

Allen, Nathaniel ^[1]

Allen, Nathaniel

by Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, 1979; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, April 2023

See also: [Allen, William](#) ^[2]

ca. 1755–1805



House of Nathaniel Allen and Joseph Hewes. March 2023. Located on West King Street in Edenton, North Carolina. Image courtesy of Google Maps.

^[3]Nathaniel Allen, planter, promoter, and legislator, was a resident of [Edenton](#) ^[4] and an owner of property in [Chowan](#) ^[5] and [Tyrrell](#) ^[6] counties. A nephew of [Joseph Hewes](#) ^[7]—a North Carolina signer of the [Declaration of Independence](#) ^[8] and naval promoter during the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[9]—Allen owned his uncle's former home on West King Street in Edenton from 1794 to his death. In 1788 he was elected to the North Carolina convention to consider ratification of the federal Constitution. In 1795 the [General Assembly](#) ^[10] chose him to be councilor of state for a one-year term, and he returned to [Raleigh](#) ^[11] once more in 1802 as a member of the House of Commons from Edenton. Although Allen was nominally an Episcopalian, the Reverend Charles Pettigrew once referred to him as an unbeliever. Allen was educated. He was noted as "Esqr." in the 1790 census, which denoted that he studied or practiced law. His education and scientific knowledge are further displayed in his personal letters. Allen was also a proponent of civil programs in Edenton; he supported a fire company in 1791 and an academy in 1800. His most outstanding achievement was the development of [Tyrrell County](#) ^[6], a swampy area lying across Albemarle Sound from Edenton. Through the medium of the Lake Company, Allen and his partners, [Josiah Collins](#) ^[12], and Samuel and Luther Dickinson, began in about 1785 to secure land grants and purchase other lands around Lake Phelps and north to the sound, until they held more than fifty thousand acres. A survey of this land revealed great resources of timber and rich soil if the swamp could be drained. The Lake Company imported a hundred enslaved people from Guinea in 1786 to dig, from the lake to the Scuppernong River, a seven-mile canal that when completed afforded drainage, transportation, and power for mills. To induce settlement, the company persuaded a clergyman, [Charles Pettigrew](#) ^[13], to move there in 1789. The culture of rice flourished around Lake Phelps for some years, together with that of wheat and forest products. The rice was shipped to New York and the West Indies directly from the mouth of the Scuppernong River. The county grew so rapidly in population and wealth that in 1802 it was divided in two, Tyrrell and [Washington](#) ^[14]. As an example of the company's rapidly accumulating wealth, by 1799 it rented to three tenants and

owned two barns, a stable, a machine house, a sawmill, a [gristmill](#) ^[15], a warehouse, and two dwelling houses.

Allen was an enslaver. The 1790 census lists him as the enslaver of 17 people, and by 1800 he had enslaved 13 people. Allen was married prior to May 1791, at which time Charles Pettigrew congratulated him and his wife on the birth of a daughter. In 1805, Allen became incapacitated from rheumatism; he died shortly after 11 Nov. His wife had died earlier, for his will names only a daughter, Mary; two sisters; Hannah Gill of Philadelphia and Mary Davis of Alexandria; and three sons, Francis, Bonaparte, and [William](#) ^[2]. After a small house on his town lot was left to an enslaved woman, half of the estate went to his daughter and the other half was divided among his three sons. He acknowledged his sons as "natural sons . . . begotton on the body of . . . Fanny Coulston," and to her he left a portion of his household and kitchen furniture.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

This person enslaved and owned other people. Many Black and African people, their descendants, and some others were enslaved in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865. It was common for wealthy landowners, entrepreneurs, politicians, institutions, and others to enslave people and use enslaved labor during this period. To read more about the enslavement and transportation of African people to North Carolina, visit <https://aahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-0> ^[16]. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery> ^[17]. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

References:

Chowan and Tyrrell County Records (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

S. M. Lemmon, ed., *The Pettigrew Papers*, vol. 1, 1685–1818 (1971).

"Nathaniel Allen." *Second Census of the United States* 1800. Edenton, Chowan, North Carolina. National Archives Microfilm Publication M32. Roll 30. Page 116. Image 124. Accessed April 13, 2023 from Ancestry.com.

"North Carolina: Introduction, First Census Act, Summary Tables, & County Tables: Edenton District, Bertie County - Fayette District, Robeson County." *1790 Census: Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790*. United States Census Bureau. 1790. Accessed April 13, 2023 at: <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1907/dec/heads-of-families.html> ^[18].

Additional Resources:

Somerset, NC Historic Sites: <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/somerset/history-somerset.htm> ^[19]

Edenton (N.C.) Papers, 1717-1937, UNC Chapel Hill Libraries:
<http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Edenton%28N.C.%29Papers.html> ^[20]

Image Credit:

"103 W. King Street: Edenton, North Carolina." Google Maps. March 2023. Accessed April 13, 2023 at <https://goo.gl/maps/zJqBP43yx73HbRgw9> ^[3].

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[21]

[Planters](#) ^[22]

Authors:

[Lemmon, Sarah McCulloh](#) ^[23]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#).^[24]

1 January 1979 | Lemmon, Sarah McCulloh

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/allen-nathaniel>

Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/allen-nathaniel> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/allen-william-0> [3] <https://goo.gl/maps/zJqBP43yx73HbRgw9> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/edenton> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/chowan> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/tyrrell> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/hewes-joseph> [8] http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/american-revolution> [10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/general-assembly> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/raleigh> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/collins-josiah-sr> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/pettigrew-charles> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/washington> [15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/gristmills> [16] <https://aahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-0> [17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery> [18] <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1907/dec/heads-of-families.html> [19] <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/somerset/history-somerset.htm> [20] <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Edenton%28N.C.%29Papers.html> [21] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [22] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/planters> [23] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/lemmon-sarah> [24] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>