

## Wynns, Thomas <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Thomas R. J. Newbern, 1996

**1760–4 June 1825**

See also: [Wynns, Benjamin](#) <sup>[2]</sup> (from the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*)

Thomas Wynns, congressman, state legislator, and major general of state troops, was born at Barfields, the Chowan River plantation of the Wynns family, in [Hertford County](#) <sup>[3]</sup>. His father, [Benjamin](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, was a state legislator and a militia colonel during the [Revolutionary War](#) <sup>[4]</sup>; he also introduced bills in the [General Assembly](#) <sup>[5]</sup> creating Hertford County from sections of [Bertie](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, [Chowan](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, and [Northampton](#) <sup>[8]</sup> counties, as well as founding the county seat of Winton, named in his honor and located on land that he donated. Thomas's mother was Margaret Pugh Wynns, the stepdaughter of [Thomas](#) <sup>[9]</sup> and [Penelope Barker](#) <sup>[10]</sup> of Edenton.

Wynns received his education at a local academy and at age twenty was allowed to tour Europe, a fashionable practice for planters' sons of the period. He sailed in the late spring of 1780 on the brig *Fair American*, which was built at Barfields and owned by his uncles, George and William Wynns, and by several [Edenton](#) <sup>[11]</sup> businessmen. But only two weeks after leaving Ocracoke the brig was seized by the British frigate *Vestal*. The *Vestal* reached Spithead, near Portsmouth, England, on 14 November, with Wynns and several members of the *Fair American*'s crew securely locked up. Wynns was released soon after he was questioned by British magistrates and spent six weeks in the London area contacting friends and relatives of his acquaintances in North Carolina. In January 1781 he booked passage first to France, then to Boston, and arrived in North Carolina by the spring of 1781.

Wynns entered politics in 1786 with his election to the state senate from Hertford County. In 1787 he represented his county in the House of Commons but returned the next year to the senate, where he served continuously until 1800. In July 1788 Wynns and his uncle George were delegates to the [convention at Hillsborough](#) <sup>[12]</sup> to discuss the new federal Constitution. The following year he attended the [convention at Fayetteville](#) <sup>[13]</sup> that adopted the document. Returning to the senate, Wynns pushed for the founding of the [state university at Chapel Hill](#) <sup>[14]</sup> and was named one of the first trustees of the school. During this period he also served as Indian commissioner for the Southern District. In 1800 he was a presidential elector and voted for the Jefferson-Burr ticket.

In 1802 Wynns was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives to fill the vacancy created by the death of [Charles Johnson](#) <sup>[15]</sup> of Edenton. He was reelected to serve in the Eighth and Ninth congresses, ending 4 Mar. 1807. He again served as a presidential elector in 1808, casting his vote for [James Madison](#) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Wynns withdrew from the national political scene in 1808 and returned to Hertford County to oversee the running of his plantation on the old Barfields land. He was, however, persuaded to serve once again in the state senate from 1808 to 1817, after which he retired to Barfields. In this period he received the commission as major general in the First Division of state troops, a post that he held until 1813.

Wynns married Susanna Maney, the daughter of James Maney II of Maney's Landing, Hertford County. They had no children. Susanna died on 5 Jan. 1822, a few years before her husband. Both were buried on the old Maney plantation at Maney's Landing.

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[Benjamin B. Winborne, \*The Colonial and State History of Hertford County, North Carolina\* \(1906\).](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

### Additional Resources:

"Wynns, Thomas, (1764 - 1825)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000786> <sup>[18]</sup> (accessed February 18, 2014).

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Edwards & Broughton Printing Company. 1907. <https://archive.org/details/historyofunivers00batt> [19] (accessed February 18, 2014).

The Wynns Family Papers, 1824-1927. State Archives of North Carolina. [http://ead.archives.ncdcr.gov/MfP\\_91\\_Wynns\\_Family\\_Papers.html](http://ead.archives.ncdcr.gov/MfP_91_Wynns_Family_Papers.html) [20] (accessed February 18, 2014).

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[American Revolution \(1763-1789\)](#) [21]

[Early Statehood \(1789-1820\)](#) [22]

[Biographies](#) [23]

[Military personnel](#) [24]

[Militias](#) [25]

[Planters](#) [26]

[Public officials](#) [27]

[Universities and colleges](#) [28]

## Authors:

[Newbern, Thomas R. J.](#) [29]

## Origin - location:

[Hertford County](#) [30]

[Murfreesboro](#) [31]

[University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) [32]

## From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#) [33]

1 January 1996 | Newbern, Thomas R. J.

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