

Sheppard, Abraham ^[1]

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Sheppard, Abraham

by William F. Hohenwarter, 1994

fl. 1759–90

Abraham Sheppard, sheriff, legislator, and soldier. The first documentary evidence of Sheppard's private and public life is the notice of his appointment as a justice of the peace at the time of the formation of [Dobbs County](#) ^[2] in 1759. He owned property along the [Contentnea Creek](#) ^[3]. Sheppard was an associate of [Richard Caswell](#) ^[4], later governor, joining with him in 1767 to bring about a division of Dobbs and the establishment of [Kinston](#) ^[5] as the county seat, finally accomplished in 1779.

A report filed by the colonial Assembly for taxes due to the colony from sheriffs for the years 1759–70 suggests that Sheppard and three other Dobbs County sheriffs "play into each others hands" with the result that the county's arrears were the second largest in the colony. In March 1773 Sheppard's tax collections were in arrears of £1888 14s 8d, a figure considerably larger than from any other sheriff in North Carolina. This suggests that he was either guilty of inefficient tax collection, poor record keeping, corruption, or a combination of these problems. Subsequent records written by Sheppard while acting as a military commander substantiate this judgment.

Sheppard served in the assemblies of 1760 and 1769, the Third, Fourth, and Fifth [Provincial congresses](#) ^[6] in 1775 and 1776, and the House of Commons in 1779 and 1780. He completed his legislative career as a member of the Council of State in 1784. From 1783 to 1790 he served as chairman of the [Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions](#) ^[7] for Dobbs County.

A letter written by Richard Caswell indicates that Sheppard served with him as a militia commander at the [Battle of Alamance](#) ^[8] in 1771 and at the [Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge](#) ^[9] on 27 Feb. 1776. In December 1776 Sheppard was appointed colonel of the First Battalion of the state militia and joined the defense of Charlestown, S.C., which was threatened by a British invasion. In April 1777 he wrote from South Carolina pleading to be "rescued from the most miserable part of God's creation—both men and lands." At the instruction of the Continental Congress, North Carolina created nine Continental regiments in 1775. On order of Governor Richard Caswell, while Sheppard was still in South Carolina, the North Carolina legislature established, without the authorization of the Continental Congress, a tenth regiment. The governor pressured the Congress to accept this latest unit, to be commanded by Colonel Sheppard, and it was made a part of the Continental line on 12 June 1777.

The conditions of appointment and acceptance of Sheppard's command in April 1777 were that he would recruit a minimum of three hundred men and move them northwards to join George Washington's Grand Army by 1 June 1777. Through the efforts of the governor, Sheppard received special aids and privileges to assist his recruiting efforts that were denied to the commanding officers of the earlier created North Carolina Continental regiments. From June 1777 to January 1778 the Tenth North Carolina Regiment remained in the state while the governor and the Continental Congress pleaded with Sheppard to move his troops northwards. The colonel complained with some validity of a lack of supplies, arrears in soldiers' pay, and the difficulty of recruiting. But these were problems common to all commanders during those years.

In December 1777 committees of both houses of the legislature found Sheppard's reasons for delay "frivolous and insufficient." These findings were reached after the colonel's son Benjamin, paymaster for the regiment, was declared to have been suspected of counterfeiting while with the militia in 1776 and was placed under a £1000 bond. At the same time the regiment's quartermaster, Alexander Outlaw, failed to appear in court in Halifax on charges of corruption.

By February 1778 Sheppard was moving his greatly understrength regiment northwards at the rate of a mile per day. While doing so, he lost a deserter per mile, an average of one per day. In mid-March the regiment reached Georgetown, Md., the location of a smallpox inoculation camp, where it was delayed by an outbreak of the measles.

Scanty records suggest that the small remnants of the Tenth Regiment arrived at Valley Forge in mid-May 1778. Losses had reduced all North Carolina regiments to skeleton strength, and the Third through Tenth were added to the First or Second regiments. Colonel Sheppard resigned his commission in the Continental army on 1 June 1778.

Little evidence survives of Sheppard's personal life. He had at least two sons, Benjamin and Captain Abram.

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