

Randolph County Weights and Measures

Unsigned narrative developed for Randolph Room, Randolph County Public Library

Updated and additional information added from Randolph Room files

by Ross A. Holt, March 2015



At the September 12, 1793 meeting of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Session, the Justices of the County ordered that Alexander Gray be requested to furnish the county with a legal standard of Weights, Measures, and Stamps, and that he be allowed 25 percent of profit on all money by him expended in procuring the same and that a tax on every poll and every odd acres of land be laid and collected by the Sheriff for payment.

It was further ordered that Gray be appointed to keep the Standard at his store in Johnstonville.

The Standard was ordered from London, England, from the firm of MARY DE GRAVE, Scale Makers for His Majesty and Exporters of Scales and Steelyards. The original invoice is dated June 13, 1804, and gives a detailed description of the Standard: all the cup measures were of copper with handles. All cups and weights were engraved "Randolph County, N.C." and stamped at the Guild Hall in the City of London. A yard stick was made of the best yellow metal, engraved properly and divided on one side $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ yard, and the other side, inches. The set



was to be delivered in a strong wainscot box with partitions to hold all the weights and measures, strong iron handles and a good lock and key, and sealed at the Exchequers. The total cost was \$197.87.

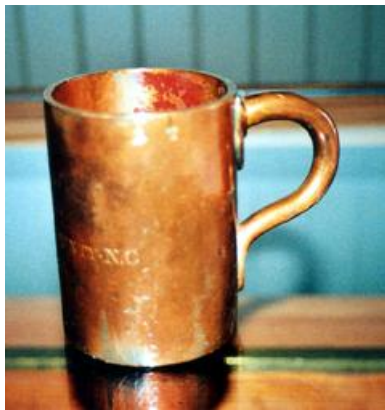
After their use for several years as the standard weights and measures for the county, they were no longer needed for this purpose because inspection laws were passed. Merchants had used the standards for checking their weights and measures to be certain that they were giving a fair measure.

It is also interesting to note that the standard pound and standard yard were destroyed when the House of Parliament burned in London on October 16, 1834. These standards had been used to certify the ones that were sold to Randolph County.

The weights and measures likely were used until 1927, when responsibility for setting the standards shifted to the state. It is not known when the county discarded the weights and measures, but they were found on a junk heap in or near Franklinville about 1954. J. L. Newton purchased them from the person who found them.

In 1949, Clerk of Court Tom Presnell found the original invoice for the purchases and started a search for the missing pieces. After the publication of the information concerning the weights and measures with a picture of the original invoice in The Courier-Tribune on July 20, 1955, Mr. Newton identified his purchases. He offered the items for display by the Historical Society.

In 1967 a group of individuals and corporations through the leadership of Mr. J. W. Plummer contributed to the Randolph Public Library funds for the purchase of the weights and measures from Mr. Newton. Donors included Acme-McCrary Corporation; B. B. Walker Shoe Company; John F. Redding; Reitzel Smith; Walker, Anderson, Bell and Ogburn; J. W. Plummer;



and Henry M. Armfield. Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Reese donated a case for displaying the weights and measures in the Randolph Room of the Library. After 163 years of service, discard and rediscovery, the weights and measures had returned to county ownership.

The set included the following pieces: 7 brass weights (various sizes); 1 brass yardstick; 1 gallon dry measure (Winchester, copper); 3 liquid measures (gallon, quart, pint - copper). All of the pieces were now on hand except the gallon and quart liquid measures. There is included one extra weight, origin unknown. The wainscot box is no longer with the collection.

In 2000, three additional measures were discovered: a gallon wine measure, a half-bushel dry measure and a bushel dry measure. Rose Samet Kline of Columbia, S.C., and Toby Samet James of Richmond, Va., donated the three items to the Randolph County Historical Society in memory of their parents, Alex and Hazel Samet. The Samet family recovered the measures from a junkyard on North Fayetteville Street in Asheboro operated by Alex Samet.

According to an estate service engaged by the Randolph County Public Library in 2010, the ½ bushel measure was made by George Price, a coppersmith in Danville, Va., between 1830 and



1850. A ¼ bushel measure likely was made in Birmingham, England; a “C” date glyph on the rim points to a series that began in 1791 and the service estimates that the measure was made in 1793.

The weights and measures are the oldest artifacts of Randolph County government. When the three additional items were donated in 2000, the News & Record of Greensboro quoted the director of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture’s Standards Division, N. David Smith, as stating that Randolph County’s set also was possibly the oldest known in the state. Smith also told The Courier-Tribune that the weights and measures have artistic as well as historical value: “They tend to be made of very thick and heavy metal as opposed to the modern, clean, efficient cold stainless steel. Quite a lot of craftsmanship went into them.”

The weights and measures can be viewed in the main hallway of the 1909 Historic Randolph County Courthouse.

An image of the 1804 invoice and a transcription of the invoice follows.



Randolph County Weights and Measures
 Copy of Original invoice

Messrs. Jas. & Robt. Colquhoun

June 13, 1804

TO MARY DE GRAVE

Widow & Successor to the late Charles De Grave

SCALE MAKER TO HIS MAJESTY

No. 59 St. Martin Le Grand, corner of St. Anns Lane, Aldersgate

Makes all sorts of Scales, Weights & Steelyards for Exportation

A set of best neat bell fashioned brass weights 56 ^{tt} 28 ^{tt} 14 ^{tt} 7 ^{tt} 4 ^{tt} 2 ^{tt} 1 ^{tt})	) 13.5.0
and a neat set of flat brass weights in a fish skin case smooth, neat engraved Randolph County N. C. & stamped at the Exchequer for standard weights	
A 1 gallon copper, Winchester measure with handles engraved & .....	) 2.12.6
A 1 gallon wine measure Do .....	) 2.10.0
A 1 quart Do Do Do .....	) 1.7.0
A 1 Pint Do & Do all stamped at the Guild Hall of the City of London .....	) 0.18.0
A best yellow mettal brass yard engraved & properly divided, on one side ½ yard, ¼ yard, nail, & ½ nail, the other side in inches & 1/8ths of an inch in a wainscot cover .....	) 2.0.0
A strong wainscot box with Partitions to hold all the weights & measures- strong iron handles & a good lock & key .....	) 2.15.0
Paid fees etc. at the Exchequer sealing the weights & yard .....	) 1.12.0
Do at Guild hall sealing the measures .....	) 0.12.0
Packing case etc. ....	) 0.7.6
	<hr/> 27.10.0
Paid for engraving all the weights & measures	<hr/> 1.4.0
	<hr/> 29.3.0