

## **Tisdale, William** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Neil C. Pennywitt, 1996; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, January 2023

**29 May 1734–ca. 1796**

William Tisdale, silversmith, judge of the admiralty court for the Port of Beaufort, and engraver of the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina <sup>[2]</sup>, was born the second son of Ebenezer and Hope Basset Tisdale of Lebanon, Conn. Following his brother Nathan (A.B. 1749) to Harvard <sup>[3]</sup>, he entered with the class of 1755 on a Hollis Scholarship. Tisdale was, according to classmate John Adams, one of the best students in that exceptional class, but he left college before the end of his first year. His connection with North Carolina was fostered by the relationship he had with the Trumbull family of Lebanon <sup>[4]</sup> with whom he corresponded for some twenty years. In 1762 he wrote to Colonel Jonathan Trumbull in Boston inquiring about the debts of one Antipas Trumbull, of New Bern <sup>[5]</sup>, who died in that North Carolina town in 1770. From that later date William Tisdale begins to appear frequently in the North Carolina records, as he seems to have moved quickly into the political sphere of the area. In 1771 he was a juror and grand juror for Craven County <sup>[6]</sup>, and late in the same year he was a member of the Assembly. On 9 Sept. 1775 he was appointed by the Provincial Congress <sup>[7]</sup> to the Committee of Safety for New Bern, and a month later he was elected to Congress, which, on 20 Oct. 1775, employed him to engrave plates for bills of credit and designated him "silversmith" in the Act. In 1779 Tisdale was paid £150 for engraving the Great Seal of the new state, and the next year he was one of the commissioners to supervise the issuing of the new paper money.

During the late 1770s Tisdale was occupied not only with the practice of his artistic trade but also with affairs of a public nature, which took up much of his time. On 11 Mar. 1777 he was appointed a justice of the peace, and the following 30 April Governor Richard Caswell <sup>[8]</sup> signed his commission as judge of the admiralty court for the Port of Beaufort. However, in 1781 a petition was presented to the Assembly to suspend him as judge of the court of admiralty, and in July 1781 Tisdale was so suspended until the charges of bribery and corruption were refuted. The committee of propositions and grievances recommended that the resolution of July 1781 be rescinded, but the house rejected this recommendation. On 17 Apr. 1782 he sent an address to the legislature asking it to reconsider its earlier vote, but once again he was refused. Finally, on 5 Nov. 1784, his resignation as justice of the peace was accepted by the legislature. Yet the next year Tisdale was elected a member of the General Assembly <sup>[9]</sup> representing New Bern and was subsequently appointed to several committees.

The census of 1790 showed the household of William Tisdale to consist of one white male over sixteen, one male under sixteen, three white females, and the three people they enslaved. Unfortunately it gives no clues as to the names of his (presumed) wife and children. Several deeds in which he was involved from 1794 to 1796 appear in Craven County documents, but his name does not show up in North Carolina records after the later date, and his will was not recorded in Craven County.

#### **References:**

Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 11 <sup>[10]</sup>, 16– <sup>[11]</sup>17 <sup>[12]</sup>, 19 <sup>[13]</sup>, 26 <sup>[14]</sup> (1895–1906).

George Barton Cutten, *Silversmiths of North Carolina* <sup>[15]</sup> (1973).

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 10 <sup>[16]</sup> (1890).

Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, vol. 13, 1751–55 <sup>[17]</sup> (1965).

#### **Additional Resources:**

Documenting the American South: Colonial and State Records of North Carolina. "CSR Documents by Tisdale, 1734-1796." Documenting the American South. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr10815> <sup>[18]</sup> (accessed July 3, 2014).

"State seal and motto." North Carolina General Assembly. <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/ncgainfo/educational/StateSeal.html> <sup>[19]</sup> (accessed July 3, 2014).

#### **Subjects:**

Biographies <sup>[20]</sup>

Judges <sup>[21]</sup>

Public service <sup>[22]</sup>

**Authors:**

Pennywitt, Neil C. [23]

**Origin - location:**

Craven County [24]

New Bern [25]

**From:**

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press. [26]

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