

## **Singleton, Spyers** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Singleton, Spyers**

by Eva Murphy, 1994; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, January 2023

**d. 31 Oct. 1814**

Spyers Singleton, legislator and businessman of Craven County <sup>[2]</sup>, was the son of Samuel (will dated 4 Dec. 1762) and Hannah Singleton (b. ca. 1728) of Dobbs County. He had one sister, Martha, who married Benjamin Caswell <sup>[3]</sup>.

In 1775 Singleton was one of seven representatives of Dobbs County to the Provincial Congress <sup>[4]</sup> at Hillsborough; Richard Caswell <sup>[5]</sup> later governor, also represented Dobbs. Singleton was then a merchant in partnership with Benjamin Caswell, Richard's brother, on Contentnea Creek near Haw Landing, between the present towns of Hookerton and Snow Hill. In the following year Singleton was appointed one of fifteen "justices for keeping the peace" in Dobbs County. He served as captain of a troop of light horse cavalry in the New Bern District Brigade of Minutemen under Colonel Richard Caswell at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge <sup>[6]</sup> (27 Feb. 1776) and in the expeditions to Moore's Creek and in the defense of Wilmington.

After 1776, references in the Colonial and State Records <sup>[7]</sup> place Singleton in Beaufort in 1777 and in New Bern in 1779. By this time he had married Elizabeth Blackledge (marriage bond 30 Dec. 1775), the daughter of Richard and Ann Blackledge, of Craven County, and apparently had moved his residence to that area. He was owner of the armed merchant ship *Cornelia* (Charles Biddle, captain), fitted out in New Bern in 1778. In the 1790 census he was listed in the Newbern District of Craven County, with a household of eight persons and the eighteen people he enslaved. His final residence was listed, in the disposal of his property after his death, as Brices Creek near New Bern.

In 1783 Singleton was one of five commissioners for the port of Beaufort, and in 1784 he was appointed a trustee and a director of New Bern Academy <sup>[8]</sup>. By 1784 he was also part of the commercial firm of Enoch Ward, Spyers Singleton, Christopher Neale and Company, which was named in a bill permitting a canal to be dug from Clubfoot Creek to Harlowe Creek. However the canal was not approved until 1795, under Governor Richard Dobbs Spaight <sup>[9]</sup>.

In October 1784 Singleton represented New Bern in the House of Commons. In December 1785 he was one of two nominees for councillor of state and was also appointed one of five commissioners for improving coastal navigation. In 1786 he was one of five lottery managers directed to raise money for the construction of a "house for the poor" in New Bern. Again nominated for councillor of state in December 1786, he was one of four nominees elected in January 1787. On 30 Nov. 1787 Singleton petitioned the house to require the "Public Treasurer to pay off . . . a certain warrant" issued to General Nathanael Greene for the purchase of commissary goods; his petition was granted.

In the same year Singleton was the defendant in a noted court case Bayard v. Singleton <sup>[10]</sup>, by which he retained some property acquired in 1784 for £2,160 formerly belonging to Loyalist Samuel Cornell <sup>[11]</sup>. This case was the first in which a court declared an act of a legislature unconstitutional.

In 1793 the General Assembly appointed him as one of the seven men on the Governor's Council. Thomas Blount <sup>[12]</sup>, in a letter to his brother, John Gray Blount <sup>[13]</sup>, in July 1798, recommended Singleton for tax commissioner, and in August he was appointed a commissioner of one of seven divisions for "the valuation of lands and houses and for the enumeration of slaves."

In 1800 Singleton was one of five commissioners of navigation, who, among other duties, inspected incoming passengers for contagious diseases. In the census of that year he was listed as having a household of seven persons and the four people they enslaved.

On 11 Dec. 1804 Singleton's wife died in New Bern. At his death almost ten years later, he was described as "an old and respectable inhabitant of This [Craven] County." He was buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery.

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### Additional Resources:

Colonial and State Records of North Carolina. Documenting the American South. UNC Libraries.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/> [7]

Bayard v. Singleton. NC Historical Markers. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=C-20> [14]

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### From:

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