The Sheriffs
of Columbus County

Christopher L. Batten
2002 – 2014

Archibald McCallum
1979 – Dec. 1882

Two died in office

The county was without a sheriff for a week in 1882 after Archibald McCallum died in office in late December. Van Valentine Richardson was appointed by the county commissioners to succeed McCallum.

John Coleman, elected in 1974, died while sheriff on Oct. 3, 1977. He was succeeded by Clayton "Son" Norton, appointed two days later and sworn in immediately.

John W. Hall
Dec. 1928 – Dec. 1936

Longest terms

Joshua Williamson, the county's first sheriff, served for 35 years, until he was forced to resign after moving to Florida and taking the tax collection records with him.

Lewis Williamson, Joshua's son, served 16 years, from 1846 to 1862. He left office when his bond was refused for an unrecorded reason.

The longest term of a sheriff elected by popular vote was that of Ben A. Duke, who served four full terms for a total of 16 years, and lost a bid in 1974 for a fifth term.

Herman D. Stanley served 14 years, followed by recent Sheriff Chris Batten's 11 years.

Research and Stories
by BOB HIGH
Staff Writer

1809-1846 – Joshua Williamson (removed from office for failure to pay collected taxes). In 1846 Williamson took tax books and went to Florida. Collection of what he owed in tax collections finally settled about 1850. Williamson was elected annually by ruling Justices of the Peace.

Aug. 1846-1862 – Lewis Williamson (Joshua's son) elected annually until his bond refused on Aug. 7, 1862, and ruling Justices of Peace appointed John W. Gore.

Aug. 1862-1864 – John W. Gore

Aug. 1864-July 1865 Van Valentine Richardson

July 1865 – John William Gore, elected by 10-7 over Van Valentine Richardson in vote of Justices of Peace when county government reorganized. (Gore was first man to become sheriff a second time)

Nov. 1865-1873 – Van Valentine Richardson, first sheriff elected by county citizens. (Second man to become sheriff second time)

1873-1875 – William Quincy Maultsby – Closest race for sheriff in county history. Won by 2 votes – Maultsby had 718 votes in 1872 to 716 for John C. Powell and 257 for Burrell Smith. In 1875 Maultsby relieved of tax collecting duties for failure to pay in amount collected – Meeting with commissioners resolved amount to be paid, without penalty.

1875 – 1879 – Kenneth Haynes defeated first black candidate J.W. Spaulding 1,332 to 711. W.Q. Maultsby, the incumbent, drew just 48 votes. (Haynes removed as tax collector for failure to pay collected taxes; Neill McPhaul, future sheriff, appointed tax collector summer 1875, and D.P. High appointed Aug. 7, 1878. Haynes finished term as sheriff)

1879 – 1882 – Archibald McCallum (died in office after being re-elected for second term in 1882 – Died between Dec. 1882 and Jan. 1,1883, because Van Valentine Richardson appointed by commissioners Jan. 1, 1883 to fill vacant office. (Tombstone for McCallum says death was June 12, 1889; however entry in Commissioner Minutes from Feb. 5, 1883 meeting shows Neill Phaul, administrator of McCallum's estate and sheriff himself in 1887, appeared before the board and presented bills to be paid by the county to McCallum's estate).

Jan. 1, 1883-Dec. 24, 1885 – Van Valentine Richardson (third time). Richardson resigned Dec. 24, 1885 to become Federal Marshal (Oct. 1886 – County commissioners rented office to Richardson in courthouse for marshal duties)

Jan. 4, 1886-1887 – Albert Fentress Toon, Richardson's brother-in-law, appointed to fill unexpired term

1887-1895 – Neill McPhaul

1895-1899 – Matthew J. Ward

1899-1907 – John G. Butler

1907-1913 – Alfred Smith "A.S." Richardson (son of Van Valentine Richardson), paid $125 a month

Tax problems

At least four sheriffs had problems with paying the county the amount of taxes they collected as the county's official tax collector.

Joshua Williamson, the county's first sheriff, moved to Florida in 1846 and took the tax books with him. The collection by the county for the amount he owed was settled about 1850.

