

Huske, John ^[1]

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by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 1988; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, December 2022

D. May[?] 1792

John Huske, early state and local official, and merchant, may have been related to British Major General John Huske (1692[?]-1761), some of whose family settled in New England. The younger John Huske, a native of Hull, Yorkshire, came to North Carolina alone, apparently arriving in the late 1770s as a merchant. He had been in Europe and the West Indies, could read French, wrote a fine hand, and could keep financial records. He was first mentioned as being in the state in 1781 when he was at Sampson Hall, [Duplin County](#) ^[3], with a great many other refugees from [Wilmington](#) ^[4] who had left or been driven out by the British when they took the town on 1 February. His business and possessions were lost at that time. Huske and Thomas Maclaine, brother of [Archibald Maclaine](#) ^[5], were reported to have been the only two inhabitants of Wilmington who "refused to sign a petition to be admitted to a dependence upon Great Britain."

[William Hooper](#) ^[6], writing to Governor [Thomas Burke](#) ^[7] on 17 July 1781, referred to Huske as "the young gentleman whom I mentioned to you as very well qualified to fill the department of a Secretary." Huske, who lived in Hooper's home for a time, was described to the governor as "a gentleman of the most refined honor and unspoiled integrity." As he was seeking "some genteel employment that may support him and keep his mind employed," he was recommended as ideal to serve as the governor's private secretary or as secretary to the Council because [James Glasgow](#) ^[8], the present secretary, lived too far away to attend the frequent Council meetings. Even if the two offices were combined, Hooper said, "I know no one who would discharge the trust with more reputation."

Bearing newspapers and other sources of information for the governor, Huske went to Hillsborough and there on 2 August was made the secretary. He performed such official duties as signing the commissions of the state's delegates to the Continental Congress on 13 Aug. 1781. He and other members of the executive staff were with Governor Burke on the morning of 13 September when Tories under the command of [David Fanning](#) ^[9] raided Hillsborough. Following an armed encounter, Fanning took them prisoner and set off for Wilmington to turn them over to Major Craig. From there they were sent to Charleston, S.C., and closely confined for a time; in December some, including Huske, were paroled and permitted to return home. Burke, however, was held until he escaped on 16 Jan. 1782. In time Huske applied to the Assembly for his salary and reimbursement of his expenses while a captive of the British. He received £150.

Huske was in [Edenton](#) ^[10] on occasion and was on friendly terms with the people there, particularly James Iredell, perhaps largely through William Hooper. In 1783 he was a member of a commission to regulate pilots on the [Cape Fear River](#) ^[11] and was among the men who chose the site for a lighthouse on Smith Island. He also served on a committee named in 1784 to build a jail in Wilmington, on a committee to seek bequests and donations to build a [Presbyterian](#) ^[12] church in the town, and as a trustee of Innes Academy. In 1787, as Captain Huske, he commanded the Wilmington artillery company. He was one of the justices of [New Hanover County](#) ^[13] between 1784 and 1790 when he resigned, and he was clerk of court in 1785. His health was not good and in 1790, in seeking a place near the sea to improve it, he visited [Fort Johnston](#) ^[14] and suggested that plans be made to lay out an adjacent town. About the time of Huske's death, the present town of Southport began to develop there.

Exactly what Huske did during the final years of the [Revolution](#) ^[15] is not clear, but apparently as an attorney-in-fact he represented some [Loyalists](#) ^[16] in their claims for land in 1783. In the spring of that year, at a heated election in Wilmington, it was reported that many people were afraid to go to the polls. Huske and two other men took up positions to see that no one eligible to vote was hindered from doing so. In another instance, however, he wanted charges against certain officials investigated before they could take an oath under the Act of Pardon and Oblivion (intended to restore former Loyalists to citizenship) and hold office. On another occasion, he demonstrated civic concern when he sought an embargo on the shipment of provisions from Wilmington when they were badly needed after a flood. In 1791 he appeared as the agent of several people, and in that capacity he was engaged by the executors of [Robert Hogg](#) ^[17].

In the spring of 1784 Hillsborough was excited about the pending marriage of Elizabeth ("Betsy") Hogg and John Huske. William Hooper wrote James Iredell that "the young gentleman is well known to, and beloved by us [Mrs. Hooper] both." On another occasion it was noted that "he and Betsy were destined for each other." In March it was reported that the wedding would be "soon"; in April it was expected to take place in two or three days. The following January Mrs. Huske was delivered of a "chopping" girl, as Archibald Maclaine described her to James Iredell. She was named Ann Alves—the latter being the surname given the younger members of the Hogg family when their father had it legally changed to their mother's maiden name. On 26 Aug. 1786 a son, John, was born, but Mrs. Huske died the same day. "There is reason to fear," Iredell wrote his wife, "owing to a mistake of her case." Hillsborough, of course, was greatly saddened by this event, and Huske "is a walking ghost," William Hooper informed James Iredell, even after a lapse of two years.

Huske was elected to represent [New Hanover County](#) ^[13] in the [Hillsborough Convention of 1788](#) ^[18] called to determine

whether North Carolina would approve the new federal Constitution. Known to be opposed to the document, he appeared to take his seat, but his name does not otherwise appear in the minutes nor is his vote recorded. Illness may have accounted for his subsequent absence. Nevertheless, his point of view prevailed overwhelmingly, and the state declined to accept the document. In 1789 he again represented his county, and at the convention in Fayetteville he was still adamantly opposed to the Constitution. This time, however, it was accepted by a majority of the delegates, whereupon Huske walked out of the convention at the head of the minority delegates.

Huske's stand clearly was unpopular. A number of men who formerly had praised him now turned against him. Archibald Maclaine's reaction was typical. In a letter to James Iredell, he wrote: "Our friend Huske is the loudest man in Wilmington against the new constitution. Whether ambition, or avarice, or a compound of both, actuates him, I leave you to judge."

At the time of the 1790 census, Huske was living in New Hanover County and was enslaving seven people. Three males over sixteen, including himself, composed his household plus one "other free person." His two children, who probably were living with relatives in 1790, in time had large families and left numerous descendants in the state. Huske died in Wilmington and was buried in the churchyard at St. James Episcopal Church although he was a Presbyterian.

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Additional Resources:

CSR Documents by Huske, John, d. 1792, Documenting the American South, UNC Libraries:

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Origin - location:

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[New Hanover County](#) ^[27]

[Wilmington](#) ^[28]

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