

## **Knight, Tobias** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by James D. Gillespie, 1988; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, December 2022

#### **D. 11 June 1719**

Tobias Knight, government official, judge, and attorney, lived in [Bath](#) <sup>[2]</sup>. The earliest record of Knight appears in the *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, dated 16 Apr. 1710, where he is recognized as a member of the governing council of the colony. In 1711, he was a member of the party that asked the queen for support against the Indians who were terrorizing the colony at that time. In the same year he was made "Commissioner and Trustee for the due Inspection and Preservation of the Library."

On 12 July 1712 Knight was appointed deputy proprietor to John Danson, and on 17 Dec. 1714 his power was extended as he became deputy proprietor to Lord Craven. Also in 1712, Knight became secretary of the government of North Carolina under Governor [Charles Eden](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, as well as the collector of "her Matyes Customs in Currituck District." The records show that by 1712 Knight had married Catherine Glover, widow of former Governor [William Glover](#) <sup>[4]</sup>. There was something of a scandal involved here, for Glover some years before had borrowed money from the church and had died before paying it back. Knight let it be known that he would not repay the money even though he had married Glover's widow. Some members of the community thought that Knight was "robbing the Church."

Three years later, the colonial government authorized him to receive prisoners from Virginia, and to present them to the magistrate. For this service he was paid 20c [*sic*] for each prisoner. Also in 1715, he was made vestryman in the West Parish of the Pasquotank Precinct of the [Anglican church](#) <sup>[5]</sup>.

On 1 Aug. 1717 Knight was chosen by the "[Governor and advice and consent of the Council . . . Chief Justice of the Province](#) <sup>[6]</sup>," and served in this capacity until shortly before his death. The following year, on 5 June 1718, he purchased a tract of land near Bath known as Archbell Point. This property had belonged to [Landgrave](#) <sup>[7]</sup> [Robert Daniel](#) <sup>[8]</sup> (one of the first to live in or near [Bath](#) <sup>[2]</sup>) and Knight bought it from Daniel's widow. As a result of the transaction, Knight became a neighbor of Governor Charles Eden.



T. Warner.

<sup>[9]</sup>On 22 Nov. 1718 Edward Teach, more commonly known as [Blackbeard](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, the notorious [pirate](#) <sup>[11]</sup>, was killed by an expedition sent by Governor [Alexander Spotswood of Virginia](#) <sup>[12]</sup>. Some of the people Teach enslaved survived the engagement and were taken to Williamsburg, where they were tried in a Court of Admiralty for piracy. On 12 Mar. 1719, they gave testimony that was damaging to Knight. The evidence was of sufficient strength that Governor Spotswood sent depositions to North Carolina for consideration. Knight was accused of accessory to piracy and his trial began on 27 May 1719 at the home of [Fredrick Jones](#) <sup>[13]</sup>. Governor Eden, sitting with the governing council, heard the testimony. Knight spoke for himself; and his defense "leaves no doubt that he was an attorney of not inconsiderable ability," for the governor and council "investigated the charges and . . . gravely pronounced him intirely

innocent."

Nevertheless, Knight resigned the office of chief justice of the colony. Shortly afterwards, Captain Ellis Brand wrote to the Lords Commissioners of Admiralty complaining that Knight and others were assisting pirates. Knight, however, died before an investigation could be launched. The question of his involvement (as well as that of Governor Eden) with Blackbeard has excited historians for centuries. Governor Eden has been criticized for finding Knight innocent given the amount of evidence that was brought against him, although the trial followed legal procedure in regard to the submission of evidence. Much of the evidence against Knight could not have been used in a court of law. However, "convincing" evidence cannot be found for either side.

Knight died after a long illness, and his estate was left to his wife Catherine, the executrix, and his step-daughter, Elizabeth Glover.

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#### Additional Resources:

"Historic Bath" N.C. Historic Sites, N.C. Office of Archives & History: <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/bath/blackbeard.htm> <sup>[14]</sup> (accessed June 10, 2013).

"Minutes of the North Carolina Governor's Council, including a deposition, a remonstrance, and correspondence concerning Tobias Knight's business with Edward Teach." *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/document/csr02-0181> <sup>[15]</sup> (accessed June 10, 2013).

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Weeks, Stephen B. "Blackbeard, the Corsair of the Carolinas." *The University Magazine* [University of North Carolina]. 21/8, no. 3. (1889) 98-116. <http://books.google.com/books?id=9Ac8AAAAYAAJ&pg=PA98#v=onepage&q&f=false> <sup>[17]</sup> (accessed June 10, 2013).

Konstam, Angus. *Blackbeard: America's Most Notorious Pirate*. John Wiley & Sons, 2007. 276. <http://books.google.com/books?id=TdTMkYgOkLYC&pg=PA276#v=onepage&q&f=false> <sup>[18]</sup>

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"Blackbeard the Pirate." *A general history of the pyrates* 2nd ed. London: T. Warner. 1724. 70. <http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/17001.1> <sup>[9]</sup> (accessed June 10, 2013).

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[Bath](#) <sup>[25]</sup>

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