

Riddick, Joseph ^[1]

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d. September 1818

Joseph Riddick, political leader, was likely born in that portion of [Perquimans County](#) ^[2] that became a part of [Gates County](#) ^[3] in 1779. He may have been the son of Joseph and Hannah Riddick. His surname sometimes appears in contemporary records as Reddick, perhaps suggesting its pronunciation. One Joseph Riddick was named to the [committee of safety](#) ^[4] for [Chowan County](#) ^[5] on 15 Oct. 1776. As early as 1797 Riddick was referred to as colonel in county records, but by 1808 he was called general.

A Jeffersonian [Republican](#) ^[6], he represented the new county of Gates in the [House of Commons](#) ^[7] for four sessions between 1781 and 1785 and in the senate for twenty-seven consecutive terms between 1785 and 1811 and again in 1815 and 1817. He did not serve in the four sessions that met between 1812 and 1816, although he remained active during this period (as he had before and would continue to do until the year before his death) as a justice of the county court, executor of numerous estates, guardian of orphans, and auditor of estates for the county court. It is possible that the [War of 1812](#) ^[8], which occurred while he was not in the Assembly, may somehow have accounted for his absence from that body. Nevertheless, he sat in the North Carolina [General Assembly](#) ^[7] for a total of thirty-three terms and was speaker of the senate as well for eleven terms between 1800 and 1811, failing of election to that post only in 1805.

Early in his legislative career Riddick became chairman of the finance committee and often served on the committee of claims. In 1791 he voted in favor of a loan of five thousand pounds to the trustees of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[9]. In 1805, 1807, and 1808 bills to establish a penitentiary were defeated. In 1810, when he was speaker of the senate, a similar bill, which also liberalized the code of punishment for crime, passed the house but the senate vote was tied, 30 to 30. Riddick, although personally in favor, broke the tie by voting against the bill. He explained his vote by saying that he did not want the responsibility of creating a new criminal system for the state.

He represented Gates County in the [convention of 1788](#) ^[10] in Hillsborough, which declined to ratify the U.S. Constitution as well as in the [convention of 1789](#) ^[11] at Fayetteville, which did ratify it. In both instances, Riddick supported adoption of the Constitution.

Riddick in 1789 owned 2,126 acres of land in Gates County, 189 in Tyrrell, and 640 in Cumberland. His household at the time of the 1790 census consisted of two males over age sixteen, one under that age, four females, and the fifteen people he enslaved. In 1800, there were six males, four females, and the twenty-one people he enslaved; by 1810, there were five males and five females but six people enslaved by Riddick.

His will, dated 24 July 1818, mentions his wife Ann; sons Reuben, Isaiah, and Arthur; daughters Hannah Rogerson, Easter Billups, Avis Eason, and Mabel Hill; and grandsons Josiah, Kedar, and Nathan Riddick, Mills Hill, Langley Billups, Solomon Eason, and Jesse Rogerson.

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