

Allen, Nathaniel ^[1]

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Allen, Nathaniel

by Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, 1979

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ca. 1755–1805

Nathaniel Allen, planter, promoter, and legislator, was a resident of [Edenton](#) ^[3] and an owner of property in [Chowan](#) ^[4] and [Tyrrell](#) ^[5] counties. A nephew of [Joseph Hewes](#) ^[6]—a North Carolina signer of the [Declaration of Independence](#) ^[7] and naval promoter during the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[8]—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](#) ^[9] chose him to be councilor of state for a one-year term, and he returned to [Raleigh](#) ^[10] 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. It is not known how he acquired the excellent education and the scientific knowledge displayed in his letters. That he was a civic-minded leader of Edenton is demonstrated by his support of a fire company in 1791 and an academy in 1800. His most outstanding achievement was the development of [Tyrrell County](#) ^[5], a swampy area lying across Albemarle Sound from Edenton. Through the medium of the Lake Company, Allen and his partners, [Josiah Collins](#) ^[11] 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 slaves 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](#) ^[12], 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](#) ^[13]. 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](#) ^[14], a warehouse, and two dwelling houses.

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 a female slave, 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.

References:

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

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

Additional Resources:

Somerset, NC Historic Sites: <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/somerset/history-somerset.htm> ^[15]

Edenton (N.C.) Papers, 1717-1937, UNC Chapel Hill Libraries:
<http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Edenton%28N.C.%29Papers.html> ^[16]

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