

## Churton, William <sup>[1]</sup>

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1711-1768

See also: [Exploring North Carolina: History of Maps, Surveying, Cartography and Cartographers](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

William Churton began working as a surveyor and cartographer for the [Granville Land District](#) <sup>[3]</sup> beginning in 1748 soon after arriving in America from London, England. His English heritage dates back to the 12th century in the county of Cheshire. Part of the Churton family migrated to Mitre Court in London in the early 18th century, where William was born in 1711. William was the eldest child of William and Hannah Churton and left his family to begin a new life in America.

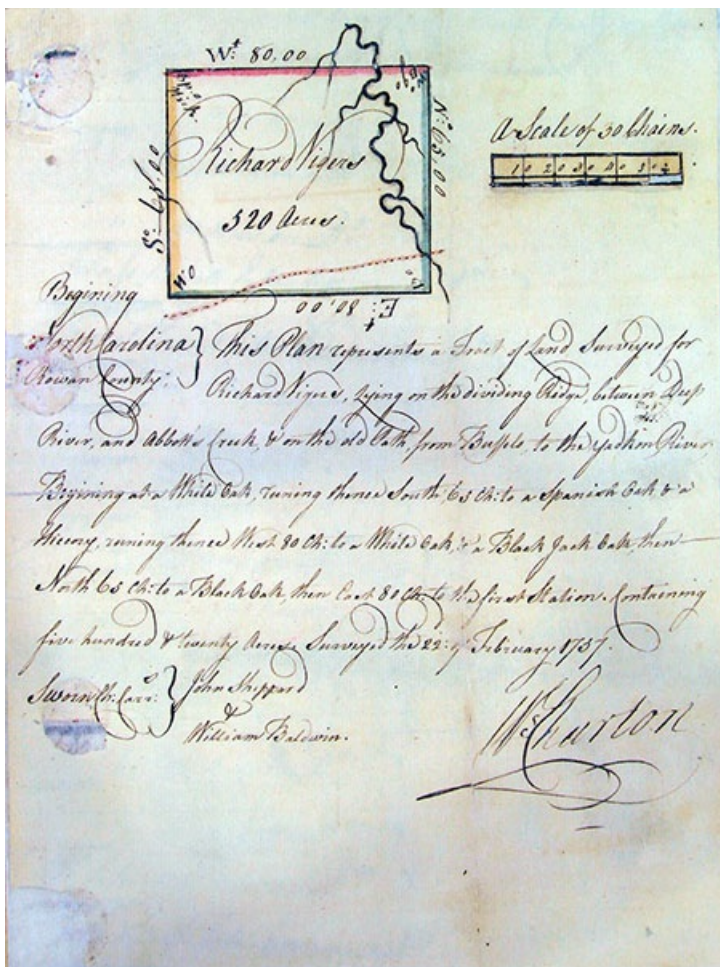


Image of original Rowan County land grant from 1757, surveyed by William Churton and bearing his signature. Item CR.085.408.1, Miscellaneous Land Records, State Archives of North Carolina.

His first job was witnessing papers in the Granville Land Office located in Edenton in the Spring of 1748. Soon thereafter he is assigned to survey some grants in the eastern counties of the province. Based on original records signed by Churton, his surveying activity is easily followed. However, in 1749, a plan to survey the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina (which is also the boundary line of the Granville District) was being estimated by a senior member of Granville's Land Office – [Edward Moseley](#). <sup>[4]</sup> It was Moseley who provided the estimates of effort and supplies required to extend the line from where William Byrd and a N.C. contingent stopped in 1728. Unfortunately, Edward Moseley died before the survey began. [Governor Gabriel Johnston](#) <sup>[5]</sup> notified Earl Granville that he ensured that both Churton and Daniel Weldon would continue to survey the line, despite their reluctance without Moseley being present. Meeting with the Virginia Commissioners (Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson), they began their effort extending the line for approximately 70 miles on August 19, 1749. Despite Moseley's estimate, the effort took more time (127 days) and money, and both the N.C. and Virginia team decided to end their effort December 24, 1749, due to the cold winter and rugged mountainous terrain.

In 1752, [Orange County](#) <sup>[6]</sup> was formed by Act of Assembly, and the Governor appointed William Churton as the first register of deeds. However, the location of the county seat (first erected on the east side of the Haw River in 1752) was in

flux until Churton surveyed a 663-acre tract on the north side of the Eno River in April 1754. The county seat was then established at Corbinton (today's Hillsborough). Soon thereafter, Rowan County was recently established in 1753. William Churton and Richard Viggers as trustees, held a 635 acre grant for Salisbury surveyed July 12, 1754.

