

Wakefield's Walking Cane

In 1770, James Lodwick and Susanah (Ross) Alford settled in a section of Granville Co., NC, which had been formed from Edgecombe County in 1746. This section was to become the eastern part of Wake Co., close to the Franklin County line, and became the town of Wakefield. An interesting legend has arisen about the founding of the town. According to Alford family traditions, the legend says that when Wake County was formed in 1771, the new boundaries took in the home of James Lodwick Alford and some of his newly acquired undeveloped property. On riding through the forests of his property on horseback, he stopped, got off his horse, cut a sapling, and said, "This will be my Wake Field." To honor the occasion, he had a walking cane made from the sapling. The origins of the legend and the whereabouts of the walking cane were subject to much conjecture until early 1914.

An article appearing in a 1914 edition of the *Raleigh Times* said: "Mr. G.B. Alford of Holly Springs, who was in the city yesterday was presented with a walking stick that is 150 years old, and which was the property of his Great Grandfather, Mr. James Lodwick Alford. It was presented by Mr. W.P. Robertson, who is a Great Great Grandson of the first owner of the stick. . . . The stick in question, which has a Deer Horn handle, is of Hickory, and was made from the first tree ever cut on the land on which Wakefield, Wake County, N.C. is now located. Mr. Alford then a land owner of a large tract of land lying in eastern Wake County, desired to establish a Negro Quarter, and upon arrival on the place, dismounted from his horse, and cut down a Hickory, and remarked, 'It may always be said that I was the first man to cut down a tree in Wakefield.' He made the stick which at his death, was left in charge

of his daughter, Delanie, who married a High, and at her death it became the property of John Andrew Green High. Upon his death, it became the property of his niece, Clara Ann Griffin, who gave it to her nephew, Mr. W.P. Robertson, sometime about 1875. Mr. Robertson, finding that Mr. Alford was closer kin, and of the same name, decided to present him with the stick. This he did in the office of the Register of Deeds yesterday afternoon."

At the death of George Benton Alford in 1924, the walking stick became the property of his son Green Haywood Alford III. This was done with the stipulation that if his son had no heirs, the stick was to be given to a cousin, Lodwick Houston Alford, who was born in 1914 shortly after the publicity about the stick and who was given the name Lodwick after his great-great grandfather James Lodwick Alford. Green Haywood Alford III had no heirs, and in 1977, two years before his death, he did give the walking cane to his cousin Lodwick H. Alford. It is now proudly displayed at his home on Sea Island, GA. The stick has a gold band with the following inscription: "1770 Wakefield James Lodwick Alford or Major Tanner Alford." (The mystery of why he was called Major Tanner is as yet unsolved.)

An article on this subject appears in *The Heritage of Wake County, North Carolina, 1983*, edited by Lynne Belvin and Harriette Riggs (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Co. Genealogical Society with Hunter Publishing Company, 1983).

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