

Webb, Sarah M. Norfleet ^[1]

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by B. W. C. Roberts, 1996

1788?–1850s?

Sarah M. Norfleet Webb, the earliest known female newspaper editor in North Carolina and perhaps the first in the United States, was the daughter of Elisha (1759–1811) and Ann Evans Norfleet. Although the dates of her birth and death are unknown, she was listed as sixty-one years old in the 1850 census and her name did not appear in the census for 1860.

She married, first, James Wills, a highly respected citizen of Edenton ^[2], on 7 May 1815, when she became his third wife. Their marriage bond records her given name as Sally. Wills edited the *State Gazette of North-Carolina* ^[3], which until 1797 was published in Edenton by his brother, Henry ^[4]. James Wills then was either editor or printer of the newspaper, which underwent several changes of name. After the death of her husband on 7 Aug. 1826, Sarah Wills became the editor of the *Edenton Gazette* ^[5]. Regrettably only three issues of this newspaper—26 Jan., 13 Mar., and 8 May 1827—survive with her name in the masthead. While editor she advertised that she was able to handle "Handbills and other Job Printing." The issue for 31 July 1827 lists J. H. Barclift as publisher "for N. Bruer." Nathaniel Bruer was Henry Wills ^[4]'s stepson, so some family association with the paper may have continued.

A marriage bond was issued on 2 Dec. 1830 for the marriage of Sarah Wills to John Webb.

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