

**The history of the dividing line between
Virginia and North Carolina, 1728**

1728

Mss.975.5.B99h

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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Byrd, William, 1674-1744
Title	The history of the dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina, 1728
Date	1728
Call number	Mss.975.5.B99h
Extent	1.0 Volume(s) 1 volume, 234 p.
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Location	LH-MV-E-13
Language	English
Container	1
Abstract	This volume is a finished manuscript copy, probably earlier than the "Westover Manuscripts," from which this varies slightly. Byrd interpolated into the narrative of his tour remarks on Indian customs, religion, warfare, and trade, in addition to observations on his Saponi guides. Several pages were added in 1817 in the hand of Nicholas Trist.

Background note

Virginia planter William Byrd served as a member of the Virginia Council of the State (1709-1744); he determined the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society

Provenance

Custodial History

Donor unknown, probably 1815. (Card says: Presented by Mrs. E. C. Izard) First mentioned in July 1815, at the American Philosophical Society's Historical and Literary Committee meeting.

Acquisition Information

Donor unknown, accessioned, 1815 (2662).

Alternative Form Available

Appendix in Wright. Prose Works of W.Byrd. (975.5:B99w.w)

Indexing Terms

Genre(s)

- Manuscript Essays
- Travel Narratives and Journals

Geographic Name(s)

- Great Britain -- Colonies -- Boundaries -- America.
- North Carolina -- Boundaries -- Virginia.
- North Carolina -- History -- Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775.
- Virginia -- Boundaries -- North Carolina.
- Virginia -- History -- Colonial period, ca. 1600-1775.

Subject(s)

- Boundaries, State.
- Colony and State Specific History
- Exploration.
- Native America
- Natural History
- Surveying and Maps

Other Descriptive Information

This manuscript is described in Maude H. Woodfin, "Thomas Jefferson and William Byrd's Manuscript Histories of the Dividing Line," *William and Mary Quarterly*, series 3, 1: 363-373. This history and the "Secret History" are printed in two publications: W.K. Boyd, ed., *William Byrd's Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, (Raleigh : North Carolina Historical Commission, 1929) and Louis B. Wright, ed., *The Prose Works of William Boyd of Westover*, (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1966).

Other Descriptive Information

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Other Descriptive Information

The collection of William Byrd's writings consists of two leather bound, handwritten copies of Byrd's History of the Dividing Line Run in the Year 1728 (Mss.975.5.B99h) and [A Secret History of the Dividing Line \(Mss.975.5.B99s\)](#). The former was likely written for public audiences and contains the details of drawing the lines, interactions with Indians, observations of the flora and fauna of the area, the health and culture of settlers, and the official actions of the commissioners. Byrd regularly wrote Peter Collinson, an English scientist, about his journal and his hope that it would be of interest and benefit to a wide audience. The Secret History, on the other hand, contains a wealth of the more personal, private, and often humorous anecdotes of the trip. Neither manuscript was published in Byrd's lifetime, although both were eventually published.

There is some debate on the accuracy of the Secret History, with some hint that it was more a work of satire than a factual account, and historians have pointed out that portions of the History do not appear to be accurate. As one expert has noted, although these two works were supposedly of the same event, they "are in general so different from each other that a reader hardly notices the few repetitions." But as they point out, rather than being contradictory, the two are in fact "complementary;" "where one gains in spontaneity, the other gains in detail."

Also of note, the History contains an introduction that gives the history of colonial settlement up until the 1720s as understood by Byrd. In this section, Byrd describes a wide range of issues colonists faced from New England to Virginia. He discusses Native-White relations, the political, religious, cultural, and economic differences between various colonies, and the rivalries between the European empires on the North American continent. Byrd has a number of interesting opinions and observations that may be of value to historians. For instance, he advocated intermarriage between whites and Indians as a way to secure peace, comparing the British experience with that of French Canada and pointed out that Pennsylvania's peaceful history with Indians was owed to their fair dealing in land acquisitions. Although historians may disagree with Byrd's interpretations, his perceptions may lend themselves to historians interested in how colonials viewed their history and their political rivals.

William Byrd is known for his personal diary, which is often graphic and lewd. Historians have used it for insight into sexual relations in colonial Virginia and the growth of the planter aristocracy. The Secret History is like Byrd's private journal in that it contains the more lascivious details that happened while drawing the boundary line and does not appear intended for a wide audience. Indeed, Byrd tried to disguise the real identities of the commissioners in his Secret History by giving them false names.

Because of its length, detail, and publication history, the collection may be of interest to political historians, historians of Indian-white relations, historians of science, historians of gender, environmental historians, and literary scholars. There is a published version of the APS manuscripts that can be found in William Byrd, *William Byrd's Histories of the Dividing Line* (1987).