

Porter, Edmund ^[1]

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by William S. Price, Jr., and Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1994

ca. 1685–1737

Edmund Porter, colonial official, was born in Lower Norfolk County, Va., the son of [John Porter](#) ^[2] (d. 1712) and his wife Mary. He was the brother of [John Porter](#) ^[3], a leading figure in the pro-Cary forces during [Cary's Rebellion](#) ^[4]. A strong Cary supporter in his own right, he was exempt from pardon because of his role. Governor [Edward Hyde](#) ^[5] considered Porter to be "as useful for any wicked purpose as the others." John Porter, Edmund's father, escaped to England, but Edmund was one of five men who were captured in Virginia. They were sent to England late in 1711 on board the British man-of-war *Reserve* to stand trial for their role in the rebellion. After a year of intermittent hearings in London before the [Lords Proprietors](#) ^[6], Porter and his friends were released for lack of sufficient evidence. In July 1712 Hyde issued a general pardon to all participants in Cary's Rebellion with five exceptions; Edmund Porter and his brother were two of those excepted.

On 30 July 1717, as "son and heir of John Porter of North Carolina," Edmund sold land in Princess Anne County, Va. Styled "Merchant," he sold land in [Chowan County](#) ^[7] near Bluff Point in 1718. There are no records pertaining to him for the next seven years, when he was probably out of the colony. Reported in May 1725 as having come to North Carolina from the West Indies, he soon was named a judge of the colony's Admiralty Court and late in the year he was elected to the Assembly from [Chowan County](#) ^[7].

A vocal critic of Governor [Sir Richard Everard](#) ^[8], and thus a natural ally of former Governor [George Burrington](#) ^[9], Porter was one of three men selected by the Assembly to carry its protests against Everard to London in 1726. His hostilities towards the governor peaked in October 1726 with his indictment for having assaulted Everard on the streets of Edenton the previous July. However, at Everard's request, all charges were dismissed in August 1728. Throughout the Proprietary years Porter and Burrington remained close friends, and in 1730, when it became clear that [Burrington](#) ^[10] would be North Carolina's first royal governor, he nominated Porter to be on the initial Council of State. Porter was sworn as a councillor on 9 Mar. 1731.

Before 1731 had ended Porter and Burrington became stronger enemies than they had been friends previously. Burrington felt that Porter was becoming increasingly allied with [John Baptista Ashe](#) ^[11], and he bitterly resented it. The governor began encouraging raucous demonstrations in the Admiralty courtroom and openly insulted Porter at Council meetings. Early in 1732 he suspended Porter from his judgeship. When Porter appeared before the governor and seven other councillors to present a written defense of Burrington's charges, the governor took the document from his hand and dropped it into a roaring fireplace behind him. Burrington then demanded a vote to suspend Porter from the Council. The suspension tally was four to three, with two votes in the majority coming from men only recently appointed to the Council (under questionable circumstances) by Burrington.

Porter sought to fight his suspensions, and many political associates in the colony supported him with numerous petitions to the [Board of Trade](#) ^[12] in London. Against Burrington's active opposition, Porter was elected to the lower house from Chowan in 1733; there he ranked second only to [Edward Moseley](#) ^[13] in popularity. In July he was authorized to express the Assembly's gratitude to William Smith returning from England where he had been to protest Burrington's executive actions.

When [Gabriel Johnston](#) ^[14] succeeded Burrington as governor late in 1734, he brought with him a commission returning Porter to the Council. Porter took his oaths on 16 Jan. 1735. In October of the next year he was restored to his admiralty judgeship. A regular attendant to his official duties, Porter died somewhat suddenly late in 1737. He left no children by his wife, Elizabeth.

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Authors:

[Price, William S., Jr.](#) [20]

[Smith, Claiborne T., Jr.](#) [21]

Origin - location:

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1 January 1994 | Price, William S., Jr.; Smith, Claiborne T., Jr.

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