

A Brief History of the North Carolina Society

The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in The State of North Carolina has a long and proud history in pursuit of its threefold mission: historic preservation, education, and patriotic service. Formed in 1894, the NSCDA-NC was the last colonial state to join The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, which had been founded only three years earlier in 1891. Today, with a membership of more than 1,700 Dames, the North Carolina Society is the largest of the 44 Corporate Societies and owns four historic properties: [Burgwin-Wright House and Gardens](#)

(the state society headquarters in Wilmington), the

[Joel Lane House](#)

and

[Haywood Hall](#)

in Raleigh, and The Fourth House in Old Salem.



Mrs. Florence Hill Kidder, founder of the NSCDA-NC **The beginning**

The story of the North Carolina Society begins with Mrs. Florence Hill Kidder. In 1892, Mrs. Kidder worked

In grateful remembrance: monuments, markers and plaques



At its second annual meeting in 1896, the Society committed to establishing a monument in honor of the patriot Cornelius Harnett. The ladies organized a kirmess to raise funds for this purpose. In 1906, after ten years of steady effort, the cornerstone of the monument was installed at the corner of Market and Fourth Streets in Wilmington. The Dames unveiled the completed monument, which includes a stone obelisk atop a pedestal engraved on four sides. This was the first achievement of the North Carolina Dames in their ambitious program of remembering the service of their colonial patriots.

At the 1908 Biennial Meeting, the National Society mandated that each State Society compile a statement describing any localities of historic significance that remained unmarked in their state. To accomplish this for North Carolina, the Society's President, Mrs. James Sprunt, the former Luola Murchison, enlisted the assistance of the most prominent historians in the state, who identified seventy-seven such places. During the early decades of the 20th century, the establishment of monuments, markers and plaques at historic sites across the state was a major preoccupation of the NC Dames. [See Monuments, Markers and Plaques for more information.](#)

Expansion of the Society

During her six-year tenure as President of the Society (1900-1906), Mrs. Gaston Meares, née Catherine deRosset, spearheaded the formation of out-of-town committees, enabling Dames in other parts of the state to participate in the Society's good works. Mrs. Meares is recognized as the Founder of the County Committees, 22 of which exist today. Dames from other North Carolina cities began to send delegates to meetings in Wilmington, often spending the night as guests in the homes of local Dames, thus strengthening ties among members across the state. Monthly minutes from the meetings were sent to County Committees to keep their members abreast of activities in Wilmington and elsewhere in the state.

Today, the County Committees hold regular meetings for their local memberships, often featuring programs by guest speakers. The County Committees not only support the state Society's initiatives, but they also pursue independent projects that fulfill the Society's mission.

Patriotic service

The NC Dames' commitment to patriotic service peaked during times of war. The 1898 Spanish American War provided their first call to action. NC Dames responded by raising money to furnish the ambulance ship "Solace".

War relief work took precedence over all other activities in 1915. Members of the Society made dressings and bandages to be shipped overseas. Soon after America declared war in 1917, the Board of Managers decided to organize a chapter of the National Special Aid Society in Wilmington. Seventeen Dames became charter members of the chapter, the main purpose of

which was to provide classes in first aid, telegraphy, signaling, gardening, canning, and the operation and repair of automobiles. In short order, 100 women signed up for these classes.

To determine the actual extent of woman-power in Wilmington, Miss Jean Dalziel Wood, Vice-Chairman of the chapter, developed a civic register by personally recruiting an individual in each residential city block to act as Block Messenger. The Messenger's duty was to enroll the names of the women in her territory, who were willing to perform some special service, such as cooking, sewing or nursing in the case of an emergency. In the course of the year 1,700 women enrolled.

During the Great War, the NC Dames also formed a Liberty Bond Committee, which succeeded in selling bonds to 24 members of the Society. The Comforts Committee in tandem with the Knitted Garments Committee of the National Special Aid Chapter, supplied the U.S.S. North Carolina with 200 sets of garments, such as sweaters and socks. The Committees sent similar packages to the Pelham Bay Training Station, the Naval Reserve Patrol on the Cape Fear River, and to Madame Helena Paderewska for Polish Volunteers. NC Dames also contributed liberally to the Hospital Ship Fund, the French Relief Fund and the National Red Cross.

The NC Dames' home-front support of World War II was equally zealous with members from every County Committee contributing time and money to various efforts. The Society invested its savings in war bonds. In addition, NSCDA-NC members welcomed soldiers into their homes and chaperoned dances and suppers.

During the summer of 1943, the U.S. Coast Guard set up camp at the Society's headquarters house. The men slept inside, and constructed other conveniences in the yard, operating their mess hall and kitchen from a tent. From 1944 to 1945, the house served as a recreational center for commissioned officers of the Armed Forces.

Historic preservation, a timeline



Joel Lane House, Raleigh



Fourth House, Old Salem

History

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Burgwin-Wright House, Wilmington

In 1927, the Wake County Committee of the NSCDA-NC initiated the Society's first foray

In 1936, the Forsyth Committee purchased the circa 1768 Fourth House in the village of

In 1937, the Society purchased the circa 1770-71 Burgwin-Wright House in Wilmington

In 1977, Haywood Hall became the property of the NSCDA-NC upon the death of Mary L

In 1986, the Mecklenburg County Committee began to raise funds for the restoration of

In the early 1990s, the Cumberland County Committee began raising funds to restore the circa 183

For more information about the NSCDA-NC's role in historic preservation,

[visit the NSCDA-NC's](#)



Haywood Hall, Raleigh

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□ **Rosedale Plantation, Charleston, Fayetteville**

Education

The North Carolina Society had long desired to make a memorial to its founder and first president, Mrs. Florence Hill Kidder. Wishing for the memorial to be a helpful agency, the Board of Managers decided to provide loans for deserving young women who could not finance their education. Mrs. Edmond L. Prince offered the motion which was acted upon. It was as follows:

"Whereas, The North Carolina Society of the Colonial Dames of America desires to promote by their efforts all real progress in North Carolina and, Whereas, The education of young women is one of the most important fundamental factors in all future progress and Whereas, The North Carolina College for Women is doing splendid work in preparing young women for future usefulness, which work every citizen should desire to promote, therefore be it Resolved - That the North Carolina Society of Colonial Dames of America do establish at the North Carolina College for Women, located at Greensboro, a Loan Fund to be used for the purpose of helping worthy North Carolina girls to equip themselves for useful womanhood, said Loan Fund to be increased annually by a donation by said Colonial Dames and furthermore Resolved - That said Loan Fund shall be known as the Florence Kidder Loan Fund, as a memorial to the beloved founder of the North Carolina Society of the Colonial Dames of America."

Mrs. Edmond L. Prince was appointed Chairman of the Florence Kidder Loan Fund committee with an initial sum of \$520.00, contributed by the Board of Managers, Mrs. Kidder's children, the Buncombe County Committee and Mrs. E.L Prince. During nine years of service as Chairman, Mrs. Prince had the pleasure of aiding eleven girls through this fund, which by 1932 had grown to \$3,087.71.

In 1955, the Florence Kidder Loan Fund was changed to the Florence Kidder Memorial Scholarship. Instead of lending money to students, the Society established two scholarships. Eligibility for the scholarships is no longer restricted to women. [See Florence Kidder Memorial Scholarship.](#)

The Scrapbook

To learn more about the history of the NSCDA-NC, [visit the Scrapbook.](#) New information about past activities and accomplishments of the NC Dames will be posted on a weekly basis.

Past Presidents

[View a complete list of the past presidents of the NC Society.](#)