

Eaton, Thomas ^[1]

Eaton, Thomas

by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1986

ca. 1739–June 1809

Thomas Eaton, Revolutionary patriot, was the son of William Eaton (d. 1759) and his wife Mary Rives. He was born probably in North Carolina a short time after his father's removal there from Prince George County, Va. As an adult, Thomas Eaton lived in the county of Bute ^[2], which had been formed from the eastern portion of Granville. He represented that county in the Assembly at New Bern in 1769 and again in 1770 through 1771. In the latter year, Governor William Tryon ^[3] appointed him colonel of the Bute Militia in the War of the Regulation ^[4].

Active in the Revolutionary cause from the beginning, Eaton represented Bute in the provincial council of 1775–76. He was also a member of the Council of Safety ^[5] in 1776, at times serving as president pro tempore; a member of the Second Provincial Congress ^[6] at New Bern in April 1775; and a member of the Third Provincial Congress held at Hillsborough later that year. In 1776 the Provincial Congress at Halifax appointed him colonel of the Bute regiment. When the congress met again at Halifax in November 1776, Eaton was a delegate. At this congress he was elected to the Council of State ^[7], the body that—with Governor Richard Caswell ^[8]—ruled the state during those trying times. Eaton was reelected a councillor in 1779. After serving with the army in the field for several years, he was once more elected to the Council by the legislature in 1784.

By 1779 the theater of war had shifted to the southern colonies. On 3 March Colonel Eaton was present at the disastrous battle at Brier Creek, Ga.; on 4 November the legislature appointed him brigadier general. On 15 Mar. 1781 he and other officers vainly attempted to stop the flight of the militia at the Battle of Guilford Court House ^[9]. Griffith McRae, in his biography of James Iredell ^[10], reported an anecdote about the wartime experience of General Eaton. He had a very small foot and wore a boot of unusual finish and neatness. In the patriot flight at Brier Creek, these boots were left behind. They eventually fell into the hands of Colonel John Hamilton ^[11], the former Halifax resident and Tory leader, who recognized them. Years later, at a dinner at the home of Willie Jones ^[12] in Halifax, Hamilton produced the boots and passed them to the former owner. Eaton was not amused and threw them across the table at Hamilton's head.

When Bute County ^[2] was divided into the counties of Franklin and Warren in 1779, the lands of Thomas Eaton, located at Eaton's Ferry on the Roanoke, fell into the eastern part of the latter county. A man of wealth, he was one of the largest slaveholders in the state at the time of the 1790 census. His will, dated 30 Apr. 1807, was probated in Warrenton at the August court of 1809. Eaton's place of burial is not known.

Eaton was married three times. About 1761 he wed Anna Bland, the daughter of Theodorick Bland of Cawsons, Prince George County, Va. Her sister Frances was successively the wife of John Randolph and St. George Tucker, and by her first husband she was the mother of John Randolph of Roanoke. Eaton and Anna Bland were the parents of one child, Anna, born in 1763, who married Guilford Dudley ^[13] of Halifax County, Va., and Tennessee. Their son, Theodorick Bland Dudley, was reared by his famous relative, John Randolph, and later published the latter's letters to him under the title Letters to a Young Relative ^[14]. After the death of Anna, Eaton in 1781 married Anne Stith, daughter of Buckner Stith of Brunswick County, Va. They had two sons, Thomas Buckner, who died young, and William, and a daughter, Harriet Bolling, who married Grandison Field of Virginia. William Eaton married Seignora, daughter of Nathaniel Macon ^[15]; their son, also William, was the noted Warrenton lawyer and statesman. Eaton's third wife was Elizabeth Jones, daughter of John and Priscilla Weldon Jones. John Jones ^[16] was first cousin to the brothers Allen ^[17] and Willie Jones.

References:

John B. Boddie, *Southside Virginia Families*, vol. 1 (1955), and *Virginia Historical Genealogies* (1954).

Bute-Warren County wills (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Stuart H. Hill, "Eaton Family" (North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

Northampton County wills, deeds, and estate records (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Additional Resources:

"CSR Documents by Eaton, Thomas, ca. 1739-1809." *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*. Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr10879> ^[18] (accessed February 24, 2014).

North Carolina General Assembly. *Journal of the proceedings of the Provincial Congress of North Carolina, held at Halifax*

on the fourth day of April 1776. Raleigh [N.C.]: Lawrence & Lemay. 1831. 61.

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North Carolina General Assembly. "An Act for annexing Part of Northampton County to the County of Bute." *Complete revisal of all the acts of Assembly, of the province of North-Carolina, now in force and use: together with the titles of all such laws as are obsolete, expired, or repealed: with marginal notes and references, and an exact table to the whole*. Newbern [N.C.]: Printed by James Davis, printer to the Honourable the House of Assembly. 1773. 430.

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Military personnel [22]

Public officials [23]

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