

Burgwin, George William Bush ^[1]

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2 Sept. 1787–9 Feb. 1854

George William Bush Burgwin, planter, was born at his father's plantation, the Hermitage, in New Hanover County ^[2], six weeks before the death of his mother, Eliza Bush Burgwin. She was the daughter of an English merchant, George Bush, of Bristol. George's father, John Burgwin ^[3], was a substantial planter and merchant in the Cape Fear region, who had emigrated to America from Wales before the Revolution. Following his mother's death, Burgwin was reared at the Hermitage and educated by private tutors. Later, he was sent to school in New Jersey.

Upon the death of his father in 1803, he inherited several plantations in Bladen ^[4] and New Hanover counties. His older brother, John Fanning ^[5], having inherited the Hermitage, George settled in Wilmington after his marriage to Maria Nash. During this time, the family spent their summers at Hillsborough.

Because John Fanning Burgwin desired to relocate at New Bern and Maria Nash Burgwin owned a substantial amount of land there, a significant transfer of family properties occurred in 1811. John Burgwin exchanged the Hermitage and Castle Haynes plantations, with the enslaved people thereon, for Mrs. Burgwin's estates and enslaved people in the New Bern vicinity. According to the agreement, Castle Haynes was settled on Maria Nash Burgwin and her heirs, while the Hermitage became the property of her oldest son, John Henry King ^[6]. George Burgwin moved his family to the Hermitage in 1812 and spent the rest of his life there. At the same time, they began living in Smithville (now Southport) during the summers.

For most of his life, Burgwin spent his time directing the cultivation of the family plantations, including the Hermitage and Castle Haynes. The principal crops produced on his properties were cotton and rice. He was given to agricultural experimentation and described in 1821 a horse-drawn seed coverer he had constructed which he was using to plant his cotton. He pointed out that it was superior to the hoe and saved the labor of six or eight field hands.

An Episcopalian ^[7], Burgwin led his family in worship from the *Book of Common Prayer* on Sundays at the Hermitage. He was interested in higher education and contributed a hundred dollars toward the completion of The University of North Carolina's South Building between 1809 and 1811. Known as a charming and handsome man, Burgwin was noted for his hospitality and delighted in filling the Hermitage with guests. During his lifetime, it was the scene of numerous entertainments, including balls and fox hunts.

Burgwin's wife, Maria Nash of New Bern, whom he married 7 Apr. 1807, was the daughter of Governor Abner Nash ^[8]. She died shortly after learning of the death of her oldest son, John, in the Mexican War ^[9] in 1847. The Burgwins were the parents of an outstanding family that played a significant role in North Carolina's history. Their eleven children were Frances Eliza Bush, Mary Nash (died young), John Henry King, Margaret Ann, Caroline Athelia, George Clitherall (died young), Frederick Nash (died young), Hassell Witherspoon, Ann Maria, Sarah Priscilla, and Nathaniel Hill ^[10].

After contracting erysipelas of the leg, Burgwin died at the Hermitage in the room in which he had been born. Originally buried on the estate, his remains were later removed, with those of his wife and son John, to Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington. A portrait of Burgwin is in the possession of a descendant, George Collinson Burgwin III of Pittsburgh, Pa.

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