The next sheriff with such problems was William Quincy Maultsby in 1875, the last year of his two-year term. A meeting with county commissioners resolved the problem, and there's no report of the amount in question.

Kenneth Haynes, elected in 1875, over the first black candidate, J.W. Spaulding when Maultsby drew just 48 votes, also had his tax problems.

Neill McPhaul, who was to become sheriff in 1887, was appointed by the commissioners to be the tax collector for three years, and then D.P. High was appointed in 1878, toward the end of McPhaul's second term.

The last sheriff with tax problems was Clyde M. Gore who was the victim of a bank failure near Christmas 1925. Gore's account with the Bank of Columbus amounted to $17,576.48.

There's no record of how much the county managed to recover when the bank's financial problems were finally resolved.

Sheriff Clyde M. Gore, who was also tax collector as all prior sheriffs, was held liable for $17,576.48 in his account "Clyde M. Gore, Sheriff" in the Bank of Columbus when bank failed in December 1925. County commissioners appointed Clyde's brother, Lennox, as tax collector until courts cleared the problem.

in 1909

1913-1916 – John Thomas Best (appointed county's first Tax Collector in Jan. 1909 – "experiment" lasted until October 1912 when county commissioners' tax books delivered to sheriff). 1915 records show salary at $200 a month (died at age 75 in Beaumont, Texas, on March 26, 1951, buried Oakdale Cemetery, Wilmington)

1916-1924 – John O'Neal Ammons

1924-1926 – Clyde M. Gore defeated Ammons in runoff (see footnote)

1926-1928 – John O'Neal Ammons (third person to become sheriff second time)

1928-1936 – John W. Hall (defeated Ammons in runoff in 1928)

1936-1950 – Herman D. Stanley. Stanley was elected to two-year term in 1936, and was first sheriff elected to a four-year term in 1938, winning easily in a three-man race. He was re-elected to two more four-year terms and served 14 years. Interestingly, Stanley won runoff with Chester A. Farley on July 4, 1936 by more than 500 votes. In the 1936 Democrat primary, Farley was first with 1,763 votes, followed by Stanley with 1,625 votes, and two former sheriffs – John O. Ammons 1,552 and Clyde W. Gore 1,320.

1950-1954 – H. Hugh Nance

1954-1958 – John R. Pridgen

1958-1974 – Ben A. Duke

Dec. 2, 1974-Oct. 3, 1977 – John Coleman, defeated Ben Duke in 11-man race.

Oct. 5, 1977-1982 – Clayton "Son" Norton, native of Scotland County. Norton won commissioners' vote, 4-1, after nearly three hours of trying to decide between Norton, a member of the rival County Police force, and Sheriff's Deputy Stuart Sasser. Norton was named at 8:15 p.m., and was sworn in at 8:20 p.m. in front of commissioners by District Court Judge Wilton Hunt.

Dec. 1982–April 28, 1988 – William "Bill" Rhodes. Rhodes resigned because of improper conduct, including notifying Whiteville and Riegelwood Country Clubs liquor raid was to take place.

April 28, 1988-Dec. 4, 1989 – Coroner Henry S. Rowan appointed by county commissioners. Rowan resigned, commissioners appointed Harold L. Rains.

Dec. 4, 1989-Dec. 5, 1994 – Harold L. Rains, American Indian and first minority race sheriff.

Dec. 5, 1994-Dec. 2, 2002 – Jimmy L. Ferguson (won runoff from Rains)

Dec. 2, 2002-Jan. 7, 2014 – Christopher L. Batten (defeated Ferguson by six votes). Resigned Dec. 19, 2013, effective Jan. 7, 2014 to take job with N.C. Dept. of Justice's Training and Standards Division. Batten was first Democrat in more than 100 years to face no opposition in re-election runs in 2006 and 2010.

Jan. 7, 2014 – Batten's chief deputy Major Lewis Lane Hatcher, 59, appointed on Jan. 6, 2014 by county commissioners and sworn in the next morning. Hatcher joined Batten's staff in 2006 as Lt. in charge of courthouse security and bailiffs, and later moved to Lt. in Patrol Division. In August 2007 Hatcher became chief deputy when John Ingram resigned. Hatcher will serve the balance of Batten's term that ends Dec. 1, 2014.

