

Woodward, Thomas ^[1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1996

1604–76

Thomas Woodward, surveyor ^[2] general of the Albemarle, was born in England. Assay master of the Mint under Charles I, he was dismissed from this position on 23 Oct. 1649 by John Bradshaw, president of the Council of State, because of his loyalty to the Crown. Woodward went to Virginia, publicly declaring never to see England again until the return of Charles II ^[3] to the throne. In November 1661, after the Restoration, John Woodward, a son of Thomas who seems to have remained in England, petitioned the king; reciting the loyalty of his father, he requested that the house and office of assay master be put in his possession until his father's return or, if his father was dead, to have a grant of it himself. This request was granted, for when John Woodward died in 1665, King Charles II advised the warden of the Mint that the office of assay master was vacant by reason of the death of John Woodward and in the absence of Thomas Woodward, who, if alive, was at some plantation in Virginia. John Brattle was to exercise the office during Woodward's absence. Thomas Woodward, however, never returned to England.

Assuming a prominent role in Virginia, he served as clerk of court of Isle of Wight County from 1656 to 1662. On 25 Sept. 1663 Sir William Berkeley, governor of Virginia and himself one of the recently appointed Proprietors of Carolina, issued twenty-nine grants in the Albemarle region. These were the first grants of land made in what is now North Carolina. Thomas Woodward was the surveyor appointed to lay off these grants, and of the twenty-nine, three were made to Woodward and members of his family. These tracts, representing over 5,000 acres, lay on the Pasquotank River and on the western side of the Chowan.

Thomas Woodward seems to have remained in the Albemarle section for several years. On 2 June 1665 he sent an interesting report to John Colleton, one of the Lords Proprietors ^[4], concerning the new colony and acknowledged his official appointment as surveyor. The report revealed him to be a man of education, as he referred to Bacon's essay on plantations and quoted a proverb in Spanish. While in Carolina, he served as secretary for the colony and was a member of the governor's Council ^[5]. He and Governor William Drummond ^[6] were commissioners to treat with Maryland and Virginia for a cessation of tobacco planting for the year 1667. This conference, called in response to a sharp drop in the price of tobacco, was held at Jamestown on 12 July 1666.

Woodward returned to Isle of Wight, Va., where he died. In his will, dated 5 Oct. 1677 and probated the same year, he mentioned his wife, his son Thomas, and his daughters Katherine, Elizabeth, Mary, Rachel, and Philarite. Provision was made for the children, if any, of his deceased son John in England. The inventory of his estate listed a parcel of books. The surname of his wife Katherine is unknown; her will was probated in Isle of Wight in 1684.

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