

Baker, Laurence ^[1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1979

1745–1805

Laurence Baker, *Revolutionary War* ^[2] patriot, was born at Buckland, the estate of his parents, Henry Baker and Catherine Booth. The first of his family in America was Henry Baker, who settled Buckland in what was then Nansemond County, Va., in the seventeenth century. When the line was surveyed between Virginia and North Carolina in 1728, Buckland fell in *Chowan County* ^[3] in the latter colony. Henry Baker II, realizing that his plantation would be in North Carolina, made a present to *William Byrd* ^[4], chief of the Virginia Line Commissioners, in the hope that Byrd would help him retain the surveyorship of Nansemond County. Later county divisions placed Buckland in *Hertford County* ^[5] in 1759 and finally in *Gates County* ^[6] in 1779. An old armorial seal given to Laurence Baker by his kinsman, Laurence Baker of "Shoal Bay," Isle of Wight County, Va., bears the arms of the Bakers of County Kent. The seal was brought to America by the immigrant ancestor of the Bakers, and, as Buckland is the name of a parish in Kent near Dover, it is plausible that Henry named his new home after his old parish in England.

There is little information available regarding the early life of Laurence Baker. His father died in 1770, and his brother William, having inherited Buckland, resettled on a plantation called Coles Hill not far away. Laurence did not appear in public life until the Revolution. He was a delegate to the Hillsborough convention, 21 Aug. 1775, and was appointed a member of the safety committee for the *Edenton* ^[7] District. He was a delegate to the *Halifax* ^[8] congress, April 1776, and was appointed major in the Continental Army. Hertford again sent him as delegate to the Halifax convention in November 1776, but he resigned to prepare for active military service. According to his son, he served as a colonel under *Colonel Jonas Johnston* ^[9] and *General Benjamin Lincoln* ^[10] at the *Battle of Stono* ^[11], where he "acquitted himself like a brave man."

After the war, Baker served for a time as general of state troops. In 1778 he was a member of a commission to mark the site for a court house in the proposed new county of *Gates* ^[6]; he served as clerk of court for Gates until his death. In 1801 he was the winner of the lottery held by *The University of North Carolina* ^[12] to raise funds for the completion of South Building.

Baker first married Anne Jones, the daughter of Albridgeton Jones of Southampton County, Va., and his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of John Simmons. Anne Jones Baker died about the time Baker left for active service during the war. Later, he married Anna Maria Burgess, the daughter of the Reverend *Thomas Burges* ^[13], the last *Church of England* ^[14] clergyman in *Halifax County* ^[15]. By his first wife, Baker fathered three children: Simmons J.; Elizabeth, the wife of Joseph Harvey; and Agatha, who never married. Three more children were born to the second marriage: John Burgess, member of the legislature from Hertford and later Gates; Maria, wife of Richard Smith of Scotland Neck; and Martha, who married Dr. Cary Whitaker of Enfield.

Baker's will, dated 6 Sept. 1805, was probated in Gates County in 1807.

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