Hatcher is the first black sheriff, and second minority sheriff.

Lewis L. Hatcher
2014 –

Van Valentine Richardson
1864-1865,
1865-1873, 1883-1885

John O'Neal Ammons
Dec. 1916 – Dec. 1924
Dec. 1926 – Dec. 1928

Clyde M. Gore
Dec. 1924 – Dec. 1926

Herman D. Stanley
Dec. 1936 – Dec. 1950

Sheriff more than once

Three men served as sheriff at different times – Van Valentine Richardson, John William Gore and John O'Neal Ammons.

Gore was the first to sheriff for the second time. He was appointed by the county's ruling Justices of the Peace in 1862 to serve a two-year term, and replaced by Richardson in 1864.

When the county reorganized its government in 1865, following the Conderates' defeat in the War Between the States, Gore was selected by the Justices of the Peace over Richardson in a 10-7 vote.

Richardson, however, went back into office in 1865 after winning the county's first popular vote for sheriff, and he served until 1873, when he decided to not seek re-election.

Richardson is the only man to be sheriff three times. After Archibald McCallum died in office in late December 1883, Richardson was appointed to be sheriff again. He served until December 1885 when he resigned to become a federal marshal.

Ammons was elected in 1916 and served until 1924, when he lost in the second Democrat primary to Clyde M. Gore.

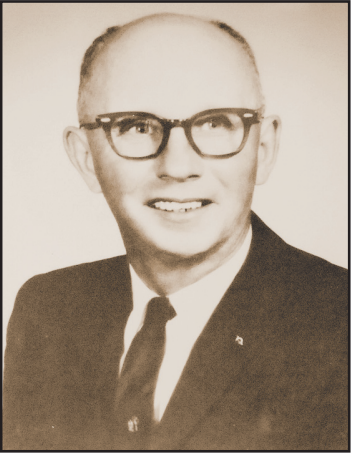Ammons managed to win the position a second time in 1926, but lost a re-election bid in 1928 in another runoff.

First four-year term

Herman D. Stanley was the first sheriff to be elected to a present-day four-year term. He won the job in 1936 when the term was two years, and was re-elected in 1938, the year the four-year term of office began.

The county's ruling Justices of the Peace – who managed county government until the commissioner form of government was installed in 1865 – selected the sheriff for one-year terms until 1865.

Ben A. Duke
Dec. 1958 – Dec. 1974
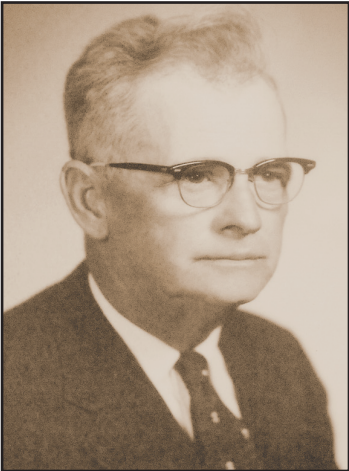

Clayton "Son" Norton
Oct. 5, 1977 – Dec. 1982

William "Bill" Rhodes
Dec. 1982 – Dec. 4, 1989

John Coleman
Dec. 2, 1977 – Oct. 3, 1977

Jimmy L. Ferguson
1994-2002

Henry S. Rowan
April 28, 1988-Dec. 4, 1989

John R. Pridgen
Dec. 1954 – Dec. 1958

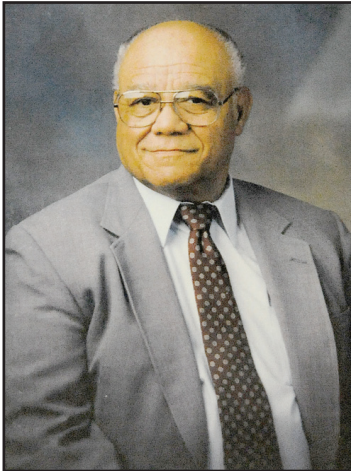**J.G. Butler**
1898-1906

H. Hugh Nance
Dec. 1950 – Dec. 1954

Harold L. Rains
Dec. 4, 1989 – Dec. 5, 1994