

Buncombe, Edward ^[1]

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by Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, 1979

1742–May 1778

Edward Buncombe, planter and officer in the Continental Line in the Revolutionary War ^[2], was born on the West Indian island of St. Christopher, of English ancestry. His father, Thomas Buncombe, was a planter; he and his wife, Esther, had four children, of whom Edward was the second. Joseph Buncombe, brother of Thomas, owned land in North Carolina that he bequeathed to Edward. In about 1768, Edward left St. Christopher to make his permanent home in what was then Tyrrell County ^[3], on Albemarle Sound. Erecting a residence called Buncombe Hall ^[4] at the present site of the community of Chesson, he became noted for his hospitality, as recorded, for instance, by Josiah Quincy in 1773 (the editor of Quincy's journal identifies the host erroneously as Richard Buncombe). The house was still standing as late as 1874. Buncombe eventually owned four square miles of land and at least one trading vessel, the *Buncombe*, which was registered at Port Roanoke ^[5].

Buncombe served the colony as a justice of the peace and as commander of the Tyrrell County militia regiment. He supported Governor William Tryon ^[6] in 1771 against the Regulators ^[7] but was not called into service. As the Revolution ^[2] approached, Buncombe Hall was the scene of a conference held on 4 Apr. 1774 at which Buncombe, John Harvey ^[8], and Samuel Johnston ^[9] discussed a decision to call an assembly in defiance of the royal governor. This assembly, the first such in the colonies, met at New Bern 25 Aug. 1774.

Buncombe was elected colonel of the Tyrrell County militia on 9 Sept. 1775 and transferred to the Fifth Regiment of North Carolina troops in the Continental Line on 17 Apr. 1776; there he was assigned to the brigade of General Francis Nash ^[10]. His colonelcy was confirmed by the Continental Congress ^[11] 7 May 1776. The brigade served at Charleston, S.C., until March 1777, when it marched north to join General George Washington ^[12]. At Trenton, Buncombe served as president of a court martial on 22 Aug. 1777, and at Philadelphia he was named field officer for the day on 26 Aug. 1777. He also signed a petition, together with other North Carolina colonels, asking the state delegation to the Continental Congress to protest the appointment of a Dr. Hand of Pennsylvania to replace Carolinian Brigadier General James Moore ^[13], deceased.

Buncombe fought with his regiment at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. He was severely wounded 4 Oct. at Germantown and left for dead. Recognized by a former schoolmate in the British army, he was removed to Philadelphia and paroled. Colonel Alex Martin hoped to exchange British prisoners for him, but the exchange was never accomplished. Without funds for proper medical attention (he had paid many military expenses out of his own pocket) and unable to return home, Buncombe failed to make a complete recovery; in May 1778, while sleepwalking, he fell down a flight of stairs, reopened his wound, and bled to death. He was interred in the graveyard of Christ Church parish, Philadelphia. The grave is not marked, and the parish register lists him as Cornelius Buncombe.

In 1791, Buncombe County ^[14] was created in North Carolina and named for Edward Buncombe. Felix Walker ^[15], U.S. congressman (1817–23) from that county, was responsible for introducing into American usage the term "bunkum," later shortened to "bunk."

Buncombe was an Anglican by faith. He was married on the island of St. Christopher to Elizabeth Dawson Taylor on 10 Apr. 1766. They had three children: Elizabeth Taylor (b. 11 Mar. 1767), who married John Goelet of New York on 23 Oct. 1784 and eventually returned to live at Buncombe Hall; Thomas (b. 3 Feb. 1769), and Hester (mentioned only in Buncombe's will).

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Tyrrell County records (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

John H. Wheeler, *Reminiscences and Memoirs of North Carolina* (1883–84).

Additional Resources:

"Buncombe Hall." N.C. Highway Historical Marker B-23, N.C. Office of Archives & History.

<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=B-23> [4] (accessed May 14, 2013).

Col. Edward Buncombe, UNC-Asheville:

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