

Cruden, John, Jr. ^[1]

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by Carole Watterson Troxler, 1979; Revised November 2022.

d. ca. 1786

John Cruden, Jr., a Loyalist ^[2] merchant, was in partnership with his uncle, John Cruden, and his brother James. They established stores in Wilmington ^[3] and Cross Creek in 1774, using money the uncle had made in trade between Britain and the West Indies. Later they added a third store, in Guilford County ^[4].

As the head of the company, the elder Cruden hesitantly signed a nonimportation association in March 1775 and made small contributions to the Wilmington Committee of Safety. The Crudens provided supplies to the Loyalists who were defeated at Moore's Creek Bridge ^[5], however, and it was not until 1779 that they made their peace with the revolutionaries. The Crudens were not included in the 1779 Confiscation and Banishment Act.

The Cruden brothers took an openly Loyalist course following the British capture of Charles Town, and as a result the company lost its North Carolina holdings. The younger John Cruden was in Charles Town by the summer of 1780 and volunteered for Loyalist militia service. In September, Cornwallis appointed him a commissioner of sequestered estates. This role entrusted him the administration of enslaved people taken from Revolutionary enslavers.

For the remainder of the war and even afterward, Cruden conscientiously tried to keep records on sequestered, enslaved people who were still in the hands of Loyalists. In East Florida after the war he discomfited some of his fellow Loyalist refugees by insisting that they return to the Americans the sequestered, enslaved people in their possession; he hoped that the state governments would reciprocate by allowing the Loyalists to return to their homes and property. In the summer of 1783, James Cruden fled from Wilmington due to an arrest warrant, accompanied by the allegation that one or both of the brothers had sent American-owned enslaved people to Nova Scotia. Some black people from the Cape Fear ^[6] area indeed were among formerly enslaved people in Nova Scotia after the war.

John Cruden's postwar behavior suggests that he had lost his sense of reality. For a while he headed a group of Loyalist refugees living between the St. Johns and St. Marys rivers in northern East Florida, who planned to take control of the province and forcibly prevent the Spanish cession for which the Treaty of Paris provided. Cruden abandoned the scheme after it attracted the robber bands who were molesting the area, but he pursued several visionary and incoherent schemes in East Florida and the Bahama Islands. His proceedings were one reason why some of the Loyalists who moved from East Florida to Nova Scotia delayed their departure until the summer of 1785.

Cruden died by 1788; he was survived by his brother James, who lived in the Bahamas.

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Additional Resources:

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Biographies ^[9]

Authors:

Troxler, Carole W. ^[10]

Origin - location:

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New Hanover County ^[12]

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