

Grist, Allen ^[1]

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by Percival Perry, 1986

2 Jan. 1792–13 Dec. 1866

Allen Grist, planter, [naval stores](#) ^[2] producer, [sheriff](#) ^[3], and senator from [Beaufort County](#) ^[4], was born near Washington, N.C., the eldest son and second oldest of eight children of Reading and Elizabeth Grimes Grist. Reading Grist, a Revolutionary War soldier, served in the militia in the New Bern District and his father, John Grist, served on the [Committee of Safety](#) ^[5] in [Pitt County](#) ^[6] in 1775. Richard Grist, John's father, was living in Beaufort County before 1752. Allen Grist served first as deputy sheriff and later as sheriff of Beaufort County for eighteen years between 1818 and 1845, although not continuously. He also served three terms in the North Carolina Senate, from 1850 to 1852 and from 1854 to 1858, and was instrumental in getting the [Bank of Washington](#) ^[7] chartered and established in 1851. Throughout his life he was affiliated with the [Whig party](#) ^[8].

Grist also owned extensive lands in Beaufort County and engaged in general farming and in the naval stores business, which since colonial times had been carried on in the Washington-New Bern area. Among the pioneers in expanding the industry south of and up the [Cape Fear River](#) ^[9] in the 1840s was the firm of A. & J. R. Grist, formed in 1843 by Allen and his son James. For the next fifteen years the firm pursued the naval stores business in [Brunswick](#) ^[10], [Columbus](#) ^[11], and [Bladen](#) ^[12] counties in the Cape Fear River region, making extensive use of slave labor. It operated a store and several turpentine distilleries and was involved in the Brothers Steamboat Company, which was engaged in hauling naval stores on the Cape Fear River. Declining availability of turpentine lands in North Carolina prompted the firm to remove to the Mobile Bay region of Alabama in 1858. Returns from this operation in 1860 were more than \$60,000.

In 1860, Grist was listed as owning \$50,000 in real estate and \$92,900 in personal property, including 109 slaves, making him the largest slaveholder in Beaufort County. A. & J. R. Grist, turpentine farmers, held \$44,000 in real estate and \$125,750 in personal property and owned 72 slaves. In addition, as estate administrator for minor children related to his wife, Grist controlled another 48 slaves, for a total of 229. His son [James R. Grist](#) ^[13] owned individually 84 slaves, giving the Grists ownership and management of 313 slaves. They leased additional slaves from other owners.

Grist appears to have had the respect of his numerous children, his relatives, and obviously of the voters from his long years in public office. He was characterized as discharging his official duties with "an energy, forbearance and fidelity which won for him ever afterwards the esteem and confidence of the people. The trust reposed in him was not betrayed, and in acknowledgement of his merits, whatever of County honors he would accept, were freely bestowed by his fellow citizens." He died at his residence near Washington at age seventy-four while still serving as chairman of the county court. The Grists were members of the [Episcopal church](#) ^[14], and he and his wife were buried in the Old Grist Cemetery near Chocowinity.

On 11 Feb. 1817 Grist married Mary Ann Williams, and they had thirteen children: James R., John W., William S., Susan E., Olivia, Mary W., Penelope and Apsley (twins), Richard, David, Margaret, Allen, and Wiley Grimes. In 1860 [William Garl Browne](#) ^[15] painted oil portraits of Allen and his wife, now owned by Mrs. Clay Carter, Washington, N.C.

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