

Hilliard, "Nancy" Ann Segur ^[1]

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Hilliard, "Nancy" Ann Segur

by John Macfie, 1988

17 Oct. 1798–8 Nov. 1873



Nancy Ann Segur Hilliard. Image courtesy of UNC Libraries.

^[2]"Nancy" Ann Segur Hilliard, hotel keeper, was a native of [Granville County](#) ^[3], the daughter of William and Lucy Walker Hilliard. The family moved to Chapel Hill in 1817. During the 1830s and 1840s, Nancy was the proprietor of a boarding-house or inn previously run by [Orange County](#) ^[4] sheriff Thomas D. Watts and his wife Lucy. Located near the site of present Graham Memorial, it was known for a time as the Hilliard Hotel and then the Eagle. For years it was considered *the* hotel in town.

The Eagle catered mainly to student boarders who paid from eight to ten dollars a month for meals described as "too good for college boys." Generous to a fault, Miss Hilliard too often extended credit to students pleading lack of money. It was said that she had energy and pluck, enjoyed extraordinary popularity and success, and was a candid and kind counselor. She was an institution in her own time.

Adult patrons arrived by coach and consisted of traveling men, general visitors, and relatives of students. President [James K. Polk](#) ^[5], a graduate of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6], arrived on 31 May 1847, at the invitation of university president [David L. Swain](#) ^[7], to attend commencement. He and his entourage were housed in a wing of the Eagle especially built for the occasion.

Reportedly, in 1852 Miss Hilliard sold the Eagle and built a house of her own, a neat white structure nicknamed the "Crystal Palace," where she kept a few boarders. It stood on the lot now occupied by the Planetarium gardens. Still later, it is said, she was manager of the "North Carolina Railroad eating-house at [Company Shops](#) ^[8], now Burlington."

Miss Hilliard's fortunes declined sharply with the advent of the [Civil War](#) ^[9] and the closing of the university. In December 1869, the Crystal Palace was sold at auction for an unpaid debt of \$750.23, the buyer paying \$150.00. There followed a brief and disastrous attempt at hotel keeping in [Raleigh](#) ^[10]. She returned to Chapel Hill and was given a free room at "the old Hotel." Odd sums sent by former students kept her going for a while. Yet she died virtually destitute and was buried in a grave next to her mother, close by the Philanthropic lot. Thirteen years later, "certain alumni" erected a stone enscribed: "in grateful remembrance of her unflinching kindness and hospitality."

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Deed Records, Hillsborough.

Archibald Henderson, *The Campus of the First State University* (1949 [photograph]).

Louis R. Wilson, *Selected Papers of Cornelia Phillips Spencer* (1953).

Additional Resources:

Nancy Hilliard, Short bio in Documenting the American South: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/global/getBio.html?type=bio&id=pn0000741&name=Hilliard.%20Ann%20%22Nancy%22%20Segur> ^[11]

"Trustees in account with Ann S. Hillyard." University of North Carolina Papers (#40005), University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: <http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/exhibits/slavery/documents/12june1849.html> ^[12]

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Subjects:

[Biography](#) ^[13]

[UNC Press](#) ^[14]

[Women](#) ^[15]

Authors:

[Macfie, John](#) ^[16]

Origin - location:

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[Chapel Hill](#) ^[18]

[Raleigh](#) ^[19]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[20]

1 January 1988 | Macfie, John

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