

## Ashe, Samuel <sup>[1]</sup>

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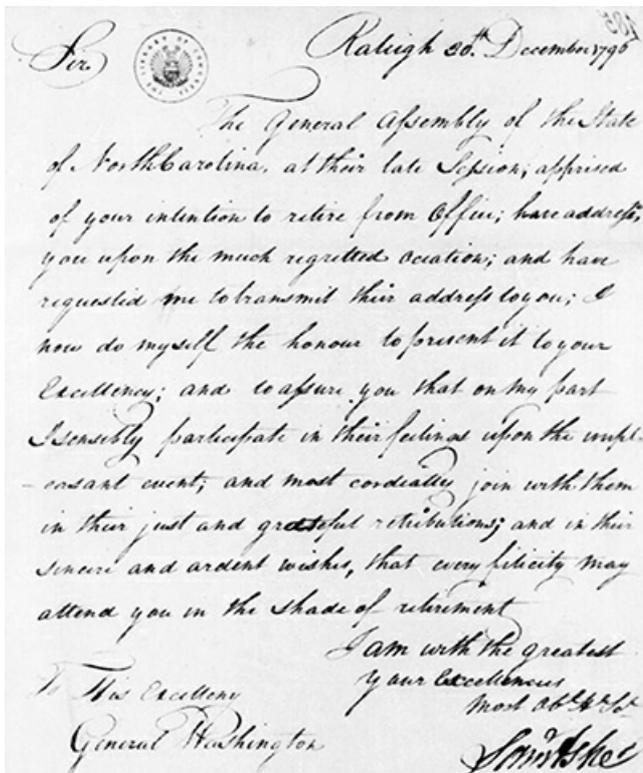
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## Ashe, Samuel

by Heustis P. Whiteside, 1979

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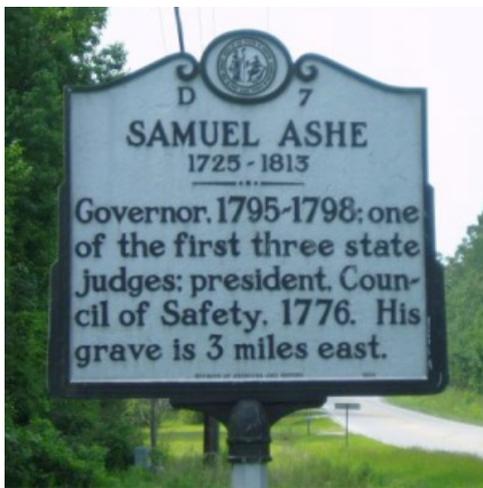


Letter from Samuel Ashe to George Washington, December 1796. Image from the Library of Congress.

<sup>[3]</sup>Samuel Ashe, judge and [governor](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, was born near Bath, where his father, [John Baptista Ashe](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, was speaker in the assembly, representing the Beaufort Precinct. His father and his mother, Elizabeth Swann, moved to the [Cape Fear](#) <sup>[6]</sup> region, where Samuel's brother [John](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, later general, [Stamp Act](#) <sup>[8]</sup> patriot, soldier, and colonial legislator, was born. Samuel's parents died before he was ten and he was raised by his uncle, [Sam Swann](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, head of the Popular party and speaker of the assembly.

After being educated in law, Ashe returned to the [Wilmington](#) <sup>[10]</sup> district and became assistant attorney for the Crown. Notwithstanding this close British alliance, he was one of the first prominent men to become a zealous patriot, organizing revolutionary groups as early as 1774, when the [colonial](#) <sup>[11]</sup> governor refused to convene the legislature. Ashe and seven others were appointed by the people to prepare a notice urging that the counties elect delegates to meet 20 Aug. at Johnston Court House, in what became the first revolutionary convention held in the state. The next January, Ashe was made a member of [New Hanover](#) <sup>[12]</sup>'s [committee of safety](#) <sup>[13]</sup>. Later that year he became a member of the [provincial congress](#) <sup>[14]</sup>. In August 1776, as president of the [council of safety](#) <sup>[15]</sup>, he organized an expedition under [General Griffith Rutherford](#) <sup>[16]</sup> against the Indians. At the [Halifax](#) <sup>[17]</sup> congress of 13 Nov. 1776, Ashe was appointed to the committee to frame the [North Carolina Constitution](#) <sup>[18]</sup>. One of the first acts of [Governor Richard Caswell](#) <sup>[19]</sup>, once the constitution was adopted, was to appoint Ashe as judge to hold the first court under the authority of the State of North Carolina.

The first legislature under the new constitution elected Ashe speaker of the senate; that legislature also made him presiding judge of the state court. He served in this capacity until 1795, when he was elected governor, and held the governorship for three terms. It is interesting to note that just as Samuel was the first judge to hold court in North Carolina by popular decree, his brother, General [John Ashe](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, was the first to receive a military commission at the hands of the people.



NC historical marker commemorating the life of Samuel Ashe. Click on the image to read more about Governor Ashe.

<sup>[20]</sup>Although early in life he was a strong Federalist <sup>[21]</sup>, Ashe later stood warmly for states' rights <sup>[22]</sup> and became ardently Jeffersonian. Always interested in education, he served on the board of Innes Academy <sup>[23]</sup> in Wilmington and was president of the board of trustees of The University of North Carolina <sup>[24]</sup>. Ashe married first a cousin, Mary Porter, to whom were born three sons, John Baptista, Cincinnatus, and Samuel. John Baptista, after a distinctive military career, was speaker of the house and a member of the Continental and U.S. Congresses; he was elected governor but died before being inaugurated. After the death of his first wife, Ashe married Mrs. Elizabeth Jones Merrick, by whom he had several children; only one, Thomas, lived to maturity.

Although no portrait is known to exist, Samuel Ashe is described by James Sprunt <sup>[25]</sup>, in a quotation from G. J. McRee, as being "of stalwart frame, endowed with practical good sense, a profound knowledge of human nature, and an energy that eventually raised him to the bench and the post of governor." Asheville (previously Morristown), Asheboro, and Ashe County <sup>[26]</sup> were named in his honor. He died at Rocky Point, Pender County <sup>[27]</sup>, where his grave is well marked and kept in the cemetery of his once lovely plantation, The Neck.

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Samuel Ashe to George Washington, Raleigh, December 30, 1796. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress*. American Memory. Library of Congress. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collid=mgw4&fileName=gwpape110.db&recNum=448> <sup>[3]</sup> (accessed February 25, 2013).

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