William Churton established his home and office in what became Hillsborough, the county seat for Orange County. This locale allowed him a great location to work from – as he surveyed the newly expanded western lands of North Carolina.

Beginning in 1752, he also was appointed to survey a large tract of land for the Moravians. This arduous task began in November and continued into January of 1753, as he and a group of [Moravians](#) <sup>[7]</sup> looked for a suitable location to establish their new community. They began by surveying 10-tracts of land in the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains. However, the Moravians did not agree with these tracts being independent entities and wanted one contiguous tract of land. They found a vacant area which Churton and his team established as Wachovia, by surveying 19-contiguous tracts, totaling in all 98,925 acres. The Spangenburg Diary as well as the Moravian records provide detailed information about this trip. In addition, [Spangenburg](#) <sup>[8]</sup> described Churton as a “reasonable man” and “excessively scrupulous” when describing his surveying activities.

In the newly formed county seat of Orange County, Churton was the first register of deeds, as well as a Council Member, and Town Commissioner. He was given tracts of land in the town in exchange for the many services he had performed for the town. He established his office and home on the corner of Churton St. and Margaret Lane (known as Lot 4). The main north-south road from the Eno River to King Street was named in honor of Churton, and from King Street north past the Anglican Church was known as Church Street. Later, the entire north-south portion of the main street was named Churton Street.

From 1750s onwards, William Churton surveyed vacant land for individuals in the Granville District. Based on the final records, William Churton surveyed approximately 1,300 individual grants, primarily in Orange, but his work includes Rowan, Granville, Johnston, and some of the east-coast counties, totaling approximately 534,918 acres.

In 1763, following the death of Lord John Carteret, Earl Granville, the Land Office for the Granville District in Edenton closed and with it the ability to apply for vacant land in the Granville District ended. Despite the closing of the land office for new warrants, there was still work to do and Churton was employed for the remaining part of 1763. On June 19, 1763, William Churton purchased a home in Edenton fronting Water Street – known as “New town lot #5”. Edenton became his new residence, as he sold most of his land and home in Hillsborough. Unemployed in 1764, it appears that Churton worked on a map of North Carolina based on his many surveys and field notes.

Governor William Tryon recommended to the [General Assembly](#) <sup>[9]</sup> to allow William Churton to receive £155 to allow him to publish and print his map. The Assembly approved this at the November 1766 Session. Governor Tryon provided further background on this new map when writing Lord Hillsborough in the U.K. in a lengthy letter dated October 16, 1768. Tryon said Churton would “complete and make perfect the southern and maritime parts of the province,” and Tryon induced Churton, that he could “present it at the Board of Trade” in England, which Tryon added, “He gladly embraced my proposals.” It is this letter which provided another key date, whereby Tryon adds, “consequently in 1767 he made several journeys to the different parts of the sea board.” Unfortunately, when Churton began to survey the coastal areas in 1767, he discovered the lower section of his map to be so defective that he removed that portion.

On January 5th, 1768 William Churton wrote a will at his house in Edenton. Based on his actual signature on the will, his shaky handwriting suggests ill health. Unfortunately, the reason for his sickness, or the exact date of his death remains unknown. His will was probated Thursday March 17, 1768 at Chowan County Court (Edenton) by Richard Rome, one of the witnesses to his will. Following the defined bequests of the will, the executors liquidated the estate in Edenton, including selling his Edenton Town Lot. His will defined parts of the estate going to his brother John (clothing), part of his Orange County land to be divided between [Edmund Fanning](#) <sup>[10]</sup> and William Comb, and then another tract of land to go to Fanning. The remaining part of the estate was liquidated and proceeds went to his two sisters (Sarah and Dorothy) in England. His last wish was for his slave named Joe (will stated, “being a faithful servant to me”) to be set as a free man and to be provided with Churton’s remaining clothing. The estate settlement and subsequent court activity was all well-documented in Chowan County Court Minutes. The original estate papers containing every item of personal ownership (which were sold at a public venue) are also preserved in the State Archives. How or why Churton died at age 52 remains unknown.

Churton’s map was never published. [John Collet](#) <sup>[11]</sup> took some of Churton’s work and published a complete map of North Carolina in 1770. Churton’s legacy continued, as surveying the ever-changing Carolina coast continued throughout time. Another cartographer, the Frenchman [Claude J. Sauthier](#) <sup>[12]</sup>, continued Churton’s survey work. He provided ten detailed town maps of North Carolina between the years 1768 and 1770. Sauthier continued to survey the coast in 1771. He completed [a map of the coast](#) <sup>[13]</sup>, but it was lost at sea in a storm in 1806.

