

Caswell, Martin ^[1]

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by Charles R. Holloman, 1979

15 Feb. 1733–ca. June 1789

Martin Caswell, colonial planter, county official, and colonel in the revolutionary militia of Dobbs County, was the third son of [Richard Caswell](#) ^[2] the elder and his wife, Christian Dallam, and was a brother of Governor [Richard Caswell](#) ^[3]. Martin was born at Joppa, Md., and received his early education in the parish school of St. John's (Anglican) Church there. When he was fourteen years old, his family migrated to New Bern and shortly thereafter settled near present-day Kinston. He received further education from his parents and older brothers and served an apprenticeship as assistant in the office of the clerk of the court of [Johnston County](#) ^[4].

At the age of twenty-one, Caswell became sheriff of Johnston County; he served from 1754 to 1756. He became a justice of the Johnston County Court in 1756 and continued to serve as a justice for [Dobbs County](#) ^[5] when Dobbs was formed from eastern Johnston in 1759. In October 1763 he gave up the office of justice to become clerk of the court of Dobbs upon the death of Charles Young, former clerk of Johnston and first clerk of Dobbs. Caswell held this post for the next twenty-six years; accordingly, his tenure in the office covered almost the entire period of Dobbs County's existence. Until shortly before the [Revolution](#) ^[6], the clerk of the county court was also the register of deeds. The position was one of great influence in local government, inasmuch as the clerk was usually called upon to recommend persons to the royal governor for justices and other county offices.

Caswell held a considerable acreage but was not a wealthy man: his property was valued at £4,045 on a county-wide list of taxable property compiled in the year 1780.

Caswell became active in the [colonial militia](#) ^[7] when he was sixteen years old. By 1761 he was captain of a company in the Dobbs militia, and he served at the [Battle of Alamance](#) ^[8] in 1771. He was lieutenant colonel in 1776 at the [Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge](#) ^[9] and became colonel in 1779.

In about 1754, Caswell married, probably in Johnston County (the public records of Johnston for that period have been burned). The maiden name of his wife has not been found, but a deed of record in [Pitt County](#) ^[10] shows that her given name was Nancy. The couple had several children of whom knowledge is meager because Dobbs County records have also been burned. The names of six of their children have been proved from scattered record sources: Martin, Jr., James, Francis, William, Mary, and Nancy.

A note of Caswell's death during the summer of 1789 is of record. His name as clerk of the court of Dobbs disappears from Dobbs County Court transcripts sent to the superior court for the New Bern District in June 1789. The place of his burial is not definitely known, but it is highly probable that he was buried in the Caswell family cemetery at The Hill, where his mother and father, according to their family Bible record, were buried. Nancy Caswell survived him for many years.

References:

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Origin - location:

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