

Shorthand ^[1]

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Shorthand



N. B. Cobb, 1872

Courtesy of FBC

by William S. Powell, 2006Hillsborough. ^[2]

Shorthand was used as a means of rapid writing in [ancient Greece](#) ^[3], but a scheme akin to the modern form was developed in England beginning in the sixteenth century based on the way words were spelled. [Joseph Gales](#) ^[4], an English-born journalist who used shorthand in his work, moved to [Raleigh](#) ^[5] in September 1799 and established the [Raleigh Register](#) ^[6] in October. He soon was employed by the state not only to record the debates of the [General Assembly](#) ^[7] and other official meetings but also to print them. These documents, together with Gales's newspaper, gave North Carolinians very accurate records of much public business. By 1830 another newspaper editor, native Richard Creecy, had mastered "stenography."

In 1837 in England, [Isaac Pitman's phonetic system](#) ^[8] introduced the use of both sounds and abbreviations, speeding the process of getting the spoken word on paper. It was published in the United States twenty years later, and in 1858-59 Goldsboro lawyer [Needham B. Cobb](#) ^[2] diligently taught himself the system. He was the first-known stenographer in North Carolina and, after about a year, prepared a shorthand primer for the instruction of his eldest son, Collier.

After becoming a Baptist minister, Cobb employed his skill in preparing sermons and taking church minutes. During [Reconstruction](#) ^[9], at the trial of a former Confederate officer for alleged cruelty to [Union](#) ^[10] prisoners at Salisbury, efforts were made to get Cobb to record the proceedings. Convinced of the officer's innocence, he refused, and a reporter had to be brought in from the North. After the trial ended, Cobb taught stenography to a private class in [Raleigh](#) ^[5] and to ten students at [Wake Forest College](#) ^[11].

Reference:

N. B. Cobb, "The History of Shorthand Writing in North Carolina," *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina* (1900).

Additional Resources:

Joseph Gale, NC Historical Marker H-99: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&sv=H-99> ^[12]

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