

## Early History of the Hillsborough Historical Society and the Historic Hillsborough Commission

by Marsha Ferree

This is one of a series of short articles on historic topics sponsored by the Hillsborough Historical Society. It is the text of a presentation made on February 15, 2007, at the Burwell School Historic Site. To read other articles in this series, go to the Historical Society's page on the Alliance web site at [www.historichillsborough.org](http://www.historichillsborough.org).

My name is Marsha Ferree and I'm President of the Hillsborough Historical Society. Now that's not to be confused with the Historic Hillsborough Commission, which owns and operates the Burwell School historic site and is the organization hosting you this evening. If you are confused, however, it would certainly be understandable. The histories of our two organizations are quite interrelated. I didn't realize, in fact, until I started looking through the Historical Society files and reading the early correspondence and newsletters, just how closely entwined our organizations are.

Let me briefly share with you some of the interesting tidbits I found.

From a letter dated March 21, 1962, from Mrs. Marion B. [Mary K.] Roberts, Secretary of the Hillsborough Historical Society to Mr. G. A. Brown, Principal, Hillsborough High School:

“On March 2, 1962, a constitution was adopted. This formal action brought into being the Hillsborough Historical Society.

“This society's announced intention is to collect and preserve accurate information, to encourage the preservation of historic sites and buildings, and to encourage the restoration of colonial atmosphere in Hillsborough insofar as it is reasonable and compatible with the times.”

Now let's jump ahead a year. According to the Hillsborough Historical Society Newsletter, Number 11, dated October 1963, H.B. 229, which created the Historic Hillsborough Commission, was passed by the General Assembly on March 18, 1963. Governor Terry Sanford then appointed 29 Commissioners, of which 13 were from Hillsborough. The Commission held its first meeting on October 12, 1963.

But here's the really interesting part. This is from the Hillsborough Historical Society Newsletter, Number 5, which is undated, but would have been from October or November of 1962: “The Executive Committee [of the Hillsborough Historical Society] has appointed Judge L.J. Phipps, Chairman, Miss Betty June Hayes, and John W. Carr as the nucleus of a committee to study existing historic commissions and to draw up an Hillsborough Historic Commission [sic] Bill for presentation to the General Assembly early in the coming session.”

The Hillsborough Historical Society Newsletter, Number 11, dated October 1963, was a special edition devoted entirely to the Historic Hillsborough Commission. Let me read you two excerpts from that newsletter:

“ABOUT THE HISTORIC COMMISSION BILL – A committee of seven members from the Hillsborough Historical Society, with L.J. Phipps as Chairman, carefully studied other Historic Commission bills and drew up the one for Hillsborough. Chairman Phipps introduced the Bill on March 18 and it was passed by the General Assembly.” This was Representative Phipps’ first official act in his new post.

And

“RELATIONSHIP OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO THE COMMISSION – The Historical Society has in general sponsored the Commission: its members wrote the Commission Bill, arranged for its introduction at the General Assembly, and screened the names submitted to Governor Sanford. Its Executive Board sent a special letter to Dr. Murphy [who had just become the first chairman of the Commission], welcoming the Commission and offering to aid its work in any way possible.

“The Society has other definite, close ties with the Commission. Nearly all of the Commissioners are now Society members, some of them life members. The current President of the Society is a Commission member [Mrs. Alfred G. Engstrom]; a vice-President is an ex officio member [Miss Betty June Hayes]; one Trustee is a Commissioner [Mr. Wilson Cole]; another is an ex officio member [Mr. Edward M. Lynch]. ...

“The Commission’s chief business is the restoration and preservation of Hillsborough. The Society’s chief business will continue to be to encourage people to appreciate and take an interest in the history of the Hillsborough area and to collect and preserve the historical records and materials of that area. The larger and the more active the Hillsborough Historical Society is, the easier will be the work of the new Commission. We have, in a sense, laid the groundwork for the Commission; now we anticipate a close and successful cooperation with it.”

Also in my reading of the files, I’m finding evidence that the Historical Society encouraged the Historic Hillsborough Commission with not just words and deeds, but with money, as well. For example, from the Hillsborough Historical Society Newsletter, Volume XXVI, Number 2, dated February 1986: “Society Giving in 1985 Totals \$5,396.41.” Included in the list of donations is “\$1,000 to the Historic Hillsborough Commission to assist in painting and repair of the Burwell School.”

So in the spirit of this continued close and successful cooperation with a sister historical organization, on behalf of the Hillsborough Historical Society, I’m very pleased to present the Historic Hillsborough Commission with this check for \$16,000.