

Alexander, John ^[1]

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by Thomas C. Parramore, 1979

ca. 1738–1799

John Alexander, Anglican clergyman, was a native of Northern Ireland. He was educated at the grammar school in Shrewsbury, England, and was received about 1760 into the ministry of the [Presbyterian](#) ^[2] church in Ireland. In 1762 he received from his church permission to go as a missionary to the colony of North Carolina, and later that year he began preaching to congregations in what is now [Pitt County](#) ^[3].

Not long after coming to the colony, Alexander was converted to the [Church of England](#) ^[4] and applied for ordination. Upon the receipt of adverse reports about him, the church denied his application, and Alexander moved southward in hopes of finding support for his ambition. He made his residence at Sunbury, Ga., among a settlement of Puritans from New England and a handful of Anglicans. Sunbury Anglicans assisted Alexander in a new application for orders, and in 1766 he went to London and received ordination and a promise of support from the [Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts](#) ^[5] (SPG). He returned to Sunbury for two years but became embroiled in personal difficulties, lost his income from the SPG, and was in 1768 obliged to leave Sunbury in search of more hospitable churchmen.

After an unsuccessful effort to locate at Purrysburg, S.C., Alexander continued northward to [Hertford County](#) ^[6], N.C., where St. Barnabas parish, created coterminously with the county in 1759, had been without a minister since that time. An application to [Governor William Tryon](#) ^[7], then working to strengthen the Anglican position in the colony, procured the parish for Alexander; he appears to have settled on [glebe](#) ^[8] land near the chapel of St. John's. His difficulties with congregations, perhaps brought on by what was described as "an over temper," continued to plague him in St. Barnabas and were compounded by the vestry's increasing balkiness in paying his salary. He may have continued to preach for a time during the [Revolution](#) ^[9], but by the 1780s he had given up trying to hold together the disintegrating Anglican congregations under his charge and had retired from the ministry. In 1786 he acquired a farm in adjacent [Bertie County](#) ^[10] and moved there to spend the remainder of his life.

Alexander would have nothing to do with the struggling new [Protestant Episcopal Church](#) ^[11] in the years following the war. He wrote into his will of 1799 a bitter indictment of the decline of "the Manly, Masculine Voice of Orthodoxy" and "the senseless Rant of Whining Fanaticism." He left behind a reputation for being, in Governor Tryon's words, "a sensible excentrical Genius"; long years after his death it was observed by Duncan C. Winston that the parson had been "a prominent man in his day and of some peculiar characteristics."

The name of his wife, who appears to have preceded him to the grave, is not known, but he had daughters named Elizabeth, Martha, and Rachel.

References:

Thomas C. Parramore, "John Alexander, Anglican Missionary," *North Carolina Historical Review* 43 (1966).

Additional Resources:

Comprehensive Architectural Survey of Hertford County, North Carolina, NCDCCR:
<http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/surveyreports/HertfordCountySurvey-2011.pdf> ^[12]

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[13]

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Authors:

[Parramore, Thomas C.](#) ^[15]

Origin - location:

[Bertie County](#) ^[16]

[Hertford County](#) ^[17]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[18]

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[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/alexander-john> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/presbyterian-church-0> [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/pitt> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/church-england> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/society-propagation-gospel-foreign-> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/hertford> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/governors/tryon> [8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/glebes> [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/american-revolution> [10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/bertie> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/protestant-episcopal-church-publish> [12] <http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/surveyreports/HertfordCountySurvey-2011.pdf> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/clergy> [15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/parramore-thomas-c> [16] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-29> [17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-32> [18] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>