Swann, John [1]

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by William S. Price, Jr., 1994

25 Apr. 1707–December 1761

John Swann, colonial official, was the youngest son of the great Proprietary [2] social and political leader, Samuel [3] (d. 1707), and Elizabeth Lillington Swann, the daughter of wealthy Albemarle planter Alexander Lillington [4]. After Samuel's death she married Alexander Goodlatt, who died about 1713; she subsequently married Colonel Maurice Moore [5]. John Swann was born and reared in the Albemarle region, but during his youth his family's interests were increasingly looking towards the Lower Cape Fear region. By his marriage to Ann Moore, the daughter of "King Roger" Moore [6], he underlined the bond between two powerful families that had begun to form in 1713 with his mother's marriage to Ann's uncle.

With the arrival of royal government to North Carolina in 1731 and the consequent growing interest in the Lower Cape Fear, Swann began rising in politics. His first of several terms as a member of the General Assembly began with election in 1733, and subsequent terms following during 1739–40 and 1743–51. He became justice of the peace for New Hanover in November 1734.

In September 1751 Governor Gabriel Johnston [7] elevated him to the royal Council by means of an emergency appointment, a move approved and confirmed by the Crown the following year. Despite Johnston's frequent clashes with the Swanns and the Moores, he could hardly ignore the enormous esteem accorded John as leader of the forces defending Brunswick [8] during the Spanish Alarm of 1748 [9].

During the administration of Governor Arthur Dobbs [10], the chief executive sometimes regretted facing the combined forces of John in the Council and his brother Samuel, who was speaker of the lower house. Indeed, Dobbs accused the two of forming an obstructive junto in 1760.

Unlike many other members of the planter elite, John was a colonel in his county's militia [11] and a member of his parish's vestry. He wrote his will in February 1761, and it was probated in April 1762. He and Ann had no children.

References:

New Hanover County Wills (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

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Additional Resources:

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