

Outlaw, George ^[1]



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by R. Hargus Taylor, 1991

25 Oct. 1771–15 Aug. 1825

George Outlaw, merchant and legislator, was the only child of Ralph, Jr., and his second wife, Mary Knott Outlaw, whose plantation lay a few miles north of Windsor, [Bertie County](#) ^[2]. The immediate ancestors of Ralph Outlaw had migrated from Norfolk County, Va., to Chowan Precinct and thence to Bertie. The surname "Outlaw" has been traced to thirteenth-century origins in Bedfordshire, England.

Educated by private teachers and in the common schools, young Outlaw was engaged in farming and in the mercantile business before his election to represent Bertie in the state [House of Commons](#) ^[3] in 1795. Thereafter, he maintained rather prosperous plantation and mercantile interests while serving frequently in the General Assembly. He was a member of the House of Commons during the sessions of 1795–98 and 1819. He represented Bertie in the state senate in the sessions of 1799, 1802, 1806–8, 1810–14, 1817, and 1822.

Characterized by kind, genial manners and a generous disposition, Outlaw—a [Jeffersonian Republican](#) ^[4]—presided as speaker of the state senate for the sessions of 1812–14. In the latter year, he was a nominee for governor but was defeated by William Miller. Outlaw's political career was climaxed with his election to the Eighteenth Congress to fill the unexpired term of Hutchings [Gordon Burton](#) ^[5] after Burton's election as governor of North Carolina. Declining to stand for reelection, Outlaw retired to his home in Bertie following a brief tenure in Congress (19 Jan.–3 Mar. 1825).

It is probable that Outlaw's service in the General Assembly was due more to his strength of character, depth of piety, and general popularity—especially among his fellow Baptist constituents in northeastern North Carolina—than to his talents as a statesman. His popularity is evidenced by the fact that he frequently was chosen to preside over the annual sessions of the Chowan Baptist Association, a union of churches that spanned the geographic region from the [Roanoke River](#) ^[6] to the Atlantic. In his capacity as moderator of the association, Outlaw signed a letter of 20 May 1806 to Thomas Jefferson expressing the deepest gratitude for the civil and religious liberties enjoyed "under the administration of the government over which you, Sir, at present preside." Jefferson's response, dated 24 Jun. 1806, noted gratification for the confidence expressed in him and his administration, together with the request that Outlaw assure the churches of "my prayers for the continuance of every blessing to them now and hereafter; and accept yourself my salutations and assurance of great respect and consideration."

Outlaw was married twice. His first wife was Elizabeth Bryan, the daughter of Joseph and Mary Hunter Bryan, by whom he had four children: Joseph Bryan, George Bryan, Harriett (m. Jonathan R. Leggett and then Anthony W. Putney), and Mary Bryan (Polly) (m. William Dossey). Elizabeth Bryan Outlaw died on 28 July 1816. On 19 Jan. 1818 Outlaw married Frances Mackey Smith, the widow of Henry Harrison Smith, by whom he had three more children: William Thomas Mackey, Frances (died in adolescence), and Julia.

Outlaw died of typhoid fever and was buried in the family cemetery in Bertie County.

References:

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Minutes of the North Carolina Chowan Baptist Association, Holden at Cashie Meeting House, 2, 3, and 4 of May 1807.

Albert Timothy Outlaw and Abner Henry Outlaw, *Outlaw Genealogy* (1972).

[John H. Wheeler, ed., *Reminiscences and Memoirs of North Carolina and Eminent North Carolinians*\(1884\).](#) ^[7]

Additional Resources:

"Outlaw, George, (Birth date unknown - 1825)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=O000139> ^[8] (accessed May 14, 2014).

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