

Philips, Abraham ^[1]

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Abraham Philips, militia general and state legislator, was born in England and settled in northern Guilford (now Rockingham) County by 1778. His home, which was still standing in the late 1970s, was located on Great Rockhouse Creek, where he eventually had a 700-acre plantation and, by 1830, had enslaved a total of thirty-one people to work it. In addition, Philips owned 800 acres in other tracts in the county, and in 1789, for his Revolutionary War service, he received 1,500 acres on the Big Hatcher River in the future state of Tennessee.

In the Revolution Philips served in the county militia as a sergeant, an ensign, and finally a captain in command of a company. In March 1781, when General Nathanael Greene's army was encamped in the county at Speedwell Furnace on Troublesome Creek, Philips was a scout and guide for Colonel William Washington's cavalry. In the fall of 1781 the county militia was recruited in the campaign commanded by General [Griffith Rutherford](#) ^[2] that forced the British to evacuate [Wilmington](#) ^[3]. In this campaign Philips was captain of his company; in a brief narrative he wrote about his experiences, he mentioned being in five skirmishes with Tories. He remained a militia officer after the war and by November 1810 had become colonel in command of the [Rockingham County](#) ^[4] regiment. In May 1811 he was elected brigadier general of the Fourth Division and served until his resignation in 1817.

By February 1783 Philips was deputy surveyor of [Guilford County](#) ^[5], and in December 1785 he was named a commissioner to survey a line to divide Guilford County to create the new county of Rockingham. He was elected county surveyor of Rockingham at the first court in February 1786 and served in this position for many years, surveying the earliest towns in Rockingham County, [Leaksville](#) ^[6] (1795) and [Wentworth](#) ^[7] (1799). Appointed a county justice on the first court, he was a justice for over forty years. Through the years Philips was on a number of important county commissions, among them the commissions responsible for the promotion of the county seat at Wentworth, for construction of the courthouse and jail, and for establishing the county poorhouse. In 1807 he was elected chairman of the county court.

On the state level Philips had a long and worthy political career. He was a delegate to both state conventions to consider ratification of the federal Constitution. The Rockingham County delegation was anti-Federalist and consistently opposed ratification. Philips was elected to the state House of Commons for three terms (1788–90) and to the North Carolina Senate for nine sessions (1797–99, 1801–3, 1812–14). In the [General Assembly](#) ^[8] he served on the committee of propositions and grievances and of privileges and elections. A Jacksonian [Democrat](#) ^[9], he was a presidential elector in 1828.

On 9 Dec. 1784 Philips married Cynthia Lanier (1761–1837) of Guilford County, and they had six children: Mary (Polly), Pleasant, Charles, Elizabeth, Isaac, and James. With the exception of Polly, who married and lived in Rockingham County, the children emigrated to Georgia and later to Russell County, Ala. Philips died at his home and was buried in a marked grave nearby.

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