

**The secret history of the line between
Virginia and North Carolina, [1728]**

Circa 1728

Mss.975.5.B99s

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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Creator	Byrd, William, 1674-1744
Title	The secret history of the line between Virginia and North Carolina, [1728]
Date	Circa 1728
Call number	Mss.975.5.B99s
Extent	1.0 Volume(s) 1 volume, 162 p.
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Location	LH-MV-E-13
Language	English
Container	1
Abstract	This volume is the only known copy of a manuscript probably earlier than "The History of the Dividing Line Between Virginia and North Carolina." Contains fewer Indian references and lacks interpolated information, but describes contact with Saponi and Nottoway Indians in 1728.

Background note

William Byrd was a Virginia planter and colonial official. He was a member of the Virginia Council of the State (1709-1744) and was commissioned to determine the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina.

Scope & content

Three pages missing; these are printed in Maude Woodfin (1945), "The missing pages of William Byrd's history of the line," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3: 2, pages 63-70, from fragments of early draft.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society

Provenance

Custodial History

Benjamin Harrison gave Jefferson the manuscript for the American Philosophical Society, following a general request of Elizabeth Carter Izard, a granddaughter of William Byrd III.

Acquisition Information

Presented by Thomas Jefferson and accessioned, 1817.

Indexing Terms

Genre(s)

- Manuscript Essays
- Maps and Surveys
- Official Government Documents and Records
- 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.
- Land and Speculation
- Natural History
- Surveying and Maps

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).

Other Descriptive Information

This history and "The History of the Dividing Line..." 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 Byrd of Westover*, (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1966).