

BATH

## One for the Books

In North Carolina's oldest town, the state's first library didn't start in a building. Instead, it was a collection of books shared among neighbors.

In 1700, English clergyman Thomas Bray saw trouble brewing in small towns around the New World: According to him, they were undereducated. They had no books! So Bray organized a collection of reading materials, mostly books and pamphlets, to be sent to communities across the colonies, including Bath, North Carolina's oldest town. The 1,000 books that Bray sent to Bath arrived at St. Thomas Episcopal Church before it even had a minister.

"This collection makes our state's first official lending library," says Laura Rogers, the manager at the Historic Bath State Historic Site.

These were no juicy page turners; they were mostly religious texts. They were also never housed in an official building. Instead, these volumes lived in people's homes, passed from hand to hand.

Today, only one title remains — Gilbert Towerson's *Application of the Church Catechism*

— which means it must not have been in as high demand as the others. Some examples of the library's other titles — like a 1686 edition of *The Gentlemen's Recreation*, a four-part manual on hunting, hawking, fowling, and fishing — are displayed at the Historic Bath State Historic Site.

— Eleanor Spicer Rice



### HISTORIC BATH STATE HISTORIC SITE

100 Harding Street  
Bath, NC 27808  
(252) 923-0525  
[historicsites.nc.gov/bath](http://historicsites.nc.gov/bath)

Visitors to historic Bath can see the nearly 300-year-old St. Thomas Episcopal Church, the oldest surviving church building in North Carolina. The books that Thomas Bray sent to the church's congregation made up the state's first lending library.

