

Amis, Thomas ^[1]

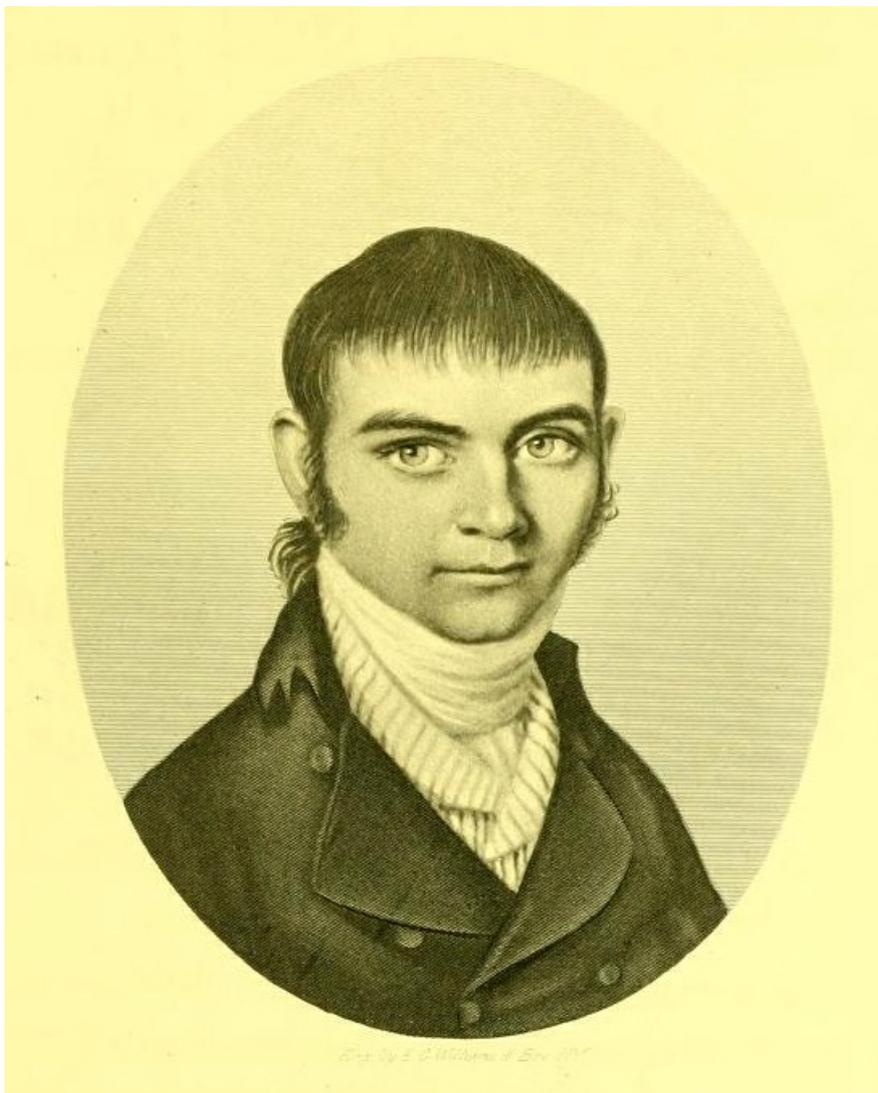
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Amis, Thomas

By Sam Starnes, North Carolina State University, 2013; with contributions by Kelly Agan, Government & Heritage Library

ca. 1730s-1740s - 4 Dec. 1797



Portrait of Thomas Amis, from Charles Lukens Davis's *North Carolina Society of the Cincinnati*, p. 56-57, published 1907. Presented on [Archive.org](#).

Thomas Amis (pronounced "Amy"), merchant and entrepreneur, patriot officer in the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[2], delegate to the [Provincial Congress](#) ^[3] and member of the North Carolina [General Assembly](#) ^[4], was born in, most likely, [Halifax County](#) ^[5] or Northampton County sometime between 1730 and the mid-1740s. Some sources suggestion the early 1730s and others, including a gravestone, suggest 1744. He is believed to be the last of nine children of John Amis (1724-1764) of French descent and Mary Dillard Amis (b. 1726). However, other sources indicate that he was the son of Thomas Amis.

In any event, Thomas Amis' notable history took place during and after the Revolutionary War. Amis served as a member of the Provincial Congress from Bladen County ^[6] in 1776 and was also appointed as a justice of the peace for North Carolina. He served as a superintendent of the commissary with a rank of captain for the 3rd Regiment of North Carolina Continental Troops representing the district of Wilmington ^[7] and also had at one point responsibility for finding continental army deserters. Following his service in the Continental Army, Amis became a member of the Society of the Cincinnati ^[8].

The western lands of North Carolina (now in Tennessee) were claimed by the state of North Carolina in 1780 and used to compensate soldiers and military suppliers instead of cash payments. After being displaced from his Bladen County home by British invasion in 1780, Amis relocated to the frontier of then western North Carolina after petitioning for and receiving a grant of one-thousand acres on Big Creek in the Holston River area in what became Hawkins County. He may have participated in General John Sevier ^[9]'s State of Franklin ^[10] campaign but subsequently represented Hawkins County in the North Carolina General Assembly. The 1887 *History of Tennessee* indicates that Amis also participated in restoring Sevier's citizenship following the failure of the State of Franklin. In 1789 Amis delivered a petition to the North Carolina General Assembly for creation of a town at the Hawkins Courthouse settlement. The approved town became Rogersville (in present day Tennessee). Amis commissioned architect Thomas Harlan to build a fortified home near present day Rogersville. The home featured eighteen inch thick stone walls and rifle ports in place of windows on an upper half story. At over 200 years old and structurally sound, the home still stands today.

Amis became a highly successful merchant and entrepreneur after the Revolution. Analysis of his business ledgers by Lucy K. Gump indicates that he developed a fairly complex enterprise utilizing the barter system that included the development and resale of commodities from local crops and goods, particularly corn. He opened a trading post, blacksmith shop, saw and grist mill, and distillery, which seems to have been his most profitable enterprise. His business ledgers also indicate horse breeding and providing tavern and stable services for travelers, among whom were Governor William Blount and Andre Michaux, the French botanist credited with the discovery of the *Magnolia macrophylla* in 1789. He may have traded with Native American traders and may also have participated in trade well down the Mississippi with the Spanish, as Edwin Sparks reported in his 1904 *The United States of America*. Sparks noted that North Carolina trader Thomas Amis lost a fully loaded flatboat at Natchez when it was taken by the Spanish.

Captain Thomas Amis married Alice Gale (1744-1784) on January 27, 1763. They had eleven children: Tabitha Amis, Francis Amis, Mary Amis, Elizabeth Amis, John Amis Rachel Amis, Willie Amis, Lincoln Amis, Alice Gail Amis, Thomas Gail Amis, and Penelope Amis. Amis married his second wife, Lucy Haynes (1761-1874), on March 26, 1787. Amis and Haynes had four children, Haynes Amis, William Amis, James Amis and Nancy Amis.

Thomas Amis spent the final decade of his life in his community operating his various business interests and providing services to pioneers who travelled through the area. His will was reportedly the first recorded will in Hawkins County, Tennessee. Captain Thomas Amis passed away December 4, 1797, and, along with both of his wives, is buried in Amis Cemetery near the stone house built by Thomas Harlan. This location is approximately three miles from present day Rogersville, Tennessee.

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