

## Carolinas 'Boundary House' Site Steeped In Local History

BY SUSAN USHER

**B**oundary House was a popular stop for colonial travelers on the road between Wilmington and Charleston, but apparently it was one of the few places President George Washington did not sleep during his Southern tour of 1791.

No matter. Boundary House doesn't have to ride the coattails of history.

Straddling the North Carolina-South Carolina state line, it figured prominently in the colonial past of an area now included in Brunswick County, N.C., and Horry County, S.C.

Today, a granite monument between the trees of the 18th hole at Marsh Harbour Golf Links, with a few tabby bricks and pottery shards half buried around its base, is the only physical evidence that remains of the original Boundary House.

The Boundary House came into play in the wars between individual men and between a nation and its rebelling colonials, in efforts to win men's souls, and in establishing a "true boundary" between North Carolina and South Carolina.

### Moore-Smith Duel

It was on the grounds of Boundary House that two of Brunswick County's wealthiest and most prominent residents confronted each other in a duel June 28, 1805, the anniversary of the Battle of Fort Moultrie.

Capt. Maurice Moore felt obliged to challenge his cousin, Gen. Benjamin Smith, when the strong-willed general, after a few too many drinks, was overheard making an unkind remark about the captain's father, Judge Alfred Moore.

Because of failing health, the highly-respected elder Moore had retired the year before from his seat as an Associate Judge of the Supreme Court of the United States. So it was that the younger Moore came to defend his honor.

But why Boundary House, when both gentlemen resided on plantations on the Cape Fear River between Wilmington and Smithville (Southport)?

Dueling was illegal in North Carolina and Brunswick law officers pursued their carriages in an attempt to avert the confrontation. But, after conferring, with the officers on the North Carolina side of the hall and the combatants' parties on the other, the duel proceeded on the south side of the line.

The scene is described briefly in memoirs of Gen. Joseph Gardner Swift published in 1890. A lieutenant and commander of Fort Johnston at Smithville at the time, he was Smith's second.

Capt. Moore chose another cousin, Major Duncan Moore, as his second.

Also accompanying the men were two physicians, Dr. Andrew Scott and a Dr. Griffin.

At first shot neither party was harmed, Swift recalled. After stepping a few paces forward, the two fired again, with a ball entering Smith's side. Moore was uninjured.

Smith was taken by boat to Smithville and eventually recovered, later serving as governor of North Carolina for a year, from December 1810 to December 1811.

### Passing The Word

A quarter of a century earlier, Boundary House was the private residence at one point for Isaac Marion, an older brother of General Francis Marion, known as the "Swamp Fox" of the American Revolution. Isaac Marion served his community as a justice of the peace.

It was here that a horseback courier from Wilmington arrived on May 9, 1775, bearing the news of the April 19 Battle of Lexington, the start of the Revolution. Marion forward-



RECLUSE W.H. HEFNER enjoyed this view of the marsh through moss-draped oaks from his home between the Calabash River and Mullet Creek. The point may also have been Boundary Landing, serving the original Boundary House. The Intracoastal Waterway is in the background.

STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

ed the message southward to the Committee of Safety at Little River, S.C.

In 1766, as excerpted from a journal in Vol. XI, *North Carolina State Records*, some 9,000 soldiers under Gen. Francis Nash marching from Wilmington to Charleston encamped to rest at Boundary House. At the urging of Marion's father-in-law, the troops soon relocated across the way to Little River Neck, where they stayed about a month.

### Called To Worship

Called both the "Club House" and "Boundary House," Berry says it more properly could have been called Boundary Meetinghouse," since it was known as a place of worship in colonial times.

One of the ministers known to have preached there was the Rev. John Barnett of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

In a letter to his conference secretary in England dated Aug. 22, 1767, the Rev. Barnett reported, "Nine times in the year I preach at the Boundary House situated on the line between the Carolinas. Here a large congregation meets. At my first coming, they were so unacquainted with liturgy that I was forced to make every response myself." With lessons a half-hour before service, the situation improved within the year.

The original house ceased to exist sometime before the Civil War, by which time only a chimney remained.

A later owner of the property was a grandfather of Doug Simmons, mayor of

Calabash. While showing a visitor the grounds, Simmons recalled his seeing the brick rubble of the Boundary House as a child.

He also remembered visiting W.H. Hefner, a well-to-do New Yorker who bought the site from the Simmons family and lived for many years in an older residence nearly a thousand feet from the boundary line but still called "Boundary House" by some.

Simmons said the former New Yorker at one time offered clothing for sale in a nearby building.

Mainly, though, said Berry, he was a gardener, nature lover and recluse.

Hefner was murdered in the late 1940s or early '50s by two young men during an attempted robbery. The two had traveled by boat from Little River in the night, said Simmons.

### Running The Line

Boundary House was built strategically on the state boundary line as first established in 1735 and it played a key role in later efforts to "recover" the boundary.

By 1900, along the coast, no sign of the cedar stake used to mark the original boundary remained. Squabbles over enforcement responsibilities and such prevailed.

The disagreements were not new. Disputes over the boundary between the sister states dated back to the days of both the Lords Proprietors and royal governors. But it wasn't until after Gov. Gabriel Johnston took office in North Carolina that something was done.

