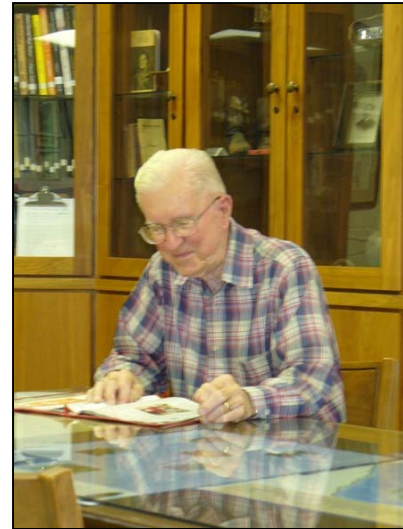


### **JAMES WALL: a biographical sketch**

James William Wall has taught, chronicled, and made Davie County history for 90 years.

Born in Davie County in 1918, Wall graduated from Mocksville High School (1935), and earned his bachelor's degree in history and English at Appalachian State University (1939) and master's degree in history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1949). Mr. Wall wrote his master's thesis on Hinton Rowan Helper, the Davie native whose book, *The Impending Crisis of the South* (1857), proved one of the leading literary influences on the Civil War.



Mr. Wall married Esther Grier at Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, Charlotte in 1950. Jim and Esther Wall have three children: Nancy Wall Piston, a high school social studies teacher in Springfield, MO; Dr. James Grier Wall, an oncologist/hematologist with Carolinas Medical Center - NorthEast in Concord, NC; and Carol Wall Poston, a Trauma ICU nurse at Pitt County Memorial Hospital in Greenville, NC. Their grandchildren are Jonathan and Claire Wall of Concord, NC and Rob and Nat Poston of Greenville, NC.

Mr. Wall readily admits to a lifelong interest in history and a deep love for teaching. He taught at Cooleemee High School between 1939 and 1944, except for a year in Signal Corps School in Winston-Salem (1942-1943). He then worked in personnel at Erwin Mills in Cooleemee for two years, followed by two years in the military with the Air Force Information Education Office in Sacramento, CA (1946-1948). After earning his master's degree, Mr. Wall taught middle school in Charlotte (1949-1951) and eighth grade in Mocksville (1954-1956), before moving to Davie County High School when it opened in 1956. He remained at the high school until his retirement in 1978.

Of Mr. Wall's teaching, Charles Crenshaw says, "He instilled in me a love of history that continues today. Having taught history myself for 38 years in Davie County, I realize that I based my own teaching style largely on the way Mr. Wall taught. I can still remember him coming into the classroom and saying, "number one to six." This meant we were having a pop test on current events or recent lessons. I found his class challenging, but fun and interesting. If Hugh Lefler (a Davie County native and UNC professor) was Mr. North Carolina History, then Mr. Wall is definitely Mr. Davie County History."

In addition to teaching, Mr. Wall invests considerable time in chronicling local history. Mr. Wall first published *A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Mocksville, NC*, for which he served as deacon, elder, and Sunday School teacher, in 1963. The book was updated and reprinted in 1997. "Jim was active in many aspects of and held leadership positions in the church for many years," says the Rev. Dr. William F. Long, pastor of the

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church from 1958 to 1962. Mr. Wall was on the nominating committee that recommended Long.

After five years of thorough research, Mr. Wall's *History of Davie County* was published in 1969. He later wrote two updates to the book (1985 & 1997). Doris Frye, who worked in the local history room of the library at the time, remembers Jim walking in the door and announcing, "today I started writing the *History of Davie County*." She admires Mr. Wall's wonderful ability to wordsmith and willingness to help. The work received critical acclaim from area journalists. Roy Thompson, reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal*, wrote at the time, "James W. Wall has accomplished a minor miracle by writing a good county history." James Brawley of the *Salisbury Post* wrote, "Wall's careful use of his source material and his wise choice of letters, diaries, and documents make this county study stand well above the general field of local history."

The NC Division of Archives and History published Mr. Wall's *A Brief History of Davie County* in 1976. In 1982, he co-authored the booklet, *The Squire, Daniel, and John Boone Families in Davie County, North Carolina* with Flossie Martin and Howell Boone. Mr. Wall's research contributed to the production of Kirk Mohney's *Historic Architecture of Davie County* (1986) and the Andrew Lagle Land Grant Map, copies of which continue to be requested by researchers across the country. Mr. Wall also contributed articles to William S. Powell's *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (1979-1996) and *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (2006).



Jim Wall's interests extend beyond history to local politics, where his work has helped to shape local history. He served six years on the Mocksville Planning Board from its inception in 1975, followed by twenty years on the Mocksville Town Board of Commissioners (1981-2001). County Manager Terry Bralley characterizes Jim Wall as a great statesman, possessing impeccable integrity, intellect, and competency. He says that Mr. Wall is forward thinking, always seeking to make Davie County a progressive place. Mr. Wall would tell Bralley, "Take the people with you, tell them what you are doing and why, because that's the right thing to do." The coaching continues admits Bralley, who says that Commissioner Tom Fleming and he often contemplate in meetings, "What would Jim Wall do?" and they still seek his opinions on issues.

NC Representative for Davie County Julia Howard, who worked with Mr. Wall as a Town Commissioner, calls Mr. Wall "the epitome of a true Southern gentleman. He is a man of vast knowledge who believes in fair and just treatment of all. He is very definitive and thoughtful in his decision making process. It is with pride and honor that I, plus hundreds of others, have had the opportunity to call Mr. Jim a friend."

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Mr. Wall's many contributions have been richly recognized, with, among others, the Valley Forge Classroom Teacher's Medal from Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge (1960), the NC Governor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service (1988), and the E.C. Tatum Humanitarian Award by the Davie County Chamber of Commerce (1996). He has served faithfully as the County Historian since 1969.

His intellectual curiosity continues unabated. Mr. Wall visits the public library and writes articles for the local history files, just as he has done for decades. He recently delivered to the school system his county history program covering 1750 to the present, consisting of about 125 slides with brief narratives to be converted to DVD format for use in the classroom.

Mr. Wall has made an indelible mark on Davie County, documenting the richness of its history and teaching several generations of its students who themselves still call and write him to say thank you. He has set a high standard of civic leadership to which we can all aspire - one that combines pride of place, commitment to meeting challenges and moving forward, and quiet humility of person.

Mr. Wall turns 90 officially on August 21 (he was actually born at 2:00am on August 22, but the doctor mistakenly recorded August 21). Appropriately, he shares that birth date with another illustrious Davie County historian, the late Miss Flossie Martin, to whom on their mutual birthday, he used to say, "Well, here we are, having another one."

Happy birthday, Mr. Wall, and thank you!



*By Jane S. McAllister*