

Rice, Nathaniel ^[1]

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by William S. Price, Jr., 1994

d. 29 Jan. 1753

See also: [Nathaniel Rice](#) ^[2], Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History

Nathaniel Rice, colonial official, entered North Carolina from England early in 1731. Previously (ca. 1725) he had visited and acquired property in South Carolina. Rice carried with him commissions as provincial secretary and royal councillor, much to the dismay of the new governor, [George Burrington](#) ^[3]. He owed his appointments to his brother-in-law, Martin Bladen, a member of Parliament since 1715 and of the [Board of Trade](#) ^[4] since 1730. Thus Rice had an independence from Burrington that most other North Carolina officials did not enjoy, and that independence generated increasing tension between the secretary and the governor.

Before 1731 ended, Rice had joined with [William Smith](#) ^[5], [John Baptista Ashe](#) ^[6], and others in firm and consistent opposition to Burrington's dealings with the two houses of the legislature. When Smith resigned from the Council in May 1731 to carry his objections about Burrington to London, Rice as next senior councillor assumed presidency of that body. From that vantage point he became the governor's chief nemesis, and the growing opposition to Burrington increasingly began to rally around Rice. The secretary led petition-writing efforts against the governor—documents that were sent to many powerful figures in London, including Burrington's patron, the Duke of Newcastle.

The tension surrounding the governor reached a high point at the legislative session in the summer of 1733. Wishing to dissolve the body but fearing some clever manipulation by Rice, Burrington on 17 July 1733 seized all of the official secretarial seals of office and dissolved the legislature the following day. When it became necessary for Burrington to go to South Carolina on business in April 1734, Rice became acting governor by virtue of his presidency of the Council. No records of Rice's activities in this period survived, but shortly after his return in September 1734, Burrington suspended Rice from office, claiming that the secretary had plotted to kill him.

With the replacement of Burrington by [Gabriel Johnston](#) ^[7] in November 1734, Rice was again restored to the Council. The following year he became a member of the General Court and a justice of the peace for [New Hanover County](#) ^[8]. With the passage of time he became embroiled in Lower Cape Fear politics and sided with the pro-Brunswick forces in opposing the establishment of [Wilmington](#) ^[9], which was advocated by the governor and William Smith. By 1750, however, Rice and Johnston were reconciled, having been brought together by the common and mutual attacks on them of [Henry McCulloh](#) ^[10].

When Johnston died in July 1752, Rice as senior councillor began acting as governor. He was by this time an ill, old man. He left a son named John and his wife Mary. His will refers to a niece in Hampshire, England, which may have been his birthplace.

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Additional Resources:

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Subjects:

Biographies [14]

Governors [15]

Judges [16]

Public officials [17]

Authors:

Price, William S., Jr. [18]

Origin - location:

New Hanover County [19]

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1 January 1994 | Price, William S., Jr.

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[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/rice-nathaniel> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/rice-nathaniel-research-branch-nc> [3] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/burrington-george> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/board-trade> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/smith-william> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/ashe-john-baptista> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/johnston-gabriel> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/new-hanover> [9] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/wilmington> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/mcculloh-henry-eustace> [11] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr10201> [12] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr03-0211> [13] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-booklet-great-events-in-north-carolina-history-1908-january-v.7-no.3/413684?item=454047> [14] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [15] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/governors> [16] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/judges> [17] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/public-officials> [18] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/price-jr-william-s> [19] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal--7> [20] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>