

## **Stephens, Samuel**<sup>[1]</sup>

# **SAMUEL STEPHENS**

**Governor: 1662-1664; 1667-1670**

by Dennis F. Daniels

Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History, 2005.

<https://www.dncr.nc.gov/about-us/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program><sup>[2]</sup>

See also: [Samuel Stephens](#)<sup>[3]</sup>, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*

Samuel Stephens (ca. 1629-1670), appointed in 1662 as “Commander of the Southern Plantation” and in 1667 the second governor of [Albemarle County](#)<sup>[4]</sup>, became leader of a colony suffering from disease and natural disasters. The colonists were divided into two camps: the anti-proprietary faction consisting mostly of pre-1663 charter settlers and the proprietary faction containing post-1663 charter settlers. To compound the situation, the [Lords Proprietors](#)<sup>[5]</sup> provided Stephens with confusing directives that increased tensions.

Stephens, the son of Richard and Elizabeth Piersey Stephens, was born in Virginia. The elder Stephens was a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses and Council. Stephens married [Frances Culpeper](#)<sup>[6]</sup> in 1652; they had no children. He owned vast acreage in Albemarle, including Roanoke Island, as well as a sizable estate in Virginia. One year prior to the implementation of the Carolina Charter of 1663, Stephens was appointed the “commander of the southern plantation.” His commission, issued by the Virginia Council and dated October 9, 1662, placed him in charge of the Albemarle region that became part of the Carolina grant to the Lords Proprietors. He remained as commander until the appointment of [William Drummond](#)<sup>[7]</sup> of Virginia as the first proprietary governor of Albemarle County in 1664. Stephens became the second governor by virtue of his October 8, 1667, commission from the proprietors.

Natural disasters and diseases created difficulties for the colonists during Stephens’ tenure. A hurricane devastated the Albemarle region in August 1667, destroying crops and buildings. The following year, a three-month drought followed by a month of excessive rain ruined crops. Another hurricane hit the region in 1669. To further aggravate misfortunes, diseases devastated the population and wiped out large numbers of livestock.

During Stephens’ administration, the Lords Proprietors made their restrictive land policies more liberal in response to a petition from the settlers requesting that land be granted in Albemarle on the same basis as in Virginia. The proprietors responded with the Great Deed of Grant giving the Albemarle settlers similar rights but soon thereafter rescinded many of those same rights. Legislation enacted by the assembly preventing colonists from collecting on debts or enforcing contracts and restricting the sale of imported goods caused problems for the governor.

Stephens apparently witnessed little dissension early in his tenure. In October 1668 it was reported that the colonists were “well-satisfied with Mr. Stephens for their governor.” Unfortunately, this situation did not last. The conditions became so vicious that some people drew their swords against the governor. However, according to Virginia’s Governor William Berkeley, Stephens withstood the challenges owing to his mild demeanor and did not punish his adversaries.

Stephens died in office around February or March 1670. In a March 1670 letter from Governor Berkeley to the Albemarle Council, Berkeley acknowledged Stephens’ death and referred to him as “a man of approved courage, great integrity, and a lover of the colony and had many other personal virtues which usually make men loved and desired by those that know them.” Stephens’ widow, Frances, married Berkeley in June of that year.

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