In the spring of 1735, the first line was run—no easy task, setting the now familiar "pistol grip" shape of southeastern North Carolina. For nearly 200 years afterward no active effort was made to re-survey and re-mark the line.

Then, in 1928, North Carolina and South Carolina each appointed a boundary commissioner—J. Monroe Johnson of South Carolina and George F. Syme of North Carolina to re-establish the line from the Atlantic Ocean to the Lumber River.

They began looking for any shreds of evidence of the line's existence that might remain. That brought them to the ruins of Boundary House. They were led to the site by Jerry Vereen, of Little River, S.C., a month before his death.

In a report dated Dec. 15, 1928, now in the North Carolina Collection at Wilson Library in Chapel Hill, the Commissioners advised their respective governors of completion of their work. "...We have reproduced it as it was originally," they announced with pride.

Citing evidence of the project's accuracy, the report continued, "The remains of the Boundary House, i.e., of the brick used in its chimney or piers, were easily found."

Confirmation of that finding came in a chart from an 1873 coast survey by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. It showed the house in relation to surrounding land features that were still in place in 1928.

The Boundary House and the ancient "state line tree" discovered near Tabor City provided the two points needed to determine a bearing for the boundary line.

So that the line would not be lost again, a path 12 feet wide was cleared along its length. Then eight-inch by eight-inch gran-

ite monuments were set four feet into the ground at two mile intervals and at key points such as Boundary House. Each marker was eight feet long and weighed 600 pounds.

Erected in 1928, the marker inscribed on its northeast side with the words "Boundary House" stands one-fourth mile off N.C. 179, on the east side of the Marsh Harbour entrance road, adjacent to the pro shop parking lot and about 500 yards from the northern bank of the Calabash River.

C.B. Berry, a Little River, S.C., surveyor known for his meticulous historical research, believes the original Boundary House was built after the original boundary was run but sometime before 1750—probably by the Indian trader William Waties, an early owner of the site. He has found a 1754 deed that makes reference to a structure "commonly known as the Boundary House." The house was located so that the boundary line ran through its center hallway.

The marker was placed "right in the middle of where the house was," he said in a re-

cent telephone interview.

Berry said he regrets that efforts were not made during development of the golf course to preserve remains of the Boundary House foundation.

"I wish they had left that," he said. "If I had known they were working there I would have urged them to put that in the rough, so that it could be properly studied."

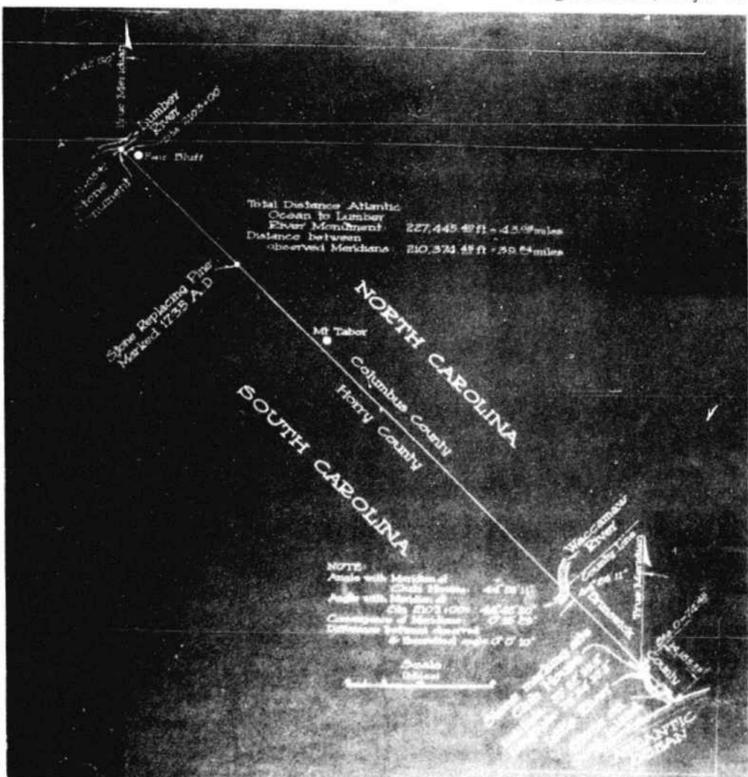
"But it was too late," Berry added, by the time he was aware of the work.

Two historical markers along U.S. 17 testify to the importance of Boundary House, one on either side of the state line.

The weathered marker in South Carolina recalls Isaac Marion's role as message relay.

The North Carolina marker was recently taken down to accommodate the four laning of U.S. 17 to the state line and won't be replaced for some time.

Its message: "Commissioners met here to run boundary in 1764. Popular stop for colonial travelers. Ruins used to est. present state line in 1928. Located 2 1/4 mi. S.E."



IN 1928 a two-state Boundary Commission set out to "recover" the lost state line from the Atlantic Ocean to the Lumber River, providing a well-defined boundary in Little River Inlet, which is shared by the two Carolinas.



THIS MONUMENT and a few tabby bricks and shards of pottery are all that mark where Boundary House once straddled the state line. The face closest to Calabash Mayor Doug Simmons is inscribed "Boundary House".

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