

Catchmaid (Catchmaie, Catchmeyd, Ketchmaid), George ^[1]

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by Mattie Erma Edwards Parker, 1979

d. 1667

George Catchmaid (Catchmaie, Catchmeyd, Ketchmaid), burgess in the Virginia Assembly and later speaker of the North Carolina Assembly, came to America from Trelleck, Monmouthshire, England. He and his brother, Henry, of whom George was "Master," resided in Calvert County, Md., in 1652. In May 1653, George was accused of fathering a child by Mary Taylor, the wife of Robert Taylor of Virginia. Mary accused George of seducing her, and her husband insisted that George take the child; George, however, said that Mary had seduced him. Eventually, Taylor decided to keep the child if Catchmaid would give him ten thousand pounds of tobacco; he finally settled for two thousand pounds.

Catchmaid lived for a time in Nansemond County, Va., which he represented in the assembly held in 1659–60. A belief that he also served as clerk of court in Nansemond, expressed by a number of writers, appears to be erroneous. In about 1662, Catchmaid moved to the North Carolina area and seated a plantation on the peninsula now called Durants Neck, in [Perquimans County](#) ^[2]. In 1666 he was speaker of the assembly of the colony, which at that time was known as Albemarle.

Catchmaid died in 1667 at his [Albemarle](#) ^[3] plantation, Birkswear. His widow, Mary, married [Timothy Biggs](#) ^[4], who later became a member of the Albemarle council. George and Mary had no children.

Catchmaid left a will, dated 25 June 1664, which he had made in Virginia and placed in the custody of a Virginia friend, Thomas Ouldie. The will was probated in the County of Elizabeth City, Va., in February 1667/68, but it appears not to have been proved in Albemarle or otherwise to have become legally effective there. Although the existence of the Virginia will was known to some of Catchmaid's Albemarle friends, court testimony given in the 1690s indicates that in Albemarle he was deemed to have died intestate. Apparently, no official record of the will was entered in the North Carolina colony until 1731, when a certified copy was recorded in connection with transactions then being made respecting a portion of the Catchmaid land. Failure to prove the will in Albemarle, or loss of the record if such proof was made, probably accounts in part for at least one of several controversies that arose over the land.

In his will, Catchmaid named Colonel Edward Carter, a Virginian, his administrator. He bequeathed half his personal estate to his wife, Mary, and made bequests of personal possessions to Virginia friends; to the children of his two sisters, Elinor Wenslye and Jane Roper; and to the children of his deceased brother, Henry. He bequeathed his principal Albemarle plantation, Birkswear, to his only living brother, Thomas Catchmaid, who lived in England, and left another Albemarle plantation, consisting of fifteen hundred acres, to his nephew and godson, George Wenslye, who also lived in England.

One of the controversies over the Catchmaid land came to a head in the 1680s, after the death of Thomas Catchmaid. As heir-at-law, Edward Catchmaid of London, Thomas's only son, then claimed the Albemarle plantation called Birkswear, consisting of 3,333 acres. However, Timothy Biggs who had married Catchmaid's widow, also claimed the property, asserting that it had been inherited by his wife. Biggs had taken possession of the plantation in or before March 1673/74 and had lived on it, though intermittently, since that time. In his efforts to establish his alleged right, Biggs requested the Carolina proprietors to issue a patent "confirming" the land to himself or his wife. The proprietors, who had been told that George Catchmaid bequeathed the plantation to his wife by will, agreed to issue such a patent to Mary Biggs or, with Mary's consent, to Timothy Biggs. Presumably, Mary did not consent, for the patent was issued in her name.

Issuance of the patent to Mary Biggs was protested by Edward Catchmaid, who brought pressure from high officials in London to bear on the proprietors. Consequently, the proprietors rescinded their action and instructed the Albemarle governor, [Seth Sothel](#) ^[5], to investigate the matter and settle it according to law. In some way, however, the land fell into the hands of Governor Seth Sothel, apparently through a purported sale by one Timothy Burton of London. After Sothel's death there was litigation in the general court of Albemarle between Edward Catchmaid and those who claimed to have inherited the land through Sothel. The courts awarded the land to Catchmaid.

A second major controversy over Catchmaid's land began during Catchmaid's lifetime and involved [George Durant](#) ^[6], who owned an adjoining plantation. Durant had bought his own land from the Indians, had settled his family on it, and had cleared much of it before Catchmaid came to the colony. He had encouraged Catchmaid to move to Albemarle and had recommended that he settle on a tract next to his own, which Catchmaid did. By that time, however, new regulations concerning Albemarle land had been imposed, and it was then necessary for Durant to secure a patent from the Virginia governor, Sir William Berkeley, in order to have legal title to the land he had purchased. Ostensibly to save Durant a trip to Virginia, Catchmaid offered to secure a patent for Durant when he obtained his own, and Durant accepted the offer. Instead of securing a patent for Durant, however, Catchmaid had Durant's land included in his own patent, thus obtaining for himself legal title to the land. Although later, under pressure from Durant, he signed a paper recognizing Durant's right

to the land at issue and agreeing to provide Durant with a proper patent for it, Catchmaid never fulfilled his agreement. When Timothy Biggs took possession of the Catchmaid land, Durant secured a similar acknowledgment and promise from Biggs, but Biggs, too, failed to perform his agreement. Durant's title to the land he held was not cleared during his lifetime. After his death, his sons, John and Thomas, took the matter to the Albemarle court of chancery, which in October 1697 issued a decree confirming their right to their land.

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Ellen Goode Winslow, *History of Perquimans County* (1931).

Additional Resources:

"George Durant: Albemarle's First Settler," by Howard Draper, Museum of the Albemarle:
<http://historicalbemarletour.org/history-george-durant.htm> ^[7]

The Governors of Albemarle County 1663-1689, by Linkley S. Butler, NC Office of Archives & History:
<http://www.ncpublications.com/colonial/Nchr/Subjects/butler.htm> ^[8]

Ye Countie of Albemarle in Carolina, NC Office of Archives & History:
<http://www.ncpublications.com/colonial/Bookshelf/countie/countie1.htm> ^[9]

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#).^[14]

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