



Burke County, North Carolina, Research

by Terry Moore, CG

A few weeks ago I received a text from my son, Alex, with a picture of my two-year-old grandson, Cliff, sitting on a tractor and pointing toward the field of his Grandpa McCall's Burke County farm. He looked so happy and in awe of the land he was seeing on that calm and peaceful day. But it hasn't always been so peaceful in Burke County, North Carolina. An unfortunate aftermath of the Civil War in the South was burned courthouses and the resulting loss of records. Although the Burke County courthouse was not burned, many court records and most land records were destroyed by federal troops.

Burke County was created in April 1777 from Rowan County. The following records have survived.

Original Burke County records at the North Carolina State Archives before 1850:

- Wills, 1790-1905, 1 box (Original images are on FamilySearch.org under Records, "North Carolina, Probate Records, 1735-1970.")
- Record of estates, 1832-1868
- Loose estates records begin in 1776 (Original images are on FamilySearch.org under Records, "North Carolina, Estate Files, 1663-1979.")
- Guardian records begin in 1785
- Divorce records, 1828-1911
- Deeds of sale, 1805-1928, 1 box (Very few early deeds.)
- Miscellaneous deeds begin in 1772, 1 box (Very few early deeds.)
- Ejectments, 1784-1868
- Land Entry book, 1 volume, 1833-1871
- Land entries, 1770-1909
- Tax records begin in 1792
- Road records begin in 1787
- Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, October 1791–January 1849
- Execution docket, 1837-1855

- Trial and Appearance Docket for the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, 1792-1806, 1814-1819, 1822-1825, 1825-1857
- Superior Court Docket for 1788
- Superior Court Minute Docket, 1830-1833, 1842-1857
- Superior Court Execution Docket, 1824-1852
- State Docket, 1830-1851
- Trial, Appearance, and Reference Docket Superior Court, 1830-1850
- Civil Action papers begin in 1755 (Original images are on FamilySearch.org under Records, "North Carolina, Civil Action Court Papers 1712-1970.")
- Civil Action papers concerning land begin in 1779 (Original images are on FamilySearch.org under Records, "North Carolina, Civil Action Court Papers, 1712-1970.")
- Criminal Action papers begin in 1779
- Miscellaneous records begin 1776, 4 boxes
- Miscellaneous records in the CRX series begin in 1777 and there are records with no date. (The CRX collection indicates records that were out of official hands for some period of time.)
- Apprentice bonds and records, 1784-1873
- Bastardy bonds and records, 1777-1899
- Officials bonds and records, 1778-1949
- Constable bonds and records, 1782, 1875, 1892
- Justices and lists of Militia officers, 1800-1810
- The State Census for Burke County, 1787

After the Civil War, residents of Burke County were asked to re-register their deeds, so early deeds might be found in the post-1865 deed indexes and books. The Burke County Register of Deeds website appears to only have deeds online beginning in 1986.

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Published abstracts for Burke County

Edith Warren Huggins, *Burke County, North Carolina, Land Records and More Important Miscellaneous Records, 1751-1809*, Volume 3 (No place: No publisher, 1987). Other volumes in this series: Volume 1, 1778; Volume 2, 1777-1800; and Volume 4, 1755-1821.

Miles S. Philbeck and Grace Turner, *Burke County, North Carolina, Surviving Will and Probate Abstracts, 1777-1910* (Wilson, NC: By the authors, 1983).

Burke County Genealogical Society, *Deed Book A, Burke County, North Carolina* (Morganton, NC: Burke County Genealogical Society, 1992).

Kathy Gunter Sullivan, CG, *Burke County, NC, Deeds Registered, 1804-1813* (Charlotte, NC: By the author, 1995).

Online resources

Familysearch.org has images of wills and estate records. See the “Guide to Locating Probate and Other Records on FamilySearch” on the NCGS for directions on how to access the records section of FamilySearch. (To view the guide, go to the NCGS website at <http://www.ncgenealogy.org>, click on **Resources** in the menu bar across the top of the page, then select “Tools of the Trade Articles.” The link to the guide is near the top of the page.)

Burke County has a page on the **FamilySearch Wiki** with links to Burke County records including newspapers, cemetery records, and more. Go to FamilySearch.org, click on **Search**, click on **Wiki**, then type “Burke County, North Carolina” in the search field.

Ancestry.com. Although I did not see anything specific for Burke County in the card catalog, there were many, many titles for North Carolina, some of which will have information relevant to Burke County residents. Go to Ancestry, click on **Search**, then **Card Catalog**. In the title field type “North Carolina” and many titles will appear. Do another

search and type “North Carolina” in the keyword field and more titles will come up.

Linkpendium has many online connections to Burke County historic information at <http://www.linkpendium.com/burke-nc-genealogy/>.

The **Burke County Genealogical Society** has published *The Burke Journal* quarterly since 1983. An alphabetical list of the names of articles by author is given on their USGenWeb page, <http://www.ncgenweb.us/burke/media/BCGSJ-ToC-1983-2014.pdf>. Many of the surviving court records, deeds, tax records, etc., have been abstracted and published in the journal. A list of each journal’s table of contents has been posted on the Burke County USGenWeb page at <http://www.ncgenweb.us/burke>. The society’s web page is also hosted by USGenWeb.com.

Burke County abstracts in the NCGS Journal

Ransom McBride “Some Early Burke County, NC Marriage Licenses, 1794-1808” *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal*, Volume VIII, no. 4 (November 1982): 206.

William Doub Bennett, “Early Settlement on the Catawba” *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal* Volume VIII, no. 3 (August 1982): 130-134.

William Doub Bennett, “Josiah Brandon’s Burke County, NC 1777-1800” *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal*, Volume VII, no. 1 (February 1981): 2-11.

“Extant Tax Records (Delinquents), Burke County, N.C. 1782-1785” *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal*, Volume VII, no. 1 (February 1981): 185.

Pittman, Betsy Dodd. “Burke County Bypasses,” *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal*, Volume 15, no. 2 (May 1989): 68-72.

Betsy Pittman wrote an excellent article about the records of Burke County before 1865. She

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included a book list of abstracts of the records and emphasized using the Burke County land grant records, which were state records and were not burned, and land records of the counties formed from Burke County. Often, when land was passed from one family member to another for several generations, the deeds were not registered. When the land was finally sold out of the family, the land would be in a new county, and registered there, often giving the names of previous owners (family members).

The above articles have Burke County in the title but there are many other articles that have Burke County residents included in other journal abstracts, just search the **NCGS Journal Index** under Burke County and all should come up. The index can be found on the NCGS website by clicking on **Publications** in the menu bar across the top of the page, then selecting NCGS Journal > NCGS Journal Index. About a third of the way down the page, select “NCGS Journal Index – Geographical Places” to begin your search for Burke County. (Please note, this index continues to be updated.)

Always remember the following tips when searching in a North Carolina county with record losses:

- Search records of the surrounding counties.
- Search the state and federal records.
- Search district court records.
- Search private records.

At his tender young age, my grandson, Cliff, is oblivious to his Burke County ancestors, but one day he might be interested in researching their lives. Until then, he can just have fun riding the tractor on their lands.