Personal Names [1]

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Personal Names

by William S. Powell, 2006

While naming traditions vary widely in history and among North Carolina's diverse cultural and ethnic groups, personal names in families are often used for many generations. Out of the 393,000 people in the state by 1790 [2], only 71 people among the heads of families had more than a single given or Christian [3] name. A large majority of the people had biblical names. Such names as Aaron, Abraham, Benjamin, Daniel, David, Emmanuel, Isaac, Jacob, James, Jeremiah, John, Joseph, Lazarus, Luke, Mark, Moses, Peter, Reuben, Shadrack, Solomon, Stephen, Thomas, Timothy, and numerous others appear over and over in the census [2] lists. Christian also was a popular name for males. Biblical names [4] were equally as common for women. Mary and Elizabeth probably were the most popular, but Anne, Esther, Martha, Rachel, Ruth, Sarah, Susanna, and others appeared frequently. Eliza, Jane, Jenny, Leanah, Lucy, Margaret, Patty, and other nonbiblical names are also found in the historical record. Perhaps the popularity of Patience and Prudence as given names suggests the hopes of parents that the traits they denoted might mark their daughters.

On the other hand, records reveal some unusual names that later generations were likely to avoid even though they had belonged to ancestors. Some interesting examples of eighteenth-century North Carolina names are Onisephorus Dameron, Melchazedick Nordan, Indignation Flowers (Bladen County [5]), Sorrowful Hendrixson (Carteret County [6]), Anthorite Martin (Caswell County [7]), Karonhappuck Moore (Perquimans County [8]), Lamentation Oneal (Edgecombe County [9]), Leannerday Canneday (Wake County [10]), and Sarcenet Roach (Wayne County [11]). It was not his given name, Richard, that may have caused a lad of Granville County [12] some concern, but his surname-Ornerry. On the other hand, Noble Ladd of Stokes County [13] may have taken pride in his interesting combination of names, while Over Jordan of Northampton County [14] undoubtedly had a different reaction to his, as perhaps also did Justin Corn of Wake County [10].

In the absence of a middle name, it was sometimes necessary to devise a means for distinguishing between people of the same name. In Moore County [15] there were two men named John Overton. After his name, one of them added "(Bigg)" while the other wrote "(Little)." In Burke County [16] the two Dennis Tramels faced the same dilemma; one called himself Big Dennis Tramel and the other was known as Little Dennis Tramel. They wrote their names as if Big and Little were their first names.

Additional Resources:

1790 Census of Polpulation and Housing: http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1790.html [2]

Subjects: American Revolution (1763-1789) [17]
Early Statehood (1789-1820) [18]
Culture [19]
UNC Press [20]
Authors: Powell, William S. [21]
Origin - location: Bladen County [22]
Carteret County [23]

Perquimans County [24]
Wayne County [25]
Caswell County [26]
Granville County [27]
Moore County [28]
Stokes County [29]
Wake County [30]
From: Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. [31]

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Links:
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[2] http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1790.html
[3] http://www.christianity.com/
[4] http://www.biblegateway.com/
[5] http://ncpedia.org/geography/bladen
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[23] http://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-15
[24] http://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-37
[25] http://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-12
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