

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2005

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HOUSE RESOLUTION 1785

Sponsors: Representative Culpepper.

Referred to: Placed on Calendar Pursuant Rule 32(a).

May 25, 2005

1 A HOUSE RESOLUTION HONORING THE MEMORY OF SOME OF EDENTON'S
2 HISTORICAL LEADERS AND RECOGNIZING THE HISTORICAL
3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHOWAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE OF 1767.

4 Whereas, the General Assembly convened in the Town of Edenton, which at
5 the time was recognized as the capital of North Carolina, from 1722 to 1737, 1740 to
6 1741, and in 1743; and

7 Whereas, during the November 1766 Session of the General Assembly, a bill
8 introduced by Joseph Hewes, an Edenton merchant and assemblyman, who would later
9 become a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was passed to build a new
10 courthouse in Edenton; and

11 Whereas, it is known that the Chowan County Courthouse was built in 1767,
12 but early records give few details about the structure's builders, financing, or architect,
13 although many believe the likely architect was John Hawks, who was also the architect
14 for Tryon Palace in New Bern; and

15 Whereas, the Georgian style courthouse included a second floor assembly
16 room, which was the largest fully paneled room in colonial America; and

17 Whereas, the courthouse, which was also used for county government
18 functions, became the center of the community's social life and was the site where
19 lanterns were placed to celebrate the State's approval of the federal constitution in 1789;
20 and

21 Whereas, during the late 1700s, some of Edenton's prominent citizens
22 included: Hugh Williamson, a physician, who signed the federal constitution in 1787;
23 Samuel Johnston, a member of the colonial assembly, who later served as Governor of
24 North Carolina from 1787 to 1789 and as the State's first elected United States Senator
25 from 1789 to 1793; and James Iredell, Sr., a State supreme court judge, who was later
26 appointed to the first United States Supreme Court by President George Washington in
27 1790; and

28 Whereas, in 1819, during an official visit to the State, President James
29 Monroe and his Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun, were entertained in the courthouse's
30 assembly room; and

Whereas, the courthouse has remained a significant part of the legal, political, and social life in the Edenton community for many decades and was named a National Historic Landmark in 1970; and

Whereas, the first floor of the courthouse was used continuously until 1996 when the courthouse was temporarily closed for renovations; and

Whereas, in 2001, archaeologists digging under the courthouse uncovered the foundation of the 1722 Council Chamber, the State's first capitol building used during the colonial era; and

Whereas, on October 8, 2004, the courthouse was reopened and rededicated to public use after undergoing an extensive restoration that was made possible by generous financial contributions, a grant from the Save America's Treasures program; and the collaborative efforts of Chowan County, the Town of Edenton, the Edenton Historical Commission, the citizens of Edenton, and the State of North Carolina; and

Whereas, on the occasion of its reopening, the North Carolina State Supreme Court held a session in the courthouse, the first time in 144 years the Supreme Court had met outside of Raleigh; and

Whereas, among other uses, the renovated courthouse will be used for nonjury court sessions as well as a meeting place for civic groups and nonprofit organizations; and

Whereas, the 1767 Chowan County Courthouse is the State's oldest government building and the nation's best preserved colonial courthouse; and

Whereas, although routinely called "the finest Georgian courthouse in the South," the 1767 courthouse is – as it always has been – a building far from routine; and

Whereas, the 1767 Chowan County Courthouse is the oldest courthouse still in continuous use in North America; and

Whereas, on May 25, 2005, the North Carolina House of Representatives will convene in the 1767 Chowan County Courthouse for a legislative session, returning to Edenton for the first time in 262 years; Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives:

SECTION 1. The North Carolina House of Representatives honors the memory of Edenton's historical leaders for their service to the State of North Carolina and to the nation.

SECTION 2. The North Carolina House of Representatives recognizes the importance of the 1767 Chowan County Courthouse and expresses its gratitude to those who contributed to the preservation of one of the State's most important historic treasures.

SECTION 3. The Principal Clerk shall transmit a certified copy of this resolution to the Chowan County Board of Commissioners.

SECTION 4. This resolution is effective upon adoption.