

Fenner, Robert ^[1]

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by Ruth L. Barrett, 1986

ca. 1755–October 1816

Robert Fenner, army officer, county official, and planter, was the son of [Richard](#) ^[2] and Ann Coddington Fenner of New Bern. In 1771 he was a member of the Craven County Militia and an ensign in the campaign against the [Regulators](#) ^[3]. In 1772 he was paid £15 (proclamation money) for making 3,400 abstracts of patents for the secretary of state. His [Revolutionary War](#) ^[4] service began with his commission as lieutenant in the Second Regiment, North Carolina Continental Line, in 1776 and lasted throughout the war. He was commissioned captain in May 1777 and was brevetted major in 1783. He also was paymaster of the Second Regiment from 1776 to 1783, and for a time he was a prisoner of war at Charleston. After the war he was agent for the late North Carolina Line in the settlement of army accounts with the United States, and was the first treasurer of the North Carolina [Society of the Cincinnati](#) ^[5] (1783–91).

In 1783 Fenner settled in the town of Halifax and lived there until his death. He became clerk and master of equity for Halifax District in 1788 and, according to existing records, was serving in 1810; he probably continued in the office until his death. He was justice of the peace and magistrate of the lower court from 1796 at least until 1802, was regularly appointed to take the list of taxables and taxable property for District 9, and served Halifax as police magistrate. He supported education, in 1801 joining with [William R. Davie](#) ^[6] and [John Sitgreaves](#) ^[7] in advertising for a teacher, and in 1807 with Richard Long, Thomas Hall, and Willie William Jones in organizing and sponsoring a school in Halifax. Fenner became a member of the Methodist Episcopal church and gave land for the site of a meeting house. He acquired lots in the town of Halifax, where he had his residence, and land in Halifax and Northampton counties. His holdings in the middle district of Tennessee amounted to 10,000 acres.

Fenner married Mary Howson (1765–1831), a granddaughter of [Montford Eelbeck](#) ^[8]. Children of record were a daughter, Mary, who married Dr. John Marrast, and three sons. Robert Jr., a captain in the Eighteenth Infantry (1814–15), married Lucy Maclin Saunders of Brunswick County, Va., migrated to Alabama, and in 1847 died of dysentery in the [War with Mexico](#) ^[9]. Dixie C. married Ann Harwell and died in [Halifax County](#) ^[10] in 1834. The third son, John Howson, who lived in Halifax County until his death in 1871, became a planter on an extensive scale. He married Rebecca Eaton and, through his son, William Eaton Fenner, left descendants in North Carolina.

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