Moore, Stephen [1]

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by Jean Bradley Anderson, 1991; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, June 2023

30 Oct. 1734–29 Dec. 1799

Stephen Moore, merchant, army officer, and congressman, was born in New York City, the seventeenth child of Colonel John and Frances Lambert Moore. His grandfather, John Moore, left England in the 1680s to pursue a legal career in the king's service, settling first in Charles Town, S.C., where he became secretary of the colony. In 1687 he moved to Philadelphia and there filled a number of public offices, including those of attorney general of the province and collector of customs.

Colonel John Moore chose a mercantile career and moved to New York, where he amassed a fortune in real estate while following his father's lead in public service. He was a member of His Majesty's Council, commander of a New York regiment of militia, alderman of the city, and vestryman of Trinity Church, where he and many of his family were buried. Among the considerable lands in both Philadelphia and New York that he left at his death was a mansion in New York City at the corner of Moore and Front streets (not, however, built by Peter Stuyvesant, as some have said) and much adjacent land. He also left an estate on the Hudson River at West Point, devised to his youngest son, Stephen. This property consisted of a large house and over two thousand acres, known as Moore's Folly.

Nothing is known of Stephen Moore's childhood or education. Though family tradition says he took a degree at Oxford [2], the rolls of that institution do not include his name. As his brother Thomas attended Westminster School and his youngest sister, Ann, was said to have been educated in England, Stephen probably received an English education. In 1754 he was apprenticed to John Watts, contractor for army supplies and a New York merchant, training Moore would use throughout his life. After volunteering for the French and Indian War [3] in 1756 and receiving a lieutenant's commission the following year, he was appointed provision contractor for the British army. When the war ended, he was rewarded with the post of deputy paymaster general in Canada.

To his service in Canada belongs the legend that he carried urgent dispatches from Governor-General Sir Frederick Haldimand in Montreal to Governor-General Jeffrey Amherst in New York. He is said to have accomplished the journey within ten days by traversing, on snowshoes and skates, the snow-covered ground and thinly iced waterways of the most direct route between Montreal and New York, then impassable for horse and rider.

Moore left military service to enter the lumber trade. Always attracted to merchandising, he, with his partner Hugh Finlay, then postmaster of Quebec, speculated unsuccessfully and went bankrupt. It is noteworthy that all of Stephen's brothers who lived to maturity were irresistibly drawn to mercantile careers and lost their fortunes in the end.

On Christmas Day, 1768, at Quebec, Moore married Grizey Phillips (18 Feb. 1749–15 Jan. 1820), the daughter of Captain John and Griselda Levi Phillips of Boston. Although he continued to live in Canada until 1770, his name in the town reports of neighboring Cornwall indicates that Moore's West Point estate was his official residence during the decade 1765–75.

The increasingly uncomfortable political climate for Loyalists [4] in New York (Stephen was the only Revolutionary Moore), financial difficulties, and the realization that his capital and experience could be turned to greater profit in the developing lands of the South were possible reasons for his decision to move in 1775. Why he chose to settle first in Granville County [5], N.C., and then in neighboring Caswell County [6] (after returning to New York to arrange his affairs for a permanent move) is unknown. But in January 1777 he bought a plantation on Flat River. Continuing to acquire more adjoining acreage, he named the estate Mount Tirzah; it was high land over the river and fertile, unlike his Hudson River property. Both his brother Charles and Griselda's brother Thomas chose to make the move with Stephen and his family.

Political upheaval reached him even on the southern frontier. In 1779 he was appointed a lieutenant colonel in the militia. After raising and equipping a regiment, he had no time to train it adequately before joining General Horatio Gates in the Battle of Camden, S.C [7]., in 1780. He was captured at Camden and sent to the prison ship *Forbay* in Charles Town [8] harbor. Exchanged a year later, he returned to Mount Tirzah in June 1781. Because of his absence while in military service, his election in 1780 to the General Assembly from Caswell County can have been only nominal. He was, however, nominated in both 1786 and 1787 as a representative to Congress. Finally elected, he served one term in the Third Congress in 1793.

Before that he had served as commissioner for specific taxes (1781), superintendent commissioner of Hillsborough District (1782), and deputy quartermaster general of the army (1783–92). Though only a lieutenant colonel in the regular army, he must have been promoted to brigadier general in the militia, for he issued muster notices and signed deeds under that rank, and his tombstone, though showing inaccurate dates, was probably correctly inscribed "General Stephen Moore."

Despite his fertile plantation, a mercantile business (he operated a general store that served a large area), and a mill on Flat River, Moore's financial condition was not secure until 1790. His father's extensive estate had been lost in the Revolution [9], the real estate in New York City had been burned to the ground in 1776, and his own West Point estate had suffered in the hands of both Tories [10] and Americans—the house had been occupied repeatedly (the last time by Americans when it served temporarily as George Washington's headquarters) and the land despoiled. In 1790 Moore successfully petitioned the government to buy West Point, long recognized as important to the security of New York, and received $11,085 for it. Thereafter he enjoyed moderate prosperity until his death, which occurred, according to family tradition, while he was visiting his friend Richard Bennehan [11] at Stagville [12].

A lifelong Episcopalian [13], Stephen Moore had participated in efforts to establish a church in his neighborhood and had been named vestryman and warden in the planning stages; because of insufficient support, the church was never built. He was consequently buried in the Moore family graveyard near his house, built in 1778 and still standing. He left considerable acreage, the mill, the store, and thirteen people whom he enslaved to his widow and eight surviving children.

The Moores had ten children: John Robert (b. 12 Nov. 1769 in Quebec; m. Sarah Bailey), Phillips (b. 12 July 1771 in New York; m. first Rebecca Moore and second Elizabeth Dudley, the daughter of Thomas Dudley), Frances (b. 5 Nov. 1773 at West Point; m. Jesse Dickins), Ann (b. 12 Jan. 1777 in Granville County; unmarried), Mary (b. 21 Sept. 1778 at Mount Tirzah, where all the younger children were born; m. Richard Stanford [14]), Marcus (b. 27 Nov. 1780; died in childhood), Portius (b. 15 Oct. 1782; m. first Frances Webb and second Lucy Pulliam), Cadmus (b. 31 June 1787; died in childhood), Samuel (b. 15 June 1789; m. Elizabeth A. Stanford), and Sidney (b. 15 Dec. 1794; m. Polly P. Reed).

Portraits of Stephen Moore and his parents came into the possession of Dr. Alexander Stanford, Rich Square, Eden, N.C.

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