

## Charles Wright Hooker, 1910 – 1994

Seventh President of the Chapel Hill Historical Society, 1981 – 1987



Charles W. Hooker, better known as Charlie, was born on September 15, 1910 in Fries, Virginia, a little town on the New River in western Virginia, a few miles north of the North Carolina border. His father, Robert R. Hooker was a North Carolinian with roots in Hillsboro; his mother, Ella (Cornett) Hooker was a Virginian from Elk Creek. The eldest of six children, Charlie grew up in the coal country of southwestern West Virginia, the land of the Hatfields and the McCoys, where his father was a bookkeeper for a coal company. However, when it became time for Charlie to enter college, the entire family, mother, father and six children, moved to Durham, NC, where he enrolled at Duke University. At Duke, Charlie earned a bachelor's degree in 1930, a master's degree in 1932, and his Ph.D. in 1933.

At Duke, Charlie met Elma Black of Bamburg, South Carolina, and they were married on September 2, 1937. They are the parents of Elizabeth Kinard (Phipps) of Greensboro, NC and Robert Wright Hooker of St. Petersburg, FL. From 1933 to 1934 Charlie was a fellow at the University of Rochester, from 1934 to 1936 a fellow at Duke University, and from 1936 to 1937 an instructor in Anatomy at Tulane University. From 1937 to 1942 Charlie was an instructor at Yale University, from 1942 to 1946 an assistant professor, and from 1946 to 1948 an associate professor at Yale. In 1948 the family moved to Atlanta where Charlie was professor of Cytology at Emory University from 1948 to 1949. In 1949 Charlie became professor and chair of the Anatomy Department at the University of North Carolina Medical School, which was beginning its transition to becoming a four year medical school. At that time, in his words, "Memorial Hospital was a hole in the ground behind the Medical School, all roads in and out of Chapel Hill were 2 lane and crooked, and RDU Airport was a wooden shed." Charlie retired in 1981 after 32 years of service to the university. During his career at UNC he received a number of awards and served several professional societies, including President of the Elisha Mitchel Scientific Society, President of the Sigma Xi scientific group, member of the Bulett History of Medicine Club, secretary and treasurer of the Anatomical Record, secretary and treasurer of the American Association for Cancer Research, and executive committee member of the American Association of Anatomists. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and was listed in Who's Who in America. In 1985, Charlie received a distinguished service award from the UNC School of Medicine.

In retirement, Charlie vigorously pursued some of the interests he had previously neglected. Hailing from a long line of Presbyterians, even before retirement he served as an Elder in the Presbyterian Church and was passionate about the history of Presbyterian and Anglican Churches in the Carolinas. He visited the sites of all the original congregations he could identify and find. He was president and secretary of the Tar Heel Golden K Kiwanis Club and a board member for the Chapel Hill Preservation Society, Orange County Historical Museum, and the Village Elders. He was an avid baseball fan and his hobbies included fishing, gardening, history, and railroads.

Charlie served as Treasurer of the Chapel Hill Historical Society from 1973 to 1978 and as President from 1981 to 1987. He is probably best remembered by Society members for initiating a series of chartered bus Carolina historical tours beginning in 1976. The bus tours visited all parts of the state from the coast to the mountains, and the detailed itineraries of some of these are preserved in the Societies Newsletters (available on line).