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Newnam, Thomas [1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1991

d. 1723

Thomas Newnam, Anglican clergyman, was born in England and moved to North Carolina in 1722 as a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts[2]. He began his work in South West Parish in Chowan Precinct. This included present day Bertie County [3] and the southern shore of Albemarle Sound. In 1722 the Assembly of North Carolina passed an act dividing this parish into South Parish and Society Parish and stipulated that both parishes "make good their agreement with the Rev. Mr. Newnam."

On 29 July 1722 Newnam wrote to the London authorities in some detail, describing his arduous duties and the vast area he had to cover to attend to his parishioners. This included two Sundays a month at Esquire Duckenfield's, a Sunday at "Eden Town," where the vestry planned to build a church, and occasional visits to the South Shore; Meherrin, which was forty miles away; and a place called Roanoke, which was eighty miles distant. In a letter of 6 Apr. 1723, John Ashe informed the Reverend William Bull that Newnam was the only settled minister in North Carolina. On 9 May Newnam reported to the society secretary that, although he and his family had suffered from fever, he was setting off for Bath County, where three hundred children awaited baptism.

Newnam died the following fall. Sometime before his death he had moved from Bertie to Edenton [4], since he described himself in his will, dated 21 Sept. 1723, as a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, residing in Edenton. His widow Frances was the sole legatee in his will, probated two months later.

After Newnam's death, Nathaniel Duckenfield wrote to the bishop of London urging a speedy replacement. He said that although Newnam had lived in the area only half a year, he was held in so high a regard that not only did the parish give the widow the whole year's salary of sixty pounds, but also the Assembly gave her forty pounds out of the public treasury.

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