

## **Heron, Benjamin** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Heron, Benjamin**

by Donald R. Lennon, 1988

**21 Dec. 1722–22 June 1770**

Benjamin Heron, mariner and colonial official, was born in Lymington, Hampshire, England. He served in the British Navy and took part in the Cartagena Expedition before settling in North Carolina. His brother Charles was an apothecary and a surgeon at Corhampton, Hampshire, England.

Captain Heron became master of a ship sailing between England and the colonies. He was in [Wilmington](#) <sup>[2]</sup> by 1755, when he was authorized by the town commissioners to purchase a fire engine in London and transport it to Wilmington for the protection of that city. By 1761, Heron had been appointed clerk of the pleas of the province, deputy surveyor, and deputy auditor of the king's revenue. Subsequently he became clerk of the Crown (1762), secretary of the province, naval officer for North Carolina (1762), a commissioner of pilotage for the [Cape Fear River](#) <sup>[3]</sup> (1764), and a member of the governor's Council (1764–69). In the Council, he frequently served on the committee to settle public claims. During the [Regulator](#) <sup>[4]</sup> rebellion in the backcountry of North Carolina, he was appointed lieutenant general of the governor's forces (1768) although he left the colony before actual hostilities began.

Heron is best remembered for building one of the first drawbridges in America, across the Northeast River above Wilmington. Authorized by the [General Assembly](#) <sup>[5]</sup> in 1766, the bridge was to have "one wide arch of thirty feet for rafts and pettiaugas to pass through and six feet high above high water mark, and be made to draw up occasionally for the navigation of vessels of larger burthen." The drawbridge was described by a traveler in 1775 as a "noble" structure which "opens at the middle to both sides and rises by pullies, so as to suffer ships to pass under it."

Along with other interests, Heron owned several plantations, including Marle Bluff, Mulberry, Mount Blake, and Four Mile House. In 1769 he embarked for England on a one-year journey to recover his health. Instead, he died at Islington, a borough of London, and was buried in St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

Heron's first wife was Mary Howe, daughter of Job Howe and sister of [Revolutionary War](#) <sup>[6]</sup> general [Robert Howe](#) <sup>[7]</sup>. After her death, he married Alice Marsden, daughter of Rufus and Alice Marsden. His children included Mary (m. Thomas Hooper), Elizabeth (m. John McKenzie), and Frances (m. Samuel Swann).

#### **References:**

Arthur Adams, *Living Descendants of Royal Blood* (1949).

Donald R. Lennon and Ida Brooks Kellam, eds., *The Wilmington Town Book* (1973).

New Hanover County Deed Books, New Hanover County Will Books.

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vols. 5, 6 (1887, 1888).

#### **Additional Resources:**

CSR Documents by Heron, Benjamin, 1722-1770, Documenting the American South, UNC Libraries:  
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr10486> <sup>[8]</sup>

"One Manuscript Fragment, Accession #: [P.TP.1966.076.001](#) <sup>[9]</sup>." . North Carolina Tryon Palace.

#### **Subjects:**

[Colonial period \(1600-1763\)](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

[Biographies](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

[Public officials](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

#### **Authors:**

[Lennon, Donald R.](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

#### **Origin - location:**

[Wilmington](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

#### **From:**

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#),<sup>[15]</sup>

1 January 1988 | Lennon, Donald R.

**Source URL:**<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/heron-benjamin>

#### **Links**

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/heron-benjamin> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/wilmington> [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/rivers/cape-fear> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/history/colonial/regulator-movement> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/general-assembly> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/american-revolution> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/howe-robert> [8] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr10486> [9] <http://collections.ncdcr.gov/RediscoveryProficioPublicSearch/ShowItem.aspx?143590+> [10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/colonial-period> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/public-officials> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/lennon-donald-r> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-39> [15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>