

DuBois, John ^[1]

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DuBois, John

by Vernon O. Stumpf, 1986

ca. 1700–1768

John DuBois, landowner in North Carolina and New York, [Wilmington](#) ^[2] merchant and captain of a fleet of ships, and colonial official, was probably of [Huguenot](#) ^[3] stock and born either in New York or Virginia. He lived on Market Street near the court house in [Wilmington](#) ^[2]. In 1754 the town governors ordered that all future surveys of Wilmington were to be made beginning at the southeast corner of DuBois's home. In 1758 he was one of the commissioners appointed to supervise the construction of St. James Church in Wilmington; two years later he was assigned the same position for the building of a prison and an office for the sheriff. The assembly also named him a commissioner to supervise the pilotage on the river. During 14–22 July 1757 one of his ships delivered ordnance to strengthen [Fort Johnston](#) ^[4], which guarded the entrance into the [Cape Fear River](#) ^[5].

DuBois probably was a man of strong opinions for he seems to have been a stern slave master and father. Respected by many of his fellow merchants, he was one of the signers of a letter from Wilmington merchants to [Governor Tryon](#) ^[6] concerning the [Stamp Act](#) ^[7] proceedings. Apparently Tryon had interpreted their earlier comments about the seizure of two ships by [Captain Jacob Lobb](#) ^[8] as criticism, but after receiving the letter he forgave them for casting aspersions on him in connection with the proposed act.

It appears that DuBois was married several times. His will refers to a monthly clock he had given to a nephew, Caleb Grainger, because it was once owned by his third wife who was an aunt of young Caleb. The names of the first three wives have not been discovered; his fourth wife, Jean, was one of his executors and the mother of at least two of his children. During the [American Revolution](#) ^[9] Mrs. Jean DuBois and a Mrs. McNeill and their families were ordered by the [Council of Safety](#) ^[10] in Wilmington to leave the city within eight days of the order, dated 15 June 1776. Despite the fact that John DuBois, Jr., was a member of the safety committee, there seems to be no record that he tried to help her. But he may have had some influence with the patriot governor, who gave Mrs. DuBois permission to return to Wilmington in 1777.

Apparently John DuBois, Sr., died before 1 Mar. 1768 as [Archibald Maclaine](#) ^[11], one of the witnesses of the will, appeared that day before Governor Tryon and swore that DuBois was of sound mind when he made his will on 13 Sept. 1767. The same year DuBois had eight living children, five sons and three daughters. Three sons—Peter, Walter, and John—were of legal majority; the other two sons—Isaac and James—were minors. Their sisters were Magdalene-Margaret, Margaret, and Anna-Jean. The minor children were left in the care of DuBois's fourth wife. The three oldest sons and Mrs. DuBois, with [Lewis Henry](#) ^[12] and [Moses John De Rosset](#) ^[13], were made guardians of the children and executors of the will. Peter and Walter, the oldest sons, were prosperous and so were left money rather than land by their father. John received lots in Wilmington, a plantation on Smith's Creek, guns, a sword, and a large diamond ring. DuBois bequeathed town properties to his minor children. He also gave his daughter Magdalene-Margaret her mother's two diamond rings, and his son James his windmill and land adjoining the town of Wilmington. This land, known as DuBois's mill, was fortified in December 1775. Mrs. Jean DuBois received the family home in Wilmington and an adjoining lot together with the profits from her husband's bake house. According to his will, on her death this property would go to their daughter Anna-Jean. The profits from the merchant fleet and slaves were to be supervised by the guardians and used for the care and education of the minor children.

Two sons of John DuBois gained public attention. The property of Isaac was confiscated by the state in 1784, and John, Jr. (known as Captain John DuBois), was active in the [American Revolution](#) ^[9] as a major in the militia, commissioner, notary public, justice of the peace, and inspector of the polls.

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