

## Caswell, Richard <sup>[1]</sup>

### Caswell, Richard

by Charles R. Holloman, 1979

**1685–24 Apr. 1755**

Richard Caswell, colonial merchant, planter, Maryland legislator, county court clerk, justice, and militia officer, was a native of London. His father's family was notable among the ranks of the English gentry: the lineage is traced to Henry Careswell (fl. 1440) of Staffordshire, whose son, Robert Careswell, became a prime officer in the household of Thomas, Lord Stanley, the first Earl of Derby. Robert's son, John Caswell of Wedon, shortened the surname, and this spelling was perpetuated among his descendants. Richard Slaney Caswell, father of the Richard who emigrated to America, used the Caswell spelling in registering his lineage and his ancestral coat of arms with the royal heralds during their Visitation of London in 1634.

The family name on Richard Caswell's maternal side was Smith. His mother's people were merchants engaged in overseas trade with the American colonies. Both parents died while Richard was still young, and his care was undertaken by his mother's brother, William Smith, a prosperous merchant who was married but without a child of his own. Smith and his wife gave their nephew parental affection and the advantages of education. As the youth grew into manhood, he entered naturally upon the career of a merchant in his uncle's business. In 1710, Mrs. Smith died. A few months thereafter, William Smith and his nephew decided to dispose of their London business and migrate to America to establish a mercantile business at Joppa, Md., where other relatives had previously settled. Joppa was at that time a flourishing colonial town and the most important port on the Chesapeake Bay.

In November 1711, Smith and his bachelor nephew departed London. They were to be the immigrant forefathers of a numerous clan of American revolutionary patriots that would include two state revolutionary wartime governors, three revolutionary generals, several colonels and captains, and Continental congressmen. The record of the arrival in Maryland on 2 Feb. 1712 appears in Richard Caswell's Bible. They soon established a residence and a mercantile business in Joppa.

Among their neighbors at Joppa were Richard Dallam and his wife, the former Elizabeth Martin (1685–1777), who had married at Joppa in 1702. They had a nine-year-old son, William Dallam, and an eight-year-old daughter, Christian Dallam. Smith, Caswell, and the Dallams became warm friends. In 1714, Richard Dallam died. A few months later, the two households were merged by the marriage of the widow Elizabeth Dallam and the widower William Smith. As the years passed, three children were born to the Smiths: two sons, Winstone and William, Jr., and one daughter, Elizabeth. All three grew to adulthood, married, and had children who were living during the Revolution. Samuel, a son of William, Jr., served his country as a general in the Revolutionary War <sup>[2]</sup> and also in the War of 1812 <sup>[3]</sup>. He was in command of Fort Mchenry, Md., when its spectacular bombardment by British warships during the War of 1812 inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star Spangled Banner." The Smith daughter, Elizabeth, married John Paca; they became the parents of William Paca <sup>[4]</sup>, signer of the Declaration of Independence, Revolutionary wartime governor of Maryland, lawyer, and judge.

On 12 Jan. 1723, Caswell married Christian Dallam. Following their marriage, they made their home at Mulberry Point on the Chesapeake Bay, near Joppa. Caswell continued in the mercantile business but branched out also into agriculture. On his farms near Joppa, called Caswell's Venture and Sterling Purchase, he produced tobacco, cattle, and other livestock for the coastal trade. The family were members of St. John's (Anglican) Church of Joppa, where Caswell served as a vestryman for many years. He was also a justice of the Baltimore County court, county coroner, and a captain in the county militia <sup>[5]</sup>. From 1738 to 1743, he served in the legislature of Maryland.

During the early 1700s, commerce and politics shifted away from Joppa to Baltimore. By 1744, Caswell's mercantile business was ruined; his agricultural enterprises were too small and land prices had shot upward. His health also was failing. The future seemed darker as the town of Joppa, stagnating, approached abandonment. Finally, he decided to move his family to North Carolina, where he had friends at New Bern.

In the spring of 1745, Caswell sent his two oldest sons, William and Richard, both still minors, to North Carolina with letters of introduction and recommendation addressed to the royal governor and other friends at New Bern. The sons were to seek employment, obtain lands if possible, and otherwise prepare for the coming of the rest of the family. William Dallam, Caswell's brother-in-law, purchased Caswell's Joppa lands and other property in 1745, but Caswell's condition of health did not permit the journey to North Carolina until the following year.

With his wife and younger children, Caswell arrived in New Bern in the early weeks of 1746. At first they settled in New Bern, and Caswell went into business as operator of an ordinary. However, Richard, Jr. <sup>[6]</sup>, proved highly able and enterprising for a youth of eighteen years. Soon after arriving in North Carolina, William Caswell <sup>[7]</sup> had found employment

as deputy clerk of the county court of [Johnston County](#) [8], upon its being formed from [Craven County](#) [9] in 1746; Richard, Jr., found employment even more quickly, as an assistant to the deputy surveyor general of the province, James Mackilwean. By 1747, young Richard had acquired by land grant a small plantation at a site now within the city of Kinston in Johnston (now Lenoir) County. He and William prepared a home there, to which the rest of the family moved in spring 1748. William then gave up his work with the county court to manage the plantation. The elder Richard Caswell was appointed to succeed William as deputy clerk; later he became clerk of the Johnston County court for a few years and thereafter served some months as a justice, until his death. He died and was buried at the family residence called The Hill (later renamed Newington-on-the-Hill and more recently Mount Vernon and Vernon Hall).

## References:

Source cited under [Benjamin Caswell](#). [10]

Maryland state, county, and parish records (Hall of Record, Annapolis, Md.).

*The Visitation of London in 1634* (1916). [11]

## Additional Resources:

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