

Lillington, Alexander ^[1]

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by James M. Clifton, 1991

1643–September 1697

Alexander Lillington, lawyer, planter, legislator, justice of the peace, and executive law officer, was one of the most distinguished citizens of seventeenth-century [Albemarle County](#) ^[2]. Born in Great Britain, he migrated with two brothers to Massachusetts, then to Barbados, and eventually to the [Albemarle Sound area](#) ^[3] before 1668. On 11 June 1668 he married Sarah James, by whom he had two sons, James and Alexander. On 13 June 1675 he was married a second time, to the widow Elizabeth Cooke; they had four daughters and a son, among whom were Elizabeth, Mary, Sarah, and John. A third marriage on 19 Mar. 1695 to the widow Ann Steward produced no issue.

Initially engaged in [shipbuilding](#) ^[4], Lillington quickly turned to planting and ultimately acquired several plantations, as noted in his will of 9 Sept. 1697. His main efforts, however, were devoted to law and public service. He participated in [Culpeper's Rebellion](#) ^[5] during which [George Durant](#) ^[6] and his associates opposed the collection of taxes on tobacco shipped to England. Elected a member of the "free parliament" of the period, he gave his full support to the rebels. Following the appointment of [John Harvey](#) ^[7] as governor in 1679, Lillington was made a justice of the peace; in this position, he presided over the court of Perquimans Precinct for the remainder of his life.

During the 1680s and 1690s Lillington was involved in almost every aspect of public and legal service in Albemarle County. At various times he was a member of the Council; an assemblyman; sheriff of Albemarle County (an office provided for in the Fundamental Constitutions issued by the [Lords Proprietors](#) ^[8]), by which he was executive officer of the courts held by the Council and tax collector of the county; and provost marshal of Perquimans Precinct. As a lawyer, he represented clients in numerous cases in the various courts of the colony.

It was in the role of chief judge of the County Court of Albemarle, which held four sessions in 1693 and 1694, that Lillington performed perhaps his greatest service. This court for all of Albemarle County, as the whole colony was then known, was also one provided for in the [Fundamental Constitutions](#) ^[9] and was first organized in 1693. Lillington, Caleb Calloway, [John Barrow](#) ^[10], and [Thomas Lepper](#) ^[11], all from Perquimans, and Henry White from Pasquotank Precinct, composed the court. While most of the court's business pertained to residents of or land in Perquimans, a number of cases related to Chowan Precinct. The jurors came from all four precincts of Albemarle County.

The marriage of Lillington's daughters to such prominent leaders as [Samuel Swann](#) ^[12], [Henderson Walker](#) ^[13], [John Porter](#) ^[14], and [Edward Moseley](#) ^[15], involved the family in the political and legal affairs of the colony for many years after his death. Following her husband's death, Mrs. Swann married [Maurice Moore](#) ^[16], principal promoter of the Cape Fear settlement and founder of [Brunswick Town](#) ^[17]. Lillington's son, John, married into the distinguished Porter family. Descendants of Alexander Lillington played significant roles in North Carolina and the nation for more than three centuries. One was a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and another was attorney general of the [Confederacy](#) ^[18].

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