

Peirce (Pearce, Perse, Pierce), Thomas ^[1]

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by Mattie Erma E. Parker, 1994

8 Sept. 1669–Feb. or Mar. 1731/32

Thomas Peirce (Pearce, Perse, Pierce), Assembly member and prominent Quaker ^[2], was the son of John and Mary Peirce, who were living in the North Carolina colony by 1679. His maternal grandfather was Joseph Scott, a member of the Council in 1673 and one of the first North Carolina converts to the Quaker faith. Peirce's parents also were Quakers. Like Scott and his wife Mary, they were among the earliest members of the Perquimans Monthly Meeting.

Thomas Peirce was the eldest of six children, one of whom died in early childhood. His father died in 1682, leaving his wife with five children, including an infant a few months old. The surviving children were Thomas, John, Joseph, Rebekah, and Mary. In 1683 the widowed mother married William Bundy ^[3], a neighboring Quaker. Bundy died in 1692, and later that year Thomas's mother married Nicholas Simmons. By that time Thomas himself was married. His mother lived until 1724.

Probably about 1703 Peirce was a member of the lower house of the Assembly, representing Pamlico Precinct, which was in the county of Bath ^[4]. During the session he and a fellow member from Pamlico, William Barrow, petitioned the deputy governor and Council requesting lower quit rents ^[5] and more favorable terms for purchasing land in Pamlico than were then in effect. The Council's action on the petition is not known. In 1708 Peirce again held a seat in the Assembly. In that session he was appointed to the important committee on the public accounts. Although other details of his career in the Assembly are not known, it is safe to say that Peirce, a devout Quaker, was deeply involved in the struggles between Anglicans and dissenters ^[6] that provided the chief issues in those sessions.

Like his parents and grandparents, Peirce took an active part in the Perquimans Monthly Meeting. He served on many committees appointed to settle differences between members or to handle other matters. At times he also served as overseer and often he was appointed to present the state of the monthly meeting to the quarterly meeting. For many years he kept the records of the Perquimans meeting, and in 1727 he and two others were appointed to transcribe the old records into a new book, which they did. He was among the Perquimans members who had property distrained in 1707, probably because he, like many other Quakers, had refused to pay tithes to support the Anglican church.

Although Peirce was living in Pamlico Precinct during his service in the Assembly, he resided in Perquimans Precinct before and after that period and remained a member of the Perquimans Monthly Meeting during it. He owned a plantation of three hundred acres in Perquimans, which he had inherited from his father, and he acquired additional land, some of which was in the county of Bath.

Peirce and his wife, Mary Kent, had six children, the eldest of whom was born in 1691. The children were John, Thomas, Ann, Mary, Sarah, and Joseph. All except Ann lived to adulthood. John married Sarah Chapman, by whom he had five children. Thomas, Jr., who was married twice, had six children by his first wife, Mary Copeland, but none by his second wife, Isabel. Peirce's older daughter, Mary, married Peter Jones, Jr., by whom she had five children. His younger daughter, Sarah, was married twice—first to George Sutton and second to John Williams. She had at least one child, Nathaniel Sutton. Peirce's youngest child, Joseph, also was married twice. His first wife, Penelope Tomes, died about a year after her marriage. His second wife, Alice, bore him three children.

Thomas Peirce died between 11 Feb. 1731/32, when he made his will, and 30 Mar. 1732, when the will was probated. He was survived by his wife Mary and three of his children—Thomas, Joseph, and Mary. He no doubt was buried on his plantation in a "burying ground" that he set aside for the family in his will, where his parents and his dead children had been interred.

References:

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Additional Resources:

Search results for "Thomas Peirce" in the Colonial and State Records of NC:

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/search> ^[7]

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