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In 2017, the North Carolina State Office of Archives and History erected a [Highway Historical Marker to William Churton](#) <sup>[14]</sup>. The marker is located in Hillsborough at US 70 Business/NC 86 (South Churton Street) just north of Eno River bridge.

## References:

Hofmann, Margaret M., The Roanoke News Co. (Weldon, NC) - The Granville District of North Carolina 1748-1763 Abstracts of Land Grants, Volume 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 – various years.

N.C. State Archives, Microfilm Z.5.4N – English Records Granville District Papers from the Marquis of Bath’s library in Longleat, Warminster, Wiltshire England – 1729-1780. Note: All of the State Line Survey information originates from unnumbered images of original letters from Gov. Gabriel Johnston to Lord John Carteret, Earl Granville.

Dunaway, Stewart E., Hillsborough N.C., History of Town Lots – The Complete Reference Guide (2012), LULU.com, ISBN 978-1-300-34110-9 – See Appendix B for Courthouse History (dates and locations, grant maps etc.)

State Archives of North Carolina. Granville District Land Grants, Microfilm, Orange Co., SSLG-86J (index to the actual grant image).

State Archives of North Carolina. Chowan County, Wills, William Churton (original).

State Archives of North Carolina. Chowan County Deeds, Microfilm, C.024.40006 – Books N-1, O-1, P-1 (1767-1773) – His slave was given housing by Joseph Blount, and records in a deed book found on microfilm, January 2, 1769 - Blount to Churton.

State Archives of North Carolina. Chowan County, Court Records, Chowan County Court of Pleas & Quarter Session, CR.024.301.6

State Archives of North Carolina. Chowan County, Estate Records, CR.024.508 – Churton.

Dunaway, Stewart E., William Churton - Colonial Surveyor of North Carolina (1711-1768) (2017), LULU.com, ISBN-978-1-365-82322-0, pg. 33 – provides all the details, maps, etc. for Churton’s Hillsborough Town Lots. Some of this information comes from the above book by Dunaway – History of Town Lots, Ibid, pg. 64 for Lot #3 his house and office, pgs. 70-77 for this other lots.

Haun, Weynette Parks, Orange County, North Carolina Court Minutes 1752-1761 Book 1, (1992) privately published.

Ballantyne, Archibald, Lord Carteret A Political Biography (1690-1763), Richard Bentley & Sons, U.K., 1887, p. 385, 387 – out of print, available on Books.Google.com

Chowan County Deed Office, Deed Book M-1, pgs 183-184.

Saunders, William, The Colonial Records of North Carolina, Vol. 7, Raleigh, NC, 1886, pg. 309

British Library, Cartographic Item Maps, K.Top.122.52 (UIN:BLL01004987620) – this IS Churton’s manuscript version of the “top part of NC”

Dunaway, Stewart E., Claude J. Sauthier and his maps of North Carolina, LULU.com, 2016, ISBN-978-1-365-03154-0 – Claude was a French Huguenot born in Strasbourg France (he was not from Switzerland), and his 10-town maps are priceless for researchers looking to Colonial records of these towns – Hillsborough, Bath, Newbern, Halifax, Edenton, Brunswick, Wilmington, Beaufort, Salisbury, Cross Creek.

S13882 US 9th Congress, 1805-1807 House Documents Accompanying a Bill Making Appropriations for ...1807, Washing, Ways, 1807., 8pp, MWA Copy. – William Tatham loses on board the Cutter Governor Williams sunk in the storm of September 1806...Sundry inestimable books, ... maps, charts...including (I believe) a manuscript map of North Carolina by Sauthier. Say in all...” The (I believe) is from the book. It is assumed that this “Sauthier” map is indeed the map referred to above – being Churton & Sauthier. This appropriation discussion was for surveying the coast of N.C.

#### **Additional resources:**

William Churton (G-136). North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program. <http://www.ncmarkers.com/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=G-136> <sup>[14]</sup>

#### **Subjects:**

[Biographies](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

[Cartographers and surveyors](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

[Colonial period \(1600-1763\)](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

[Public officials](#) <sup>[18]</sup>

#### **Authors:**

[Dunaway, Stewart](#) <sup>[19]</sup>

#### **Origin - location:**

[Chowan County](#) <sup>[20]</sup>

[Edenton](#) <sup>[21]</sup>

[Orange County](#) <sup>[22]</sup>

[Hillsborough](#) <sup>[23]</sup>

#### **Years:**

1711-1768

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**Links**

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