

Hill, Whitmel ^[1]

Hill, Whitmel

by James R. Young, 1988; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, December 2022

12 Feb. 1743–12 Sept. 1797

Whitmel Hill, Revolutionary officer and government official, delegate to the Continental Congress, state senator, and member of the [Council of State](#) ^[2], was born into a wealthy family in [Bertie County](#) ^[3]. Little is known of his early life or when he moved to what is now [Martin County](#) ^[4]. He was graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1760. Hill married Winifred Blount, great-granddaughter of [James Blount](#) ^[5] of [Chowan County](#) ^[6], and they had four children, two of whom died in infancy. Their son was Thomas Blount, their daughter, Elizabeth. The extent of Hill's landholdings is not known though his estate, Palmyra, at Hill's Ferry, was undoubtedly large. In the census of 1790, the 140 people enslaved by Hill was the largest number enslaved by anyone in Martin County.

At the beginning of the [American Revolution](#) ^[7], Hill, already a justice of the peace, was elected lieutenant colonel of the Martin County militia. He was second in command to [William Williams](#) ^[8], for whom Williamston was named. Hill remained lieutenant colonel from September 1775 to April 1778, when Williams's "infirmities" forced his resignation and placed Hill as colonel of the regiment. Previously he had held several important positions in the Revolutionary government. In August 1775, Hill was elected to the Assembly which met at Hillsborough and established the provisional government in the "absence" of the last royal governor of North Carolina, [Josiah Martin](#) ^[9]—the man, ironically, for whom Hill's county was named. In April 1776, Hill was a delegate at Halifax where the provisional government changed its name to the [Council of Safety](#) ^[10] and declared its independence from England. When the next Congress assembled in Halifax in November 1778 and established the state constitution and the bill of rights, Hill was once again a member. Previously, Hill had represented Martin County in North Carolina's first General Assembly in 1777. At the following session of the General Assembly in New Bern in April 1778, Hill, now a senator, was elected speaker of the Senate.

In July 1777, Hill had uncovered a Tory plot "to assassinate all the leading men" of the Revolution in North Carolina on "some certain night." As a result of this information Governor [Richard Caswell](#) ^[11] was able to circumvent the plans of the "traitors," most of whom were arrested. Shortly before Hill's discovery of the Tory conspiracy, his name had been placed in nomination as a delegate to the Continental Congress, a position won by [Cornelius Harnett](#) ^[12]. Nevertheless, he was named a delegate to the Congress meeting in Philadelphia shortly after he was chosen speaker of the Senate. Hill served in the Congress from 1778 to 1781.

In a letter to Dr. [Thomas Burke](#) ^[13], his roommate in Philadelphia, fellow delegate to the Continental Congress, and future governor of North Carolina, Hill wrote that he had made the 350-mile journey to Philadelphia in only seven and one-half days, "a ride scarcely performed before in so short a time." With apparent pride, Hill later wrote that he had covered 65 miles in one day! In another letter from Philadelphia, Hill expressed his irritation with South Carolina's refusal to accept the paper money of North Carolina troops serving in the Palmetto State or adequately to provide for the Tar Heels. "Our distressed militia," he wrote, "have been obliged to rescue that Country from the Dominion of Britain" and had been met with constant affronts. He hoped that the North Carolina troops would therefore "claim to themselves some compensation for their services, which compensation they will seize and bring home to their ruined families."

In October 1779, Hill and Burke received special recognition from the North Carolina General Assembly for "their able, faithful and diligent and public spirited services" in Philadelphia. Hill was then appointed to the prestigious Council of State. In 1783 he was elected senator from Martin County, and in 1787 and 1788 he was reappointed to the Council of State. In the latter part of 1788 Hill was reelected to the Senate, and in 1789 he was appointed to the state commission on Indian affairs and public revenue and to the committee on propositions and grievances. These were the last public offices he would hold.

Meanwhile, Hill had spent considerable effort attempting to develop Martin County. In 1785 he successfully petitioned the state to incorporate a town on the [Roanoke River](#) ^[14] on property he donated "to promote the trade and navigation of the said river." No trace now exists of this town, Blountsville, though it was probably located to the east of Williamston. Hill also encouraged the building of a canal to open the Albemarle Sound to the Atlantic Ocean near Roanoke Island. Nothing else is known of his life except that he died on his plantation.

References:

Fairfax Braxton, "Patriots of North Carolina," *National Republic*, April 1930.

Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 12, 19 (1895, 1901).

Marshall De Lancey Haywood, comp., *Membership and Ancestral Register, North Carolina Society of Sons of the Revolution* (1898).

William C. Poole, "An Economic Interpretation of the Ratification of the Federal Constitution in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 27 (April, July, October 1950).

David Lowry Swain, "Life and Letters of Whitmill Hill," *University of North Carolina Magazine*, vol. 10 (March 1861).

John H. Wheeler, ed., *Historical Sketches of North Carolina, 1584–1851*, vol. 1 (1851).

Additional Resources:

"Whitmel Hill." N.C. Highway Historical Marker E-48, N.C. Office of Archives & History.

<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=E-48> [15] (accessed April 24, 2014).

Haywood, Marshall De Lancey. "Whitmel Hill." *Biographical history of North Carolina from colonial times to the present* vol. 3. Greensboro, N.C.: C.L. Van Noppen. 1906. 180-183.

<https://archive.org/stream/biographicalhis00ashegoog#page/n186/mode/2up> [16] (accessed April 24, 2014).

"CSR Documents by Hill, Whitmel, 1743-1797." 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/csr11113> [17] (accessed April 24, 2014).

Whitmel Hill Papers, circa 1795; 1798 (collection no. 03099-z). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/h/Hill,Whitmel.html> [18] (accessed April 24, 2014).

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) [19]

[Military personnel](#) [20]

[Planters](#) [21]

[Public officials](#) [22]

Authors:

[Young, James R.](#) [23]

Origin - location:

[Bertie County](#) [24]

[Martin County](#) [25]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) [26]

1 January 1988 | Young, James R.

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/hill-whitmel>

Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/hill-whitmel> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/council-state> [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/bertie> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/martin> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/blount-blunt-james> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/chowan> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/american-revolution> [8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/williams-william> [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/martin-josiah> [10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/council-safety> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/caswell-richard-0> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/harnett-cornelius> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/burke-thomas> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/rivers/roanoke> [15] <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=E-48> [16] <https://archive.org/stream/biographicalhis00ashegoog#page/n186/mode/2up> [17] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr11113> [18] <http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/h/Hill,Whitmel.html> [19] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [20] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/soldiers> [21] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/planters> [22] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/public-officials> [23] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/young-james-r> [24] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-29> [25] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-28> [26] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>