

Seawell, Benjamin ^[1]

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1741–16 July 1821

Benjamin Seawell, revolutionary Patriot and legislator, was born in St. Andrew's Parish, Brunswick County, Va., the son of Benjamin and Lucy Hicks Seawell.^[2] In 1770 the elder Seawell and his family moved to Bute County^[3], N.C., some thirty miles south of their former home, where he died in 1778. His will, probated in November 1778, mentioned his wife Lucy; sons Joseph, Thomas, and Benjamin; married daughters Mary Hill, Sally King, Elizabeth Mabry; and unmarried daughters Nancy, Rebecca, and Mildred. His sons Benjamin and Joseph and his son-in-law Green Hill were named executors. In addition to the usual bequests of land and enslaved people, the will referred to a bookcase and a colt by the racehorse^[4] Mark Anthony.

Young Benjamin Seawell was an early member of the Bute County Safety Committee^[5] in 1775. Though he had been a resident of the county for only a few years, he was elected a delegate to the Provincial Congress^[6] held in Halifax^[7] in November 1776. In 1777 he represented Bute in the senate, and on 19 November he introduced a bill to divide the county. No action was taken until 1779, when Bute was finally divided into the counties of Warren^[8] and Franklin^[9]. Because Seawell's lands fell in the latter county, the act of the legislature establishing Franklin directed that the first court be held at Seawell's residence. He represented Franklin in the senate in 1779. In May of that year the Assembly appointed him as one of the commissioners to determine a suitable place for the capital in Johnston^[10], Wake^[11], or Chatham County^[12]. Seawell was a member of the Council of State for North Carolina in 1781–82 and 1795.

Serving in the militia as lieutenant, captain, and colonel, he saw active duty in the closing years of the Revolution when the scene of conflict shifted to the southern colonies. Several letters from Colonel Seawell concerning the performance of his duties have been preserved in the state records. In a letter of 2 Oct. 1780 to General Horatio Gates, General Jethro Sumner^[13] referred to Seawell as "a diligent good officer of the line he fills." The march of Lord Cornwallis northwards through the state in the spring of 1781 incited uprisings among the local Tories, and Seawell wrote from his home county on 13 May 1781 that "our situation at present is not very comfortable. Not a man of any rank or distinction or scarcely any man of property has lain in his house since the British passed through Nash County^[14]."

Sometime before his death, Seawell moved to Tennessee and died near Lebanon in Wilson County^[15]. He was buried at McMurray Place in Horn Springs. In 1927 a monument was erected to his memory in Lebanon. In addition, his name is inscribed on a monument on the grounds of the capitol in Nashville erected to the memory of the Revolutionary officers who died in Tennessee.

Seawell married first, in 1768, Mary Booker. After her death in 1786, he married Susan Brown, the widow of Thomas Tullocks. He was the father of sons William, Benjamin, Joseph, and John, and daughters Elizabeth and Margaret.

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Additional Resources:

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