

Duckenfield, Nathaniel ^[1]

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13 June 1746–20 Oct. 1824

Nathaniel Duckenfield, baronet, landowner, and councillor, was the son of Nathaniel and Margaret Duckenfield of Chester, Cheshire, England. His father, who had extensive holdings in Bertie County ^[2], N.C., inherited from his cousin William Duckenfield ^[3], died in 1749 and bequeathed his land to his wife. In 1756 Margaret Duckenfield appeared in Bertie County court to petition for appointment as executrix of her husband's estate. How long she remained in North Carolina at that time, or whether her son had come with her, is not known, though she apparently settled in the colony at some point in the 1760s and married John Pearson, a lawyer. They lived on an estate called Duckenfield on Salmon Creek in Bertie County.

On 15 May 1768, young Nathaniel became the fifth Duckenfield baronet when his uncle Samuel died without issue. The following year he decided to visit his mother and his North Carolina holdings. He soon informed Governor William Tryon ^[4] that he intended to settle in the province permanently. Several years later Duckenfield wrote to James Iredell ^[5] that he had hoped to find a wealthy wife in the colony who could help support the financial strain of a baronetcy. In January 1771 Tryon nominated him to a place on the royal council. Although he was not seated until November, Duckenfield had created a considerable stir in the council the previous April by claiming the senior position in that body by virtue of his baronetcy. He was firmly resisted in this ploy by his fellow councillors and in November took his place as a junior member.

During 1771 the baronet courted Hannah, daughter of Samuel Johnston ^[6]; early in 1772 he proposed to her but was rejected. Although Hannah would later marry James Iredell, Duckenfield and Iredell remained friends and corresponded until 1791. Duckenfield decided to return to England by the spring of 1772, convinced that he was not suited to managing a plantation (he owned over 3,600 acres of land) and that he would not make a "good match" in North Carolina. In England he purchased a coronet's commission in the Queen's Dragoons. In 1773 he resigned his council seat, stating that he would not return to North Carolina. Two years later he advanced to adjutant in his regiment but declared that he would not serve happily in revolutionary America ^[7], and he never did. In 1778 his North Carolina lands were confiscated by the state, although he had managed to deed the rights to continue enslaving his enslaved people to his mother after his departure from the colony. Whereas other loyalists, especially Henry Eustace McCulloh ^[8], owned more land than Duckenfield, his properties brought in more money from state sales than those of any other person except Lord Granville. His friend James Iredell attempted to prevent confiscation but was unsuccessful.

In 1783 Duckenfield married Katherine Warde, who eventually gave him four sons and a daughter. The following year he went on half pay as a captain in the Eighty-second Regiment of Foot—effectively retiring from active duty. Before his mother died at Duckenfield in December 1784, she directed that most of her property be sold and the proceeds sent to her son. The next year Sir Nathaniel was awarded £3,000 by the Loyalist ^[9] Claims Commission in London for his North Carolina losses—considerably less than the £8,762 at which he had valued his holdings. Nevertheless, with this money and his wife's wealth, Duckenfield appears to have lived comfortably in England for the remainder of his life.

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R. Don Higginbotham, ed., *The Papers of James Iredell*, 2 vols. (1976).

Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution*, vol. 1 (1864).

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vols. 8–9 (1890).

Additional Resources:

Order of the Privy Council of Great Britain concerning the appointment of Nathaniel Duckenfield and Marmaduke Jones as members of the North Carolina Governor's Council, Great Britain. Privy Council, May 01, 1771, Volume 11, Page 233: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr11-0105> ^[10]

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