

Evans, Peter ^[1]

Evans, Peter

by Elizabeth W. Manning, 1986; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, December 2022

12 Dec. 1781–25 Dec. 1852



Rocky Mount Cotton Mills. Image courtesy of the NC Museum of History. ^[2]Peter Evans, planter and businessman, was born in Pitt County ^[3] of English ancestry. His father was Major George Evans, a member of the colonial Assembly from Pitt County, a delegate to the Provincial Congress ^[4] at Halifax in 1776 that formed the constitution and bill of rights of North Carolina, and a member of the General Assembly of North Carolina in 1782. His mother was the former Ann Hines, daughter of Peter Hines of Pitt County. In 1800, Peter Evans settled in Edgecombe County ^[5] on a plantation called Piney Prospect near Old Sparta. Here he lived until about 1830, when he sold his old house and established a new residence on the Deep River in what was then Chatham (now Lee) ^[6] County. This 2,700-acre-plantation, which was previously known as La Grange, Evans named Egypt because people going there to get corn associated it with the biblical land of Egypt. Considered a very wealthy man, Evans enslaved more than a hundred people and lived after the fashion of typical southern planter-enslavers of romance and tradition. Around 1847, his health began to decline and he moved to Scotland Neck where he built a small house called Piney Prospect after his Edgecombe home. He died of cancer of the throat on Christmas Day at his daughter Susan's home, Kelvin Grove, near Scotland Neck.

In his will Evans directed that his Egypt lands be examined for coal. This was done and by 1855 the Deep River coal fields were being mined. With the coming of the Civil War ^[7], a railroad was built from these coal fields to Fayetteville ^[8]. The coal was soft and inferior, therefore avoided by the blockade runners as its excessive amounts of smoke enhanced detection by the enemy. The noted blockade runner *The Advance* was finally sighted and captured because she had been reduced to burning Egypt coal.

Evans's father died when he was two, and with few resources and little education Evans had a remarkably successful business career. He was a pioneer in the great agricultural revival that made Edgecombe County noted throughout the South. He and his brother-in-law, Joel Battle ^[9], established the cotton mill at Rocky Mount. He later had interests in mills, canals, and iron foundries in other parts of the state. His son, Peter G. Evans, married Eliza Morehead, the daughter of Governor John Motley Morehead ^[10], and together father and son supported the establishment of the railroad ^[11] from Greensboro to Morehead City. This was to provide North Carolina with an outlet to the sea and was a great impetus to the development of the state.

Evans married Ann Johnston (1789–1866), the daughter of Amos and Dorcas Williams Johnston of Edgecombe County. He was buried in the Evans cemetery, Greenville, and his wife in Trinity Churchyard, Scotland Neck. There were four daughters of the marriage: Eliza (m. Dr. Isaac Hall of Scotland Neck), Mary Ann (m. Dr. Samuel Southerland of Warren County ^[12]), Susan (m. William Ruffin Smith of Kelvin Grove, near Scotland Neck), and Adelaide (m. James Norfleet Smith of Magnolia Hall, near Scotland Neck). His two sons were George N. (m. Hettie Rowland) and Peter G. (m. Elizabeth Morehead). Young Peter was colonel of the North Carolina Sixty-third Regiment and a cavalry officer in General J. E. B. Stuart's Brigade. He was killed near Upperville, Va., on 21 June 1863.

References:

William C. Allen, *History of Halifax County* (1918).

Samuel A. Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, vol. 2 (1925).

Wade H. Hadley and others, eds., *Chatham County, 1771–1971* (1976).

John W. Moore, *History of North Carolina*, 2 vols. (1880).

Records of Halifax County (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vols. 4, 9, 10 (1886, 1890).

Additional Resources:

Peter Evans in UNC-Libraries Catalog: <http://search.lib.unc.edu/search?Ntk=Subject&Ntt=Evans,%20Peter,%201781-1852>.^[13]

William Ruffin Smith Papers, 1772-1959 (collection no. 00678). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/s/Smith,William_Ruffin.html^[14] (accessed July 24, 2013).

Image Credits:

"Photograph, Accession #: [H.1952.40.1](#)^[2]." 1952. North Carolina Museum of History.

Subjects:

[Biographies](#)^[15]

[Business leaders](#)^[16]

[Planters](#)^[17]

Authors:

[Manning, Elizabeth W.](#)^[18]

Origin - location:

[Edgecombe County](#)^[19]

[Pitt County](#)^[20]

[Lee County](#)^[21]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#).^[22]

1 January 1986 | Manning, Elizabeth W.

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/evans-peter>

Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/evans-peter> [2] <http://collections.ncdcr.gov/RediscoveryProficioPublicSearch/ShowItem.aspx?22198+> [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/pitt> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/provincial-congresses> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/edgecombe> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/lee> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/history/cw-1900/civil-war> [8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/fayetteville-0> [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/battle-joel> [10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/morehead-john-motley> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/railroads> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/warren> [13] <http://search.lib.unc.edu/search?Ntk=Subject&Ntt=Evans,%20Peter,%201781-1852>. [14] http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/s/Smith,William_Ruffin.html [15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [16] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/business-leaders> [17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/planter> [18] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/manning-elizabeth> [19] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-20> [20] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-21> [21] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/> [22] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>