

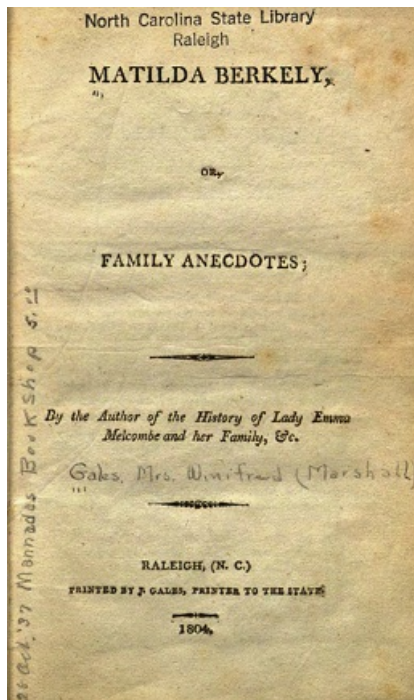
Matilda Berkely; or, Family Anecdotes ^[1]

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Matilda Berkely; or, Family Anecdotes

by Elizabeth Reid Murray, 2006



Title page of *Matilda Berkely, or, Family Anecdotes*, 1804.

^[2]*Matilda Berkely; or, Family Anecdotes* ^[3], by British-born Winifred Marshall Gales ^[4] (1761-1839), is considered the first novel published in North Carolina written by a resident of the state. The author's husband, *Raleigh Register* founder Joseph Gales ^[5], printed ^[6] the book in 1804 on his press in Raleigh. Instead of listing the novelist's name, the title page revealed only that the work was "By the Author of the History of Lady Emma Melcombe and her Family ^[7], &c." This earlier novel was published in 1787 in England, where the couple lived before moving to the United States in 1795.

The youngest daughter of a Newark-on-Trent family, Winifred Marshall began writing poems and stories as a child and by 17 had published her first novel. After Marshall's marriage in 1784 to Joseph Gales, the couple settled in Sheffield. There they opened a bookshop and published the liberal *Sheffield Register* until 1794, when Gales's activism in the Constitutional Reform movement necessitated his leaving England. They eventually immigrated to America, settling in Raleigh ^[8] in 1799. That year Gales issued the first number of his long-lived *Raleigh Register*. He soon opened a bookshop, importing a large part of its stock from England. Biographer Robert N. Elliott characterizes the Galeses' home as a center of social activity, noted for good conversation, quoting one of their visitors as crediting a large part of its attractiveness to Gales's "brilliant wife."

In Winifred Marshall Gales's written recollections of her parents, her description of her own English mother parallels some of the qualities with which she endows the fictional Matilda. The "strength of a sensible mind" saw her through "many trials," including separation by a great distance from part of her family; namely, daughter Winifred's removal from England to America. Twentieth-century reviewers described the book as typical of the English novels of the last half of the eighteenth century, "concerned with incidents of the *haut-monde* who looked down on the governesses and companions from the upper middle class."

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Additional Resources:

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