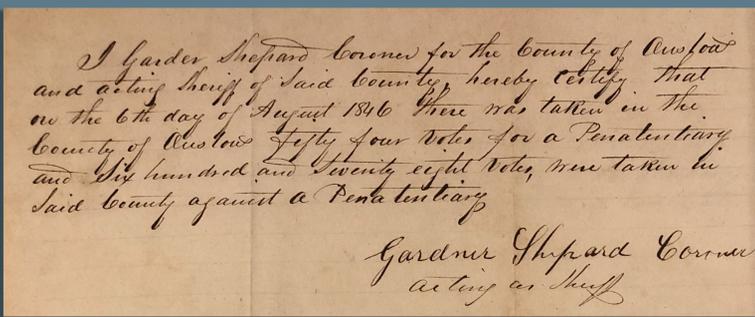
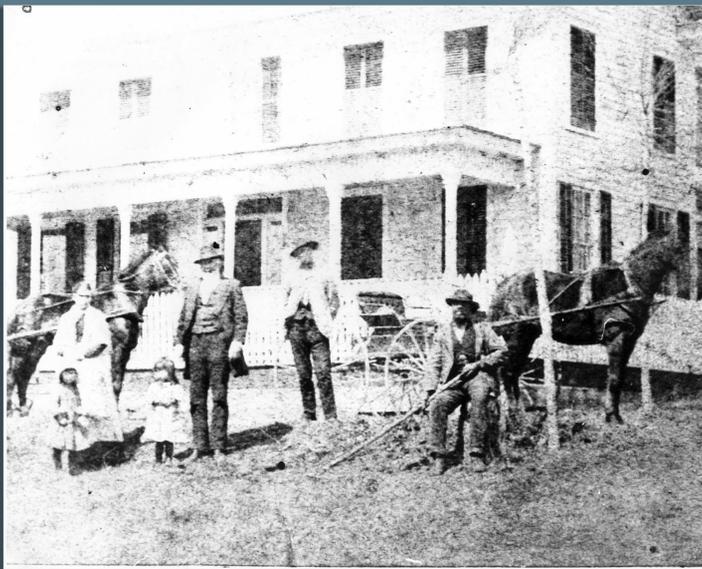


# SHERIFF

The primary law enforcement office for Onslow County is the office of Sheriff. Historically the office of Sheriff evolved out of the shire reeve, an official with responsibility over a shire, or small division of land. This official position dates to medieval England, and transferred to the United States with colonization. Today the Sheriff is an elected official responsible for policing unincorporated areas, maintaining the jail, providing security for the court and school system, serving court papers, and maintaining civil law.



One of the most important roles the sheriff played in Onslow's history was that of certifying elections and votes. Gardner Shepard, who in 1846 was coroner and acting sheriff, certified a vote held in the county showing a desire among eligible voters to prevent a penitentiary from being constructed.



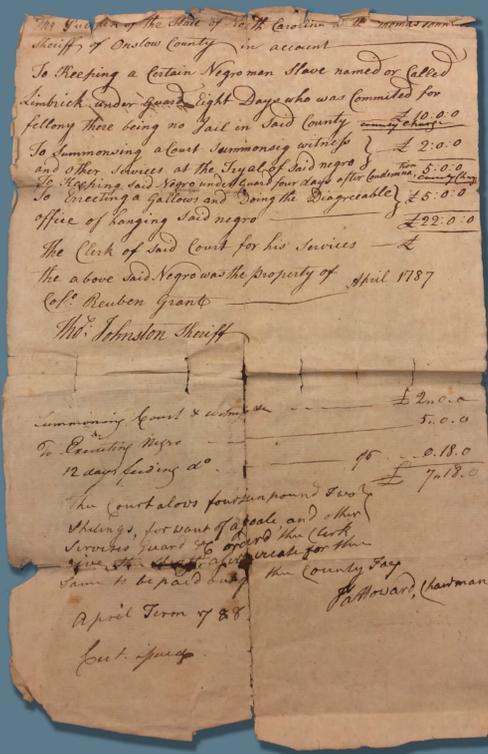
Pictured above is the Murrill home, which stood by Alum Spring near Catherine Lake. Elijah Murrill served as sheriff of Onslow County for 27 years during the latter half of the 19th century. He also served at various times as coroner and warden of the poor. Many men who held the position of sheriff also held other positions in county government and often through these positions rose to higher office.

The colonial assembly created the office of constable, which was the most basic rank of colonial peacekeeping. They were support for the Sheriff with the responsibility for law enforcement, preventing breach of peace, and punishing those who did break the peace. They served warrants, helped bring civil matters before the court, raised juries, and collected taxes. Today's position of deputy sheriff serves a similar function as law enforcement officer and keeper of the peace. Deputies also provide security to the court system as bailiffs and to the school system as School Resource Officers. Deputies patrol the 767 square miles that make up Onslow County in twelve hour shifts, twenty four hours a day twelve days a week.



Mounted deputies on Onslow Beach. Images courtesy OCSO.

Initially Onslow Precinct had the position of Provost Marshal, but those chosen frequently refused the office due to a lack of income associated with the title. In 1739 the Colonial Assembly created the office of Sheriff and during the Colonial era the Sheriff became the most important executive and administrative officer of the court. Appointed by the governor after being nominated by the Justices of the Peace, the Sheriff's responsibilities included tax collection, execution of laws, and supervision of elections. With so much power, especially in tax collection, many Sheriffs in colonial North Carolina were corrupt. It seems that Onslow County enjoyed a relatively corruption free history when examining the Sheriff's office. The one exception is Enoch Ward, who was removed from office by the Governor in 1763 due to complaints about his misconduct.



Thomas Johnston holds the state record for most nominations to sheriff, ten, during the colonial period. He continued to serve in that capacity after the American Revolution. This account, presented to the Justices of the Peace at the court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, is for expenses accrued while overseeing the execution of an enslaved man in 1787. One of the roles of Sheriff was that of execution, usually by hanging.

1900-1904	David J. Sanders
1904-1908	W.C. Mills
1908-1912	E.W. Summersill
1912-1916	T.B. Henderson
1916-1920	Elisha H. Walton
1920-1928	J.R. Gurganus
1928-1928	Dan W. Russell, Jr.
1938-1946	B. Frank Morton
1946-1950	I. Dan Sanders
1950-1978	Thomas J. Marshall
1978-1990	Bill G. Woodward
1990-2014	Ed Brown
2014-Present	Hans Miller

This list contains all of the Sheriffs elected to serve Onslow County from the beginning of the twentieth century.

