

Johnston, Samuel Iredell ^[1]

Johnston, Samuel Iredell

by James Elliott Moore, 1988; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, December 2022

28 Dec. 1806–12 Aug. 1865

Samuel Iredell Johnston, Episcopal clergyman, was born in Windsor, the son of Colonel John Seymour and Elizabeth Cotten Johnston. His father was a brother of Governor [Samuel Johnston](#) ^[2] of Hayes Plantation near [Edenton](#) ^[3] and represented [Bertie County](#) ^[4] in the state senate in 1795 and 1800. Shortly after his birth, the family moved to neighboring [Hertford County](#) ^[5] to live with his maternal grandfather, Godwin Cotten. When John Johnston died in 1807, Cotten took charge of young Samuel and his sister Sallie Ann and raised them at his plantation, Mulberry Grove. In 1826 Johnston received the A.B. degree from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6], which later awarded him the A.M. degree in 1844. After reading law, he practiced briefly in Jackson.

Although his Cotten grandparents were devout [Baptists](#) ^[7], Johnston was exposed to the [Episcopal church](#) ^[8] through visits with his father's family in Edenton. As his interest in the denomination grew, he determined to enter the ministry. After meeting with the Right Reverend [Levi S. Ives](#) ^[9], Bishop of North Carolina, he was admitted as a candidate for Holy Orders in 1832. He studied privately under another clergyman and was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop Ives at St. Matthew's, Hillsborough, on 20 July 1834. Johnston was soon sent to take charge of Calvary Church, Wadesboro, where he served for three years. In 1835 he was ordained to the priesthood by the Right Reverend Richard Channing Moore of Virginia. During his tenure at Wadesboro, Johnston established a parish library, worked among the local blacks, and held services at Morven.

In 1837 Johnston was named rector of [St. Paul's Church, Edenton](#) ^[10], and embarked on a ministry that would take him throughout the Albemarle section for the next twenty-eight years. At the beginning of his rectorship, he often held services at Windsor, Gatesville, and Hertford until churches could be erected at those places. Later, he worked with enslaved people on the plantations of their enslavers and was instrumental in persuading the Burgwyn, Pettigrew, and Skinner families to build chapels on their estates. Johnston also organized a parochial girls' school in Edenton, and he trained a number of young men while they were reading for deacon's or priest's orders.

Widely respected throughout the diocese, Johnston was frequently asked to preach to the diocesan convention and often represented North Carolina in the General Convention of the Episcopal church. In addition, he served on the important Standing Committee and on boards responsible for establishing a diocesan library and revising the canon law. Johnston was one of four clerical representatives selected in 1850 to investigate Bishop Ives and to examine his views on private confession and absolution, transubstantiation, prayers to the Virgin Mary, and veneration of the saints. In 1858 he was awarded the honorary doctor of divinity degree (institution unknown).

The [Civil War](#) ^[11] marked the end of Johnston's highly successful ministry. In February 1862 he and his family fled from Edenton to Chapel Hill where his son-in-law, the Reverend Francis Hilliard, was rector. Poor health prevented his returning immediately to his parish at the end of the war. He died soon afterwards and was buried in Edenton.

On 25 Sept. 1829 Johnston married Margaret Ann Burgwin, the daughter of [George William Bush Burgwin](#) ^[12] of the Hermitage near Wilmington. They were the parents of thirteen children: Samuel John (died young), James Cathcart, Maria Nash, Foster, Elizabeth Cotten, Gabriel, [George Burgwin](#) ^[13], infant twins, Iredell, Helen S., John, and Frances Ann.

References:

Diocesan Journals of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina.

Walter Burgwyn Jones, *The Jones-Burgwin Family History* (1913).

Additional Resources:

Warren, Edward. *A doctor's experiences in three continents*. Baltimore, Md.: Cushings & Bailey. 1885. 209-210. <https://archive.org/stream/doctorsexperienc00warr#page/208/mode/2up> ^[14] (accessed May 27, 2014).

Tisdale, Lennie Dalton Johnston (Mrs. C. E.). Oral History Collection. Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. Texas Tech University. <http://www.swco.ttu.edu/abstracts/2574.htm> ^[15] (accessed May 27, 2014).

Edwards, Anne Rouse. "The Reverend Samuel Iredell Johnston." *A celebration of faith: 300 years in the life of St. Paul's* [Columbia? NC]: Sweet Bay Tree Books for St. Paul's Episcopal Church. 2003. 65-71. <https://archive.org/stream/celebrationoffaiedwa#page/64/mode/2up> ^[16] (accessed May 27, 2014).

Subjects:

Biographies ^[17]

Religious Leaders and Clergy ^[18]

Authors:

Moore, James Elliott ^[19]

Origin - location:

Bertie County ^[20]

Windsor ^[21]

Hertford County ^[22]

Orange County ^[23]

Chapel Hill ^[24]

From:

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[25]

1 January 1988 | Moore, James Elliott

Source URL:<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/johnston-samuel-iredell>

Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/johnston-samuel-iredell> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/johnston-samuel> [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/edenton> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/bertie> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/hertford> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/university-north-carolina-chapel-hi> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/baptists> [8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/episcopal-church> [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/ives-levi-silliman> [10] <http://stpauls-edenton.org/history> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/civil-war> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/burgwin-george-william> [13] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/diary-george-burgwin-johnston-may-19-1862-september-15-1862/594493> [14] <https://archive.org/stream/doctorsexperienc00warr#page/208/mode/2up> [15] <http://www.swco.ttu.edu/abstracts/2574.htm> [16] <https://archive.org/stream/celebrationoffaiedwa#page/64/mode/2up> [17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [18] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/clergy> [19] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/moore-james> [20] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-29> [21] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/windsor> [22] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-32> [23] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/o> [24] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-5> [25] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>