

Phifer, Martin (or Fifer, Fiffer, Phieffer, Pheiffer, Phyfer, Pfifer) ^[1]



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by E. W. Phifer, Jr., and Nancy W. Phifer, 1994

18 Oct. 1720–18 Jan. 1791

[Martin Phifer](#) ^[2] (or [Fifer Phifer](#), [Fiffer](#)) planter, colonial militia officer (major), colonial assemblyman, member of the North Carolina House of Commons, and justice of [Mecklenburg County](#) ^[3] Court, was a native of Switzerland. Tradition has it that he was born in the canton of Berne, but better evidence indicates that he came from the village of Hafelfingen, district of Homburg, canton of Basel. He sailed from Rotterdam in 1736 on the *Harle* and landed in Philadelphia. Sometime between 1751 and 1756 he migrated from Pennsylvania to North Carolina and settled on Big Cold Water Creek (before 1750 located in Bladen, after 1750 in Anson, and after 1 Feb. 1763 in Mecklenburg County). On 1 Oct. 1745 he had married Margaret Blackwelder (1722–1803), a native of Holland who may also have sailed on the *Harle*.

In North Carolina Martin Phifer prospered and advanced rapidly in politics, in wealth, and in the militia. From the mid-1750s to the early 1760s he served the colony as a commissary officer provisioning the Indians who cooperated with the settlers during the intermittent raids associated with the [French and Indian War](#) ^[4]. He was also elected to the lower house of the Assembly and was seated on 6 Feb. 1764. During the [Regulator](#) ^[5] uprising he was a loyal supporter of the colonial government. In 1767, when Governor [William Tryon](#) ^[6] made his celebrated march from Salisbury to the [Cherokee](#) ^[7] nation to survey the boundary line, he halted for the night of 22 May at the plantation of Major Phifer, who was continuing to serve as one of his officers. Also, when the militia was called out in August–September 1768 because of unrest at Hillsborough, [Governor Tryon](#) ^[8] was quartered periodically at Major Phifer's home and used his plantation as a rallying point for the militiamen. This plantation continued to be the site for holding the general muster of the Mecklenburg Regiment until at least 1779.

Phifer continued to serve in the lower house of the colonial [Assembly](#) ^[9] (1764–68, 1773–75) and in the House of Commons of the new state (December 1776–77). In 1773 he cosponsored, with [Griffith Rutherford](#) ^[10], a bill to establish a new county from western Rowan (in 1777 it was finally established as [Burke County](#) ^[11]) and, with John Davidson, sponsored a bill to establish a "Public Seminary of Learning in the Western part of this Province [North Carolina]." In an ordinance passed in the convention of 1776 (this probably refers to the last [Provincial Congress](#) ^[12] of 1776), Martin Phifer was appointed one of the eighteen justices of Mecklenburg County [Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions](#) ^[13].

Martin and Margaret Blackwelder Phifer had three children: John (1747–78), Caleb (1749–1811), and Martin, Jr. (1756–1837). Major Phifer was a Protestant and his biographers state that he was of the Lutheran denomination. It is of interest to note that he had fast friends in the [Moravian](#) ^[14] settlements and, with his wife, visited [Bethabara](#) ^[15] and Bethania on at least three occasions: sometime prior to 9 Nov. 1762, on that date, and on 12 May 1770. At the time he made his will in 1789, he owned eighteen slaves, a gristmill, and three plantations. One plantation, Red Hill, was located on the western outskirts of present Concord between U.S. 29 and North Carolina 49. A second, five miles west of Concord on Buffalo Creek, was inherited by his son Caleb, and a third plantation, Cold Water, where he himself lived and died was located on Cold Water Creek about 3–4 miles due east of the center of Concord off North Carolina 73. Phifer also had landholdings on Mecklin's Fork of Lyles Creek in present [Catawba County](#) ^[16] that he divided equitably between his heirs. He was buried "at the Phifer graveyard, three miles from Concord near the old road leading from Charlotte to Salisbury."

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