

Jones, Thomas ^[1]

Jones, Thomas

by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 1988

d. Sept.[?] 1797

Thomas Jones, lawyer and colonial and state official, a native of Gloucestershire, England, was clerk of court in [Chowan County](#) ^[3] in 1758. Because there were numerous men of the same name in the colony, it is unlikely that his origins and the date of his arrival can ever be determined with certainty, although many families from Bristol, Gloucestershire, moved to North Carolina in the eighteenth century. It is clear, however, that Jones represented Chowan County in the colonial Assembly for three terms between 1773 and 1775 and in all five sessions of the [Provincial Congress](#) ^[4] between 1774 and 1776. He also served on the Provincial Council in 1775–76 and on the [Council of Safety](#) ^[5] in 1776. His letters, which are well written and grammatically correct, contain evidence of a classical education.

Jones was already established in [Edenton](#) ^[6] when James Iredell, later noted as a jurist, arrived. The two men became close friends as well as neighbors. Iredell often visited Jones and his wife, and he copied some records for Jones as well as prepared a catalogue of Jones's extensive library. (One of Jones's books is preserved in the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill.) Jones participated in services at St. Paul's Anglican Church in Edenton, purchased a "gilt" copy of the *Book of Common Prayer* from a local merchant in 1772, and sang the psalms on one occasion in 1773, much to the delight of some of the ladies present.

As a member of the Provincial Council and the Provincial Congress, Jones played a significant role in the colony. The Council, composed of just thirteen men, was the most important agency of government at a critical time, and under its direction North Carolina was prepared for the coming revolution. The Council was responsible for the steps that led to victory at the [Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge](#) ^[7]; it also laid the plans for and ordered the execution of General [Griffith Rutherford](#) ^[8]'s campaign against the Cherokee Indians. In the Provincial Congress Jones served on a select committee to provide for the defense of the province, and he also was on the Committee of Secrecy, Intelligence, and Observation. The latter committee reported the document that has come to be known as the [Halifax Resolves](#) ^[9]—the first state action calling for independence from Great Britain. On 9 May 1776 [Allen Jones](#) ^[10] and Thomas Jones, presumably unrelated, were appointed by the Provincial Congress to attend the Virginia Provincial Congress to recommend that both states fit out armed vessels to protect trade.

In the Provincial Congress Jones also served on the small committee that devised a temporary form of government to serve before a constitution was drawn up and a state government inaugurated. Finally, in December 1776, when the Provincial Congress was charged with writing a Declaration of Rights and a constitution, Jones was an important committee member. The constitution, in fact, was spoken of as "Jones's constitution." He was familiar with the constitutions of South Carolina and Connecticut, and pointed out some of their features for the committee's consideration. Jones was said to have been "a cunning and ingenious politician, [who] interceded and appeased the rage of the contending factions." With the adoption of the constitution, he was named first among eleven men charged with reviewing all past statutes and acts of assembly to determine which should remain in force.

Also in December 1776 the Congress passed a number of ordinances, and Jones is credited with having been responsible for the third of these. It secured all church property to whatever "religious Society, Church, Sect, [or] Denomination" it had belonged previously. This clearly was an attempt to protect Anglican church property for the future.

Once the state was launched on the road to independence, Jones seems to have withdrawn from public life. His wife, the daughter of the late Reverend [Clement Hall](#) ^[11], apparently was dead by July 1776, as his children were with Mrs. Arthur Howe while he was attending the Provincial Congress. Jones's will, dated 26 June 1797, was probated in September. He left property to daughters Mary Brinn and Elizabeth Beasley; to sons Zachariah, Levi, and Thomas; and to grandchildren Elizabeth and Isaiah Sweeney. Sons James and Joshua in 1772 made purchases at the Johnston store, but they apparently died before their father.

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