503 Market St., Wilmington
- 12:30 – 1:30 History and tour of St. James Episcopal Church, 25 S. Third St., Wilmington
- 1:30 – 2:30 Lunch

Those wishing to visit Airlie Gardens should plan to go either Friday morning, 10:00-11:30, or Saturday afternoon from 2:30-4:00. Airlie Gardens, 300 Airlie Road, Wilmington 28403 (see p. 6).

Our recommended motel is Comfort Suites, 4721 Market St. **Please call the motel directly for reservations at (910) 793-9300 or 877-424-6423 and ask for the group discount rate** for the North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society, which should be \$82. Motel has free wi-fi and breakfast.

Registration fee is \$20. Please send form below and check (payable to NCPHS) by March 30 to NCPHS, P.O. Box 20804, Raleigh, NC 27619-0804. If you have questions, please contact our Program Chairman Steve McRae, (336) 693-1929, [smcrae@stevemcraelaw.com](mailto:smcrae@stevemcraelaw.com).

### **Registration, Spring Tour, April 6-7, 2018**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Registrations: \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$20.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Dues if included (Individual \$15; Family \$20; Individual Life Membership, \$125): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Please send this form **by March 30** with a check (payable to NCPHS) to NCPHS, P.O. Box 20804, Raleigh, NC 27619-0804.

**If you can do so, please put the following announcement in your church bulletin or newsletter:**

**The North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society** will be in the beautiful city of **Wilmington** for its **Spring Tour of Historic Churches** on Friday and Saturday, April 6-7. Registration is \$20. The schedule, registration form, and address will be on our website at [www.ncphsociety.org](http://www.ncphsociety.org) after March 15, or contact Program Chair Steve McRae at (336) 693-1929. If you would like transportation from Raleigh, please contact Barbara Cain, [btcain@nc.rr.com](mailto:btcain@nc.rr.com), 919-782-0944.

\*\*\*\* If you haven't paid your 2018 dues yet, please send them with the registration form. Individual \$15  
Family \$20; Individual Life Membership, \$125. \*\*\*\*

North Carolina Presbyterian Historical Society  
P.O. Box 20804  
Raleigh, NC 27619-0804

**Wilmington—Spring Tour, April 6-7, 2018**  
See registration form on p. 7.