

Moir, James ^[1]

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Moir, James

by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1991

ca. 1710–February 1767

James Moir, colonial clergyman, was sent to Edisto Island in South Carolina as a missionary of the kirk of Scotland prior to 1739. In that year, he decided to take Anglican orders and went to London to be ordained. On 12 June 1739 Commissary Alexander Garden in Charleston wrote to the bishop of London that the Reverend Mr. Moir would not be acceptable to the Anglican congregation at Edisto, attributing the objection to prejudice excited against him by the Presbyterians. Accordingly, the bishop assigned Moir to the Cape Fear section.

Having received the king's bounty (passage money paid by the king), Moir arrived in North Carolina and was assigned to St. James's Parish, [Wilmington](#) ^[2], in 1739. After 1742 he officiated in St. Philip's, Brunswick, as well. Missionaries supported by the [Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts](#)^[3] were required to send reports to the secretary of the organization in London twice a year. Moir's reports—the most voluminous of any missionary—were filled with complaints regarding officials and the recalcitrance of his parishioners. His complaint that when living in Brunswick, he had to live in the garret of his schoolhouse, with a single slave to cook his meals, is a reminder that colonial clergymen often were also schoolteachers.

Moir suffered from intermittent fevers or malaria, and in 1747, with official permission, he transferred to Edgecombe Parish, [Edgecombe County](#) ^[4], thinking that a move slightly northwards would improve his health. In 1759 [Halifax County](#) ^[5] was formed from the northern section of Edgecombe. However, Edgecombe Parish remained in the new county division and the parish in what remained of Edgecombe County was given the name, St. Mary's. Moir chose to officiate in the new parish of St. Mary's. In 1760 he was one of the commissioners appointed to lay out the town of Tarboro and was one of the first lot holders. [Joseph Blount Cheshire](#) ^[6], Jr., bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina (1893–1932), sensed his influence in the naming of the principal streets of the new town for the patron saints of England, Scotland, and Wales. The streets of Halifax town, laid out the same year, were also so named. The present Calvary Church, Tarboro, was built on a lot owned by this early clergyman.

In 1762 Moir moved to St. George's, [Northampton County](#) ^[7], where he remained until the end of 1765. While in Northampton he seems to have visited Bertie and Hertford counties and his old charge of St. Mary's with some regularity. Moir's final communication to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in London, written from Suffolk, Va., and dated 13 Oct. 1766, describes a trip he took for his health to New York, Boston, and Rhode Island. He closed by saying: "My constitution is so crazy that I despair of being in a condition to officiate in such large parishes." He was no doubt referring to the charges he had held in North Carolina. After Moir's death, Governor [William Tryon](#) ^[8] commented: "his death . . . defeated the Society's direction to have him fixed in some parish."

During his stay in North Carolina, Moir carried on a personal feud with Governor [Arthur Dobbs](#) ^[9], who wrote in 1764: "He lives upon a plantation penuriously and unhappily and lays out his salary as missionary for retirement." A close reading of the records, however, will show that Moir left solid accomplishments behind in the parishes where he served. He never married. On his death he left an estate of a thousand acres in Edgecombe to his brother Henry, the rector of the parish of Auchterlool in the county of Fife, Scotland.

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