

Caswell, Benjamin ^[1]

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by Charles R. Holloman, 1979

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Benjamin Caswell, planter, revolutionary army officer, merchant, county official, and state legislator, was born at Joppa, Md., the fifth son of Richard Caswell ^[2] the elder and Christian Dallam. He attended the parish school at St. John's (Anglican ^[3]) Church at Joppa until his parents migrated to North Carolina. Thereafter, his education was provided by family members and local schoolmasters.

Caswell married Martha Singleton, daughter of Samuel and Hannah Singleton of Dobbs County ^[4] and sister to Captain Spyers Singleton ^[5], who became noted as a Continental army officer and, after the Revolution, as a prominent businessman of Craven County ^[6]. The marriage took place before December 1762, at which time the will of Samuel Singleton named Caswell as testator's son-in-law. Caswell and his wife settled on a plantation about four miles south of present Snow Hill, Greene County ^[7]. The site is still identifiable by a small stream called Caswell's Branch and also by a site on nearby Great Contentnea Creek, which has been known as Ben Caswell's Landing since colonial times. The couple had several children. Although widespread destruction of local records leaves the report of these children incomplete, records of sons Samuel, Matthew, and Benjamin William and of a daughter, Sarah Rebecca, have been found.

Caswell's public services included periods as a justice of Dobbs County and several terms as sheriff of Dobbs (1774–77, 1780–84, and 1787–91). He served in the House of Commons in the General Assembly of 1781. He was active in the colonial militia of Johnston County ^[8] and later was a lieutenant in the Dobbs militia; he was captain of a Dobbs militia company at the Battle of Alamance ^[9] in 1771 and at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge ^[10] in 1776. During the period 1777–79, he was captain of the light horse in the state regiment, a select force established by Governor Richard Caswell to guard the seat of state government, the governor's person, the General Assembly when in session, and the board of war ^[11]. It also served as a recruiting and training unit for officers sent as replacements to the Continental regiments. In 1781, Caswell is shown on a list of disabled persons who volunteered for service when Kinston was under attack by British forces marching from Wilmington.

Caswell is occasionally noted as a merchant of Dobbs County, sometimes alone, sometimes associated with his brother-in-law, Spyers Singleton, and sometimes associated with Benjamin Sheppard, who resided at present Snow Hill.

Caswell died in November 1791, according to the last accounting returned for the sheriff of Dobbs County. His wife had died in 1790. Both were buried in the old cemetery close to the site of their former home, near present Snow Hill.

References:

Caswell family record collection in the possession of Charles R. Holloman, Raleigh.

Richard Caswell Papers (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Family records, 1712–1790, Richard Caswell family Bible (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Hillsborough District Superior Court Records (Case papers entitled The Governor vs. the Heirs of Richard Caswell) (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Talmage C. Johnson and Charles R. Holloman, *The Story of Kinston and Lenoir County* (1954).

New Bern District Superior Court Records (Several sets of case papers including those of Caswell family members and their heirs and estates, 1760–1808) (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

William L. Saunders and Walter Clark, eds., *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 8–25 (1890–1906).

Additional Resources:

"CHAPTER LVII: An Act to Empower Ethelred Ruffin, Thomas Branton, Willoughby Williams and Hymeric Hooker, the Securities of Benjamin Caswell, Late Sheriff of the County of Dobbs, to Collect and Account for the Taxes Due From the Inhabitants of the Said County for the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-Nine." *The State Records of North Carolina* vol. 25. Goldsboro, N.C.: Nash Brothers. 1906. 111-112.<http://books.google.com/books?id=4QQMAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA111#v=onepage&q&f=false> ^[12] (accessed January 6, 2014)

Dobbs County Manuscripts, PC.1912. State Archives of North Carolina.

http://www.ncdcr.gov/Portals/26/PDF/findingaids/pdf/pc_1912_dobbs_county_manuscripts.pdf [13] (accessed January 6, 2014)

Singleton v. Odgen, Administrators of Caswell. 121-122. *North Carolina Reports: Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of North Carolina, Volume 5 1804-1810*. [Raleigh, N.C.]: E. M. Uzzell & Co. 1910.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=xXc3AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA121#v=onepage&q&f=false> [14] (accessed January 6, 2014)

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