

Jerkins, Alonzo Thomas ^[1]

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by Gertrude S. Carraway, 1988; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, March 2023

2 June 1807–7 Apr. 1895

Alonzo Thomas Jerkins, legislator, banker, merchant, and shipper, was born in New Bern, the son of Thomas Jerkins (11 Apr. 1783–21 Dec. 1855) and his wife Grizzell Sears, a sister of Captain George Sears. A native of [Beaufort County](#) ^[2], the father was a sea captain operating between New Bern and the West Indies. In 1804 he settled at New Bern and in less than a year was married there; the marriage bond was dated 8 Jan. 1805. While he was away on a lengthy voyage, his wife died on 13 Aug. 1824. Ceasing his sailing trips, he remained in town and turned his attention to other interests. Four fine homes built by him still stand in New Bern.

After his mother's death, young Jerkins left [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[3] where he had been a student in 1823–24. Had she lived longer, he probably would have remained to graduate. For some time he taught school at his home in New Bern, later assisted by his first wife, Sarah McIlwean (28 July 1809–13 Sept. 1874), for whom a marriage bond was issued on 28 June 1831. His second wife, Susan Carr (14 Mar. 1836–19 Feb. 1911), survived him.

Becoming a prosperous businessman, Jerkins was long recognized as one of the community's outstanding citizens, landowners, and religious leaders. In April 1845 he was a trustee of the First Baptist Church when title to its Middle Street lot was obtained for the erection of its present brick edifice, now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A holder of various church offices, he placed in the church a memorial tablet to his first wife.

In 1850 Jerkins represented [Craven County](#) ^[4] in the North Carolina House of Representatives. In 1854, he was among the original subscribers for the Union Bank at New Bern and one of the first directors of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad Company. An incorporator of the Bank of Commerce in 1859, he became its president.

Jerkins was instrumental in helping develop water transportation facilities. Besides having an interest in the Trent River Transportation Company, which ran a regular line of freight and passenger boats from the river's mouth up to Trenton, he held stock in the [Neuse River Navigation Company](#) ^[5], which among other projects owned and operated the steamer *Johnston* between New Bern and Smithfield. Frequently he shipped upstate by water merchandise from his local stores. According to a bill of 3 Apr. 1855, for goods sent by him to Ashley G. Powell of Smithfield, his charges were 3 1/2 yards of plaid muslin, \$1.05; 47 7/8 yards of curtain calico, \$6.43; 8 yards of Kentucky jeans, \$2.00; 7 1/2 yards of apron checks, \$1.35; 3 coconut dippers, \$1.05; 467 pounds of sugar in two barrels, \$35.03; 1 set of cups and saucers, \$0.60; 12 white granite plates, \$1.40; and 20 gallons of molasses, \$6.00.

During April 1846 Jerkins joined St. John's Lodge No. 3, Ancient Free and Accepted [Masons](#) ^[6], to which his father also belonged. His rise to official positions was rapid, becoming Junior Warden in June, Senior Warden the following year, and Worshipful Master in 1848–50. In December 1850, he was named the Twenty-fourth Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina and was twice reelected. Until 1853 he served as High Priest of the reactivated Eureka Chapter No. 7, Royal Arch Masons, and in 1857 he again became the Worshipful Master of St. John's Lodge for another one-year term.

After the Civil War, he did not hold Masonic offices but remained active in the fraternity. He was also an organizing member, a temporary chairman, and a permanent director of the [North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company](#) ^[7], of which records are extant from 19 Sept. 1867 to 21 Sept. 1870.

After a busy career in diversified fields, Jerkins died in New Bern when he was almost eighty-eight. His will, probated on 29 Aug. 1895, named his widow as executrix. The grave in Cedar Grove Cemetery, New Bern, is on a plot with the graves of his two wives. A portrait of him hangs in Lowthrop Hall on the second floor of New Bern's Masonic temple; another portrait is at the Grand Lodge headquarters in Raleigh.

Jerkins had two sisters: Julia E., who married Francis N. McIlwean in July 1826—the marriage bond is dated 27 July; and Nancy Sears (10 Oct. 1810–8 Sept. 1881), who was the wife of Alexander Mitchell (19 Jan. 1807–27 Aug. 1876)—their marriage bond was issued on 18 Oct. 1833.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

This person enslaved and owned other people. Many Black and African people, their descendants, and some others were enslaved in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865. It was common for wealthy landowners, entrepreneurs, politicians, institutions, and others to enslave people and use enslaved labor during this period. To read more about the enslavement and transportation of African people to North Carolina, visit <https://aahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-0> ^[8]. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery> ^[9]. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

References:

Gertrude S. Carraway, *Years of Light*, vols. 1, 2 (1944, 1974).^[10]

Craven County Deeds, Wills, and Marriage Bonds (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Tombstones, Cedar Grove Cemetery (New Bern).

Additional Resources:

"Alonza T Jerkins [A T Jerkins]." *Slave Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States* 1850. New Bern, Craven, North Carolina. National Archives Microfilm Publication M432. Records of the Bureau of the Census, #29. Accessed March 31, 2023 from Ancestry.com

"Bible Records: Jerkins Family Bible." *Pitt County Genealogical Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (May 2004). 25-26.
<https://archive.org/stream/pittcountygeneal11pitt#page/n131/mode/2up> ^[11] (accessed May 15, 2014).

"Bible Records." *Pitt County Genealogical Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (August 2002). 25.
<https://archive.org/stream/pittcountygeneal09pitt#page/n223/mode/2up> ^[12] (accessed May 15, 2014).

Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of Illinois Ancient Free and Accepted Masons Bloomington, Indiana: Pantagraph Printing and Stationary Co. 1896. 220-221.
<https://archive.org/stream/proceedingsofgra571896free#page/220/mode/2up> ^[13] (accessed May 15, 2014).

Haywood, Marshall De Lancey. "Grand Masters Spaight, Jerkins and Clark." *The North Carolina Booklet* 21, nos. 1,2,3,4 (July-Oct. 1921 - January-April 1922). 68-76.

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Authors:

Carraway, Gertrude S. ^[18]

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[22]

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