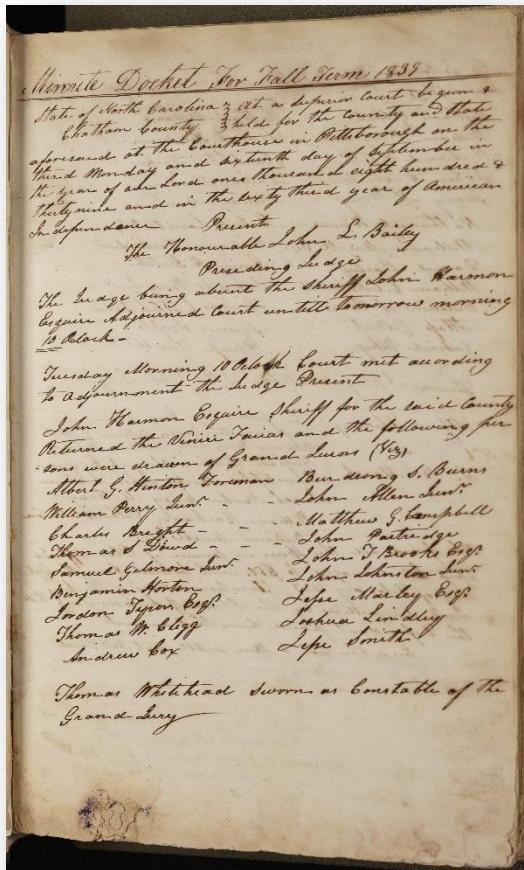


Chatham County Superior Court Minute Docket Now Available in Digital Form



Page from the Chatham County Superior Court Minute Docket for the Fall Term 1839.

The original Chatham County Superior Court Minute Docket covering the years 1839 to 1866 has now been digitized and made available online thanks to CCHA's partnership with the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center. The book was recovered from the Chatham County Courthouse following the 2010 fire, and the damage restored with funds from James Milton Johnson & Laura Blair Johnson Trust.

Few details are included in the records. Rather, most entries note the Plaintiff, Defendant and the verdict, but not the specific charge. Nevertheless, the minute book gives a sense of events in the county and includes the names of many Chatham residents involved in civil and criminal cases, along with those serving as jurors.

[Link to the Chatham County Superior Court Minute Docket for 1839 to 1866](#)

The NC State Archives notes that Superior courts were established in each county in 1806, replacing the district superior courts that had functioned since 1778. These courts had original and appellate civil

and criminal jurisdiction. Criminal jurisdiction extended to serious felonies, such as murder, rape, larceny, house breaking, assault and battery, riot, forgery, and the like; civil jurisdiction extended to suits involving \$100 or more (after 1868, \$200 or more). Extra-judicial matters assigned to superior court included legitimization of bastards, emancipation and manumission of slaves, divorce proceedings, registration of aliens, and hearing of grand jury presentments and reports. The minute dockets record the daily transactions of the court, generally giving judgments in civil and criminal actions. They also reflect the internal workings of the court, recording the appointments and qualifications of clerks, the summoning and impaneling of juries, and the hearing of grand jury reports.

CCHA is grateful to the James Milton and Laura Blair Johnson Trust for supporting the restoration of this historic court record and for pursuing its digitization. The Trust was established by James "Jim" Johnson, who grew up in Pittsboro and, after a long career that took him all over the world, retired to Pittsboro. In addition to the Court Minute Docket, the Trust has funded a large collection of local history books at the Chatham Community Library. Other projects supported by the Mr. Johnson or the Trust he established include funding the courthouse clock that was installed in 2000 and destroyed in the 2010 courthouse fire; the Page Vernon pocket park on Hillsboro Street; the restoration of the VFW lodge on West Street; and the restoration of the historic Kentucky smokehouse on the Ag Center property. The current trustees are Gene Brooks, Rick Torbert, and Bob Wachs.