

Worley, John ^[1]

Worley, John

by Neil C. Pennywitt, 1996

d. between 8 Feb. and 3 Mar. 1741

John Worley, justice of the [General Court](#) ^[2] and a member of the Council, flourished in what is now [Tyrrell County](#) ^[3] from 1715 until the mid-1730s. He first appears in colonial records as a vestryman for the South West Parish in the Chowan Precinct of the colony in 1715; thereafter his name shows up with great regularity.

Worley was appointed a justice of the General Court in August 1716 and remained a member until November 1732. It seems, however, that he was not an impeccable, law-abiding model for the community; twice he was tried for assault (in 1716 and 1727), though acquitted both times. Colonial records also note in 1716 that he was accused of keeping one Mary Haskins (the wife of John Haskins) in his household, along with several illegitimate children. Worley admitted that Mary Haskins was indeed a member of his household, but only as a "hierling," and he made no mention of the children. Apparently he was a man of action as well as a judge.

The Worley name was quite prominent in the Chowan area; concurrent with his General Court membership, John Worley was a justice of the peace from 1716 to 1727, was appointed road overseer for the "lower district" of Chowan precinct in 1716 (a very important post at the time), and served as a colonel in the local militia. Despite his questionable decorum, he must have been held in some esteem as a learned man, for in 1716 John Swain signed an agreement with the judge placing his orphaned sister Elizabeth in Worley's service for an undetermined period in return for Worley's teaching her to read.

Little appears of his later activities, although he was a member of the Provincial Council from August 1726 to December 1730. His family is also seldom mentioned, but apparently one of his sons followed in his legal footsteps, as John Worley, Jr., is listed as a justice of the peace for [Tyrrell County](#) ^[3] in March 1735.

During his lifetime Worley acquired a rather sizable estate. According to the 1735 [quitrents](#) ^[4], he paid taxes on 1,050 acres in Tyrrell County; his son, John, Jr., is listed for 840 acres, and his son Joshua held 390 acres. Worley drew up his will on 8 Feb. 1741, and it was recorded on 3 Mar. 1741. Survived by sons John, Jr., and Joshua, two daughters, Elizabeth Lurry and Penelope Wright, and a grandson, John Norcom, he was buried somewhere in presentday Tyrrell County.

References:

Robert J. Cain, ed., *Records of the Executive Council, 1664–1734* (1984).

J. R. B. Hathaway, ed., *North Carolina Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. 1 (1900).

William S. Price, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Higher-Court Minutes, 1709–1723* (1977) and *1724–1730* (1981).

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vols. 1–2 (1886).

Additional Resources:

Minutes of the General Court of North Carolina. General Court July 27, 1725 - August 02, 1725 Volume 02, Pages 591-596. Documenting the American South, UNC: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr02-0279> ^[5]

Minutes of the General Court of North Carolina. General Court July 30, 1723 - August 06, 1723 Volume 02, Pages 510-513. Documenting the American South, UNC: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr02-0242> ^[6]

Minutes of the North Carolina Governor's Council North Carolina. Council November 08, 1727 Volume 02, Pages 679-683. Documenting the American South, UNC: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr02-0304> ^[7]

Minutes of the North Carolina Governor's Council North Carolina. Council July 28, 1726 - August 01, 1726 Volume 02, Pages 637-639. Documenting the American South, UNC: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr02-0291> ^[8]

Minutes of the General Court of North Carolina. General Court October 29, 1728 - November 05, 1728 Volume 02, Pages 829-834. Documenting the American South, UNC: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr02-0329> ^[9]

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[15]

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