

## Wedding Gave Brunswick Its Name

BY JIM MEGIVERN

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Brunswick County would not be named Brunswick if it were not for a wedding that took place in the old university town of Heidelberg, Germany, in September, 1658.

Nobody involved in that event could possibly have foreseen the weird set of circumstances that more than a half-century later would install the House of Hanover on the British throne, a development that accounts for the 18th century adoption in the British colonies of such German place names as Brunswick, Hanover and Mecklenburg.

The marriage that was to bring the destinies of England and north Germany so close together actually took place when the British throne was vacant, its last occupant (Charles I) having been beheaded nine years earlier. The bride that morning in Heidelberg was an unimportant heir, the 12th child of the daughter of King James I. Her name was Sophia, and she was a talented woman who spoke five languages fluently and had a grasp of the politics of that era. The groom was a minor dignitary, Ernest Augustus, Elector of Hanover. The marriage lasted 40 years (Ernest died in 1698) and produced seven children.

George Lewis, Sophia's oldest son, now crossed the channel to become King George I, and that takes us back to our opening statement. The throne of England would not have gone to the Duke of Brunswick, the House of Hanover in 1714, if it had not been for that wedding in Heidelberg in 1658. It would have been a far more glorious story, however, if Sophia herself had been the one to link Brunswick and England as Queen, for George I was a dull, vindictive character with none of his mother's talents.

The entrance of Brunswick and Hanover into English life was thus not accompanied by any kind of glory. The "Catholic threat" had been avoided, but only by letting the throne fall to the "Hanoverian vultures."

George kept his divorced wife imprisoned on the continent and brought his two German mistresses with him. Irreverent Englishmen with a fine eye for the female figure, quickly dubbed them, "the Elephant," and "the Maypole," as they exercised the real power for the English king who could not speak English.

It was this man's alienated son, George II, who was on the throne two decades later when Brunswicktown was settled and named, and it was his great-grandson, George III, against whose taxation policies the colonists revolted in 1776. All in all, the House of Hanover did not exactly signal an era of greatness for the British crown.

There was a kind of poetic justice, therefore, in 1917, when antipathy toward things German led the English to drop the name of Brunswick from royal titles, replacing it with Windsor.

Had North Carolina been as close to Britain in 1917 as it was in 1714, Brunswick County would probably have changed its name to Windsor County as part of the English effort to purge itself of the "German Connection."

On the one hand, that would have meant that this thrilling article, instead of appearing in the Brunswick Beacon, would probably have surfaced in the Windsor Whatnot.

On the other hand, by keeping the names of Brunswick and Hanover in North Carolina counties, one can always say that the failure to find creative solutions for such things as land-fill and zoning problems, is simply part of the legacy of unimaginative leadership received from George I.

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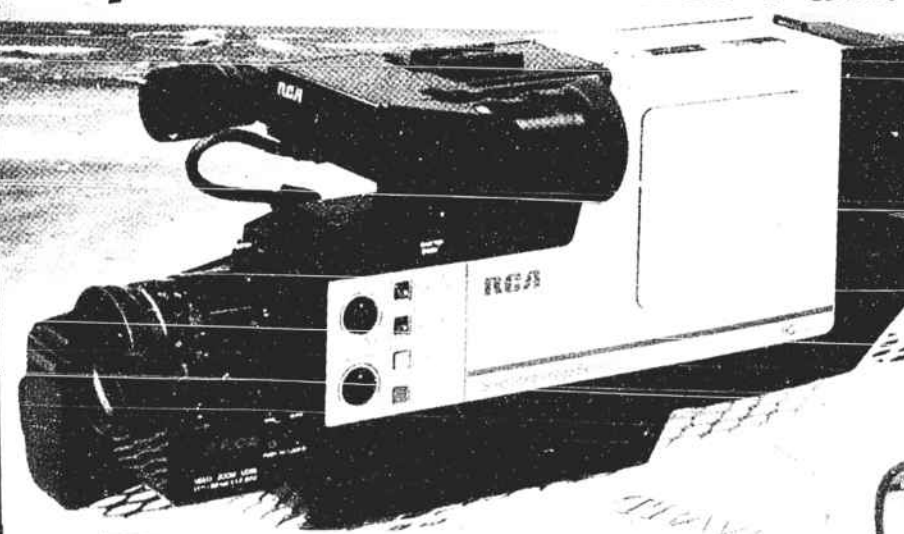
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