

Gordon, Patrick Duff ^[1]

Gordon, Patrick Duff

by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 1986

18? Aug. 1719–[5-11?] Nov. 1773

Patrick Duff Gordon, attorney, was the son of John Duff (second son of Patrick Duff of Craigston, Scotland) and his wife, Margaret Gordon of Farskane. He was the nephew of Margaret Duff, Lady Farskane. John Duff was well educated and held municipal office in Elgin, Moray, where he lived. In addition to Patrick, the Duffs were the parents of Archibald, William, John, James, and Anne (who married James Leslie of Bennebeith). All of the children were well educated. Patrick, also called Peter, was the second but oldest surviving son and was "bred to the Law at Edinburgh and entered Writer to the Signet." He would have been well employed, but he fell into a life of dissipation and pleasure, and at last into an itch for [gaming](#) ^[3]. He kept company with some of the great folks at Edinburgh, and, after losing his own money, played away other people's entrusted to him until he was obliged to retire to North America. "He married a gentleman's daughter in Fife, an agreeable, pretty woman, and had a daughter," but both had been dead for many years in 1773. This wife was Grisell Balfour; their daughter was Grisell or Jean, and she inherited property from her mother in 1752. When he left for America and settled in North Carolina, Patrick Gordon Duff quietly changed his name to Patrick Gordon or Patrick Duff Gordon.

Some time before sailing from London on 14 Mar. 1757, he married, a second time, a woman named Mary who had been a domestic in his family. They became the parents of three children: Margaret Duff Gordon, who died in 1780; James Duff Gordon, born in August 1770, who left North Carolina soon after the death of his mother, and who was drowned en route to India as a midshipman on 18 May 1791; and Peter Duff Gordon, who was sent to Scotland to be educated and afterward returned to New York during the American Revolution on board a British ship. Peter eventually went to Charleston, S.C., where he died before 1808. Patrick Gordon's second wife survived him, dying in New Bern in March 1784.

Settling first in the town of Bath, Gordon was elected to represent the borough in the Assembly in 1762; he was again a candidate in 1766, but his election was contested and he was not seated. By 1767, he was living in New Bern where he held a number of important positions as well as serving as an attorney. He was interested in education and endorsed the appointment of [Thomas Thomlinson](#) ^[4] to head the [New Bern Academy](#) ^[5]. In New Bern he was commissary and judge of the Court of Vice-Admiralty of North Carolina. Royal governor [William Tryon](#) ^[6] apparently thought highly of Gordon and called upon him for service on numerous occasions.

Gordon was the author of the lengthy and detailed account of the various agencies of government in colonial North Carolina that Governor Tryon sent to his superiors in London on 28 June 1767. Entitled "[A View of the Polity of the Province of North Carolina in the Year 1767](#)" ^[7], it is a thorough explanation of the obligations and privileges of officials at all levels in the colony. The duties of each is carefully spelled out and the laws that governed them are cited. The author clearly had a thorough understanding of North Carolina law and government.

Gordon was employed as assistant counsel of the Crown in the trial of some of the [Regulators](#) ^[8] at Hillsborough charged with riot in the early spring of 1771. Tryon reported that Gordon presented sixty-one indictments and that without exception they were found true.

Patrick Gordon died apparently rather unexpectedly at the age of fifty-four. His will, dated 5 Nov. 1773, was proved before Governor [Josiah Martin](#) ^[9] one week later. When his estate was being settled, Mrs. Mary Grainger applied for refund of a fee that she had paid him to represent her in a pending court but he died before court was convened. Gordon died before the split brought on by the American Revolution divided people into opposing camps, but his widow lived until 1784, well after the war was over. In 1782, she entered claims against several Loyalists who had left North Carolina owing her late husband for legal services.

References:

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Additional Resources:

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Correspondence of Lord Fife relating to Patrick (Peter) Duff (Gordon). Ref No: MS 3175/1832/5. Correspondence and other papers, Papers of Duff House/Earls of Fife. GB 0231 University of Aberdeen, Special Collections.
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[11] (accessed March 17, 2014).

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