

## **Hairston, Peter** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Peter Wilson Hairston, 1988; Revised by Jared Dease, SLNC Government and Heritage Library, February 2023

**24 Feb. 1752–1 Dec. 1832**



Peter Hairston. Image courtesy of the Digital NC Library.

<sup>[2]</sup>Peter Hairston, Revolutionary War <sup>[3]</sup> officer, North Carolina state senator, planter, iron manufacturer, and merchant, was born in Franklin County <sup>[4]</sup>, Va. His father was Robert Hairston, a landowner and officer, and his mother was Ruth Stovall Hairston.

Peter Hairston, who was named for his grandfather, a Scottish immigrant, was—judging from the voluminous records he left—a man of some education. It is said that he could spell but often he did not. In 1780, he moved with his father's family to that part of Pittsylvania that later became Henry County, Va. In the American Revolution <sup>[3]</sup> he took part in the 1776 raid against the Cherokees <sup>[5]</sup>, in the first battle of the Shallowford, and, as a captain, in the Battle of Guilford Court House <sup>[6]</sup>.

In 1782 Hairston was a deputy under his father, who had been appointed sheriff of Henry County. In April of the same year he married Alcey (Aylcie) Perkins, a daughter of Peter Perkins. Hairston, as early as 1781, began acquiring large tracts of land in Stokes <sup>[7]</sup> (then Surry) County, N.C. In the spring of 1786 he moved with his wife and their daughter, Ruth Stovall Hairston (1784–1867), to upper Saura Town. There he engaged in many business enterprises including ironworks, a country store in Germanton, the exporting of ginseng and bearskins, and increasingly large tobacco and corn plantings. Hairston also served four terms in the North Carolina state senate (1792–1800) as a Federalist <sup>[8]</sup>. In 1814, his wife died and their daughter Ruth took over much of his record keeping. Ruth married her cousin Peter Wilson Hairston and their only child, Agnes, married Samuel Hairston.

Peter's land and property was maintained with the labor of enslaved people. The numbers of people he enslaved increased as he grew older. According the 1790 census, Hairston had enslaved 58 people. By the 1830 census, the last before his death, he was listed as the enslaver of 293 people. Additionally, while Hairston only had one daughter, Ruth, with Alcey Perkins, he fathered at least seven more children with one of the women he had enslaved, Sally Blag <sup>[9]</sup>. Their names were Salem, Judy, Gilchrist, Anna, Tip, Mima, and Sally. Peter maintained extensive correspondence with Gilchrist and frequently tasked him with business and estate management. Salem, Gilchrist's brother, was also tasked frequently by Peter to conduct business affairs. Another son between Sally and Peter, Gilblas, is alleged, but not verified by the list of Sally Blag's descendants written in 1854.

In 1817, Peter Hairston purchased from Jesse Pearson the 2,300-acre Cooleemee Plantation in Davie <sup>[10]</sup> and Davidson <sup>[11]</sup> counties, thereby adding cotton growing to his enterprises. His landholdings extended over 12,000 acres in Piedmont <sup>[12]</sup> North Carolina. He died and was buried at Saura Town. His property was willed to his daughter and her descendants,

except Cooleemee, which was devised separately to a great-grandson, Peter Wilson Hairston. His will also called for "Sally Blag nor none of her children be separated but remain and live with my daughter."

## References:

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Deeds of Davidson, Rowan, Stokes, and Surry counties (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

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Tombstone of Peter Hairston, Saura Town, Stokes County.

Wiencek, Henry. *The Hairstons : An American Family in Black and White* 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1999.

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## Additional Resources:

Hairston, Robert E., Jr. "Peter HAIRSTON." Accessed February 9, 2023 at <https://www.hairston.org/p399.htm> [13].

Peter Wilson Hairston Papers, 1773-1986 (collection no. 00299). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/h/Hairston,Peter\\_Wilson.html](http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/h/Hairston,Peter_Wilson.html) [14] (accessed August 14, 2013).

Search results for Peter Hairston (1773-1832) in the UNC Libraries Catalog: <http://search.lib.unc.edu/search?Ntk=Subject&Ntt=Hairston,%20Peter,%201752-1832>. [15]

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