

## **Thomson, John** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Thomson, John**

by Harold J. Dudley, 1996

#### **1690–1753**

John Thomson, Presbyterian clergyman, teacher, and writer, was born in Northern Ireland and baptized in 1691. On 1 Mar. 1706 he entered the [University of Glasgow](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, Scotland, from which he was graduated with the M.A. degree in 1710–11. Licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Armagh in Northern Ireland on 23 June 1713, he moved with his family to Virginia in 1715, disembarking at Yorktown just nine years after the Presbyterian church had been formally organized in the American colonies. He settled among relatives and on 24 Sept. 1717 became a member of the New Castle Presbytery, one of four that constituted the newly formed Synod of Philadelphia. Thomson frequently served as moderator of the courts of the church of which he was a member and in 1719 and 1722 of the Synod of Philadelphia. He was the first to recommend to the synod the adoption of the Westminster Assembly (1641–48) Standards (*Confession of Faith*, *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Book of Church Order*) as the constitution of the Presbyterian church. This was formerly done in 1729. He is also credited with authorship of *The Directory of Worship*, which was later incorporated into the constitution.

Following his ordination in April 1717, Thomson began his ministry at Lewes, Del. For thirty-five years he served churches in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Virginia—possibly even after he settled in North Carolina in midcentury. A controversial figure, he often engaged in polemics, written and spoken, with peers and sometimes with parishioners. He was outspoken and adequately endowed with Scottish sagacity equal to every situation.

The minutes of the General Synod of Philadelphia record that in May 1744 many people in North Carolina reported their "desolate condition" and requested that a minister be stationed among them. It was ordered that the Reverend Mr. Thomson respond, and it is assumed that he did. He moved to North Carolina in 1751, intending to remain; he built a cabin in present [Iredell County](#) <sup>[3]</sup> near Mount Mourne not far from the home of his son-in-law, Samuel Baker. Not only did he prove to be a vigorous and persuasive preacher, but also he had an eye for desirable land, some of which was held for eventual church uses. Land in the area was rapidly being taken up, and he acquired three grants of 640 acres each on various creeks. Early deeds indicate that he actually surveyed some of the tracts himself. As new settlers arrived this land was made available to them.

With the location of his home as a central point, Thomson established a number of stands or outpost preaching stations—one was under a great poplar tree near the present [Davidson College](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, and another, near [Fourth Creek](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, became the prominent First Presbyterian Church in [Statesville](#) <sup>[6]</sup>. Deeds dated 1753 suggest that he served Cathey's Meeting House, a landmark for the region. Another stand became Third Creek Presbyterian Church, and the town of Concord developed around another. He visited the settlements in which Centre, Hopewell, Sugaw Creek, Poplar Tent, and Thyatira churches evolved. The significance of this is that all of these stands became influential Presbyterian churches, and from them or the communities in which they were located have come some of the most powerful and distinguished citizens of North Carolina.

Thomson's marriage took place in Ireland in or about 1715. His wife's name is unknown, but she may have been a Miss Osborne. They had one child, a daughter, before arriving in America, and they were the parents of eleven more before her death in 1733 or 1734. His second wife was Mary McKean Reid, widow of Thomas Reid of Octorara, Pa. To them was born one child, Hannah, in 1735.

Thomson died on the eve of the [French and Indian War](#) <sup>[7]</sup> when Indian raids on frontier settlements were common. This may account for his burial beneath the floor of his cabin, where his son-in-law, Samuel Baker, was also buried. The site eventually became known as Baker's Grave Yard, and it was surrounded by a rough rock wall. In 1963 it disappeared under the waters of Lake Norman, after the construction of Cowan's Ford Dam on the [Catawba River](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and the removal of the graves and stone markers to the cemetery of old Centre Church near Mount Mourne.

Thomson was the author of several publications, one of which was printed in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin and one in Williamsburg, Va., by William Parks. Among them were *An Overture Presented to the Reverend Synod of Dissenting Ministers* <sup>[9]</sup> (1729), *An Essay Upon the Faith of Assurance* <sup>[10]</sup> (1740), *The Doctrine of Convictions Set in a Clear Light* <sup>[11]</sup> (1741), *Poor Orphan's Legacy* <sup>[12]</sup> (1743), written on the occasion of the death of his first wife, *An Appendix, Containing the Articles of the Church of England* (1749), and *An Explication of the Shorter Catechism* <sup>[13]</sup> (1749). The latter, printed in Williamsburg, Va., has been acclaimed as the first Presbyterian book published in the South.

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John G. Herndon, *John Thomson: Presbyterian Constitutionalist* <sup>[14]</sup> (1943).

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E. F. Rockwell, "Gospel Pioneers in Western North Carolina <sup>[17]</sup>," *Historical Magazine* (1869).

