

Hasell, James (from Research Branch, NC OA&H) ^[1]

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JAMES HASELL

Governor: 1771

by Ansley Herring Wegner

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

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

See also: [James Hasell](#) ^[3], *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*

James Hasell (d. 1785) was the acting governor in the summer of 1771 after [William Tryon](#) ^[4] departed for his new post in New York and while [Josiah Martin](#) ^[5] was delayed due to illness. He served as president of the Council from 1760 to 1775, and in that capacity performed the duties of acting governor of North Carolina on several occasions. Son of merchant James Hasell, the younger Hasell was originally from Bristol, England. He immigrated to the American colonies where he lived briefly in Philadelphia before settling in [New Hanover County](#) ^[6], North Carolina prior to 1735. Hasell married twice, first to Susannah (or Sarah) Sampson and second to Ann Sophia Von Blade Durlace. He and his first wife had a son, James.

Acquiring over 2,000 acres and three Wilmington town lots by the 1740's, James Hasell was one of the largest landowners in [New Hanover County](#) ^[6]. Having served as a justice of the peace since 1739 and having risen to social prominence, Hasell caught the attention of Governor [Gabriel Johnston](#) ^[7]. In 1747 Johnston nominated Hasell to the royal Council; he was seated October 2, 1749, upon the death of [Edward Moseley](#) ^[8]. As a long-time member of the executive council, Hasell held the distinction of having been present at more meetings than any other member, attending 368 meetings, just over 80 percent of the meetings for which he was responsible. In addition to his dependability, Hasell had a distinguished career on the council, serving several governors who relied upon him and commended him for his advice and unwavering loyalty to the crown. Josiah Martin, in particular, found Hasell to be his most trusted confidant and tried to have him appointed lieutenant governor. Hasell was not timid in his leadership. As acting governor in January 1775, he terminated the Assembly due to its perceived revolutionary spirit.

Although he had no formal legal education, James Hasell enjoyed a respectable career on North Carolina's higher courts. He served several times as chief justice of the General Court, as well as of the supreme and superior courts. He was named chief baron of the Exchequer Court in September 1753, and held that office until the American Revolution, resigning twice, temporarily, for terms as chief justice.

James Hasell's hobby was book collecting, and during his lifetime he accumulated one of the largest libraries in North Carolina. Many of his books are now in the North Carolina Collection at the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) ^[9]. In his will, probated in 1785, Hasell left to his son James twenty pounds sterling with which to purchase mourning clothes, his own clothing, a gold watch, his riding horse, and the family "pictures." He left his stepdaughter Ann the same amount of money designated for mourning clothes. To his wife, Sophia, he left the rest of his estate, including over 12,000 acres of land. The property was confiscated after his death, but returned to the heirs in 1802.

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