

Irving, Thomas Pitts ^[1]

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by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 1988; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, December 2022

d. February 1818

Thomas Pitts Irving, [Episcopal](#) ^[3]clergyman and teacher, was born in Somerset County on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. He was graduated with high honors from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1789. In 1793 he went to New Bern, N.C., to head the [New Bern Academy](#) ^[4], which he served very effectively until 1813 when he left for Hagerstown, Md., to head a new academy there. In New Bern Irving earned a good reputation not only as a classical and mathematics teacher, but also as an active participant in local events. Among his earliest pupils was [William Gaston](#) ^[5], later a renowned judge. When he was fifteen Gaston delivered an oration on "the blessings of American independence" on the occasion of the quarterly visitation of the trustees of the academy.

Irving was a musician, both performing and composing musical works, and he directed his pupils in dramatic presentations, some of which he wrote himself, for the pleasure of the community. When funds were being collected for a new [Masonic](#) ^[6]lodge, Irving directed his students in an evening of entertainment for which admission was charged and applied towards the new building. He was chaplain of the lodge in 1798 and Worshipful Master in 1808–10.

He was the owner of a sloop, *The Farmer's Daughter*, valued at a thousand dollars, which sank in the [Neuse River](#) ^[7] in 1809. While the vessel was being used by Moses Jarvis, her cargo shifted in a storm, resulting in considerable damage and loss of property. Irving's stepson, Captain Thomas Fuet, played a role in raising her, but a lawsuit followed in connection with the loss.

In 1795, soon after Irving's tenure at the New Bern Academy began, the building burned and the school was transferred to a room in the [Tryon Palace](#) ^[8] building. About this time Irving undertook to prepare for the Episcopal priesthood; he was ordained in Philadelphia by Bishop William White in 1796. In New Bern he took on additional duties as rector of Christ Church, a position he held until his departure for Maryland. Irving was a subscriber to John Marshall's five-volume *Life of George Washington*, published between 1804 and 1807.

Irving was in Hagerstown, Md., by the end of October 1813 when he obtained certificates to enslave two people, Sue and Tom, who accompanied him there from New Bern. He later purchased another enslaved person, David Davis, a blacksmith. Whether Irving had a wife in New Bern does not appear, but Thomas Fuet was identified as his stepson. In Maryland, in 1816, he married Bridget Philburn, who survived him.

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