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Charles W. Sommerville, *History of Hopewell Presbyterian Church* <sup>[19]</sup> (1939).

## Additional Resources:

Crockett, Alex T. 1985. *John Thomson: a man with a mission*. Durham? N.C.: A.T.

Crockett. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/john-thomson-a-man-with-a-mission/420692?item=468256> <sup>[20]</sup> (accessed July 2, 2014).

Search results 'Third Creek Church' in North Carolina Highway Historical Marker

Program: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=L-41> <sup>[21]</sup> (accessed July 2, 2014).

Search results 'Centre Church' in North Carolina Highway Historical Marker

Program: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=M-22> <sup>[22]</sup> (July 2, 2014).

Search results 'Fourth Creek Meeting House' in North Carolina Highway Historical Marker

Program: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=M-46> <sup>[23]</sup> (accessed July 2, 2014).

Search results 'Early History' in North Carolina Highway Historical Marker

Program: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=MM-1> <sup>[24]</sup> (July 2, 2014).

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Carolina. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr22-0179> <sup>[25]</sup> (accessed July 2, 2014).

## Subjects:

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[Writers, journalists, and editors](#) <sup>[29]</sup>

## Authors:

[Dudley, Harold J.](#) <sup>[30]</sup>

## Origin - location:

[Iredell County](#) <sup>[31]</sup>

[Statesville](#) <sup>[32]</sup>

[Davidson College](#) <sup>[33]</sup>

## From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#) <sup>[34]</sup>

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## Links

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/thomson-john> <sup>[2]</sup> <http://www.gla.ac.uk/> <sup>[3]</sup> <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/iredell> <sup>[4]</sup>

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<https://www.ncpedia.org/french-and-indian-war> <sup>[8]</sup> <https://www.ncpedia.org/rivers/catawba> <sup>[9]</sup> <https://www.worldcat.org/title/overture-presented-to-the-reverend-synod-of-dissenting-ministers-sitting-in-philadelphia-in-the-month-of-september-1728-and-is-now-under-the-consideration-of-the-several-members-of-the-said-synod-in-order-to-come-to-a-determination-concerning-it-at-next-meeting-together-with-a-preface-or-an-epistle-containing-some-further-reasons-to-strengthen-the-overture-and-an-answer-to-some-objections-against-it/oclc/6282112> <sup>[10]</sup> <https://www.worldcat.org/title/essay-upon-the-faith-of-assurance-being-the-substance-of-several-sermons-preached-by-the-author-to-his-own-congregation-to-which-is-added-an-appendix-containing-a-modest-resolution-of-two-important-cases-relating-to-assurance/oclc/62821120> <sup>[11]</sup> <https://www.worldcat.org/title/doctrine-of-convictions-set-in-a-clear-light-or-an-examination-and-confutation-of-several-errors-relating-to-conversion-being-the-substance-of-a-sermon-preached-by-the-author-to-his-own-and-a-neighbouring-congregation-with-some-enlargements/oclc/62821119> <sup>[12]</sup> <https://www.worldcat.org/title/poor-orphans-legacy->

being-a-short-collection-of-godly-counsels-and-exhortations-to-a-young-arising-generation-primarily-designed-by-the-author-for-his-own-children-but-published-that-others-may-also-reap-benefit-by-them/oclc/32648351 [13] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/explication-of-the-shorter-catechism-composed-by-the-assembly-of-divines-commonly-called-the-westminster-assembly-wherein-the-several-questions-and-answers-of-the-said-shorter-catechism-are-resolved-divided-and-taken-apart-into-several-under-questions-and-answers-in-order-to-render-the-whole-more-plain-and-easy-to-be-understood-not-only-by-the-young-arising-generation-but-also-by-the-more-weak-and-ignorant-of-more-advanced-years-that-they-all-may-be-helped-forward-in-their-growth-in-knowledge-and-acquaintance-with-the-doctrines-of-faith-and-principles-of-our-holy-protestant-reformed-christian-religion/oclc/62821121> [14] <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89065914418;view=1up;seq=5> [15] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/american-writers-before-1800-a-biographical-and-critical-dictionary/oclc/8169965> [16] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/mecklenburg-signers-and-their-neighbors/oclc/1976502> [17] <https://archive.org/details/gospelpioneerinw00rock> [18] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/national-index-of-american-imprints-through-1800-the-short-title-evans/oclc/76769> [19] <https://archive.org/details/historyofhopewel01somm> [20] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/john-thomson-a-man-with-a-mission/420692?item=468256> [21] <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=L-41> [22] <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=M-22> [23] <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=M-46> [24] <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=MM-1> [25] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr22-0179> [26] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [27] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/clergy> [28] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/educators> [29] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/writer> [30] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/dudley-harold-j> [31] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/i> [32] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location> [33] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmon-56> [34] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>