

Wright, Gideon ^[1]

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by Frank Salter, 1996

ca. 1726–82

See also: [Loyalists](#) ^[2]

Gideon Wright, [Loyalist](#) ^[2], one of the prominent men in early North Carolina who stood for law and order, was the son of John and Ruth Ludlam Wright. Gideon and his brother, Hezekiah, served in the [French and Indian War](#) ^[3] in the colony of New York before moving to North Carolina. It was customary in each county to hold the court in the center of the county, and a man who had a house near the center and enough friends or a bit of influence could usually determine where the courthouse would be located. In 1771 Wright got the jump on his neighbors, the Armstrongs, and determined the location of the county seat of newly established [Surry County](#) ^[4]. The legislative act authorized Gideon Wright to build the courthouse. The land on which it was located belonged to him and had been included in a grant from the Earl Granville in 1762.

Wright was a justice of the peace, and it was on his land that a muster ground had been reserved. The pendulum of power did not stop with this important local decision, however, but continued to swing. When it did, the Wright site, after four years as the courthouse, was abandoned. The Armstrong family was then in the ascendancy, and the recently built courthouse was abandoned and a new one authorized two miles north where a new town to be named Richmond was being formed.

During the [Regulator](#) ^[5] uprising, Gideon Wright sided with Governor [William Tryon](#) ^[6] and rose to the rank of colonel. When the [American Revolution](#) ^[7] began, he remained [loyal to the Crown](#) ^[2]. In January 1776 Governor [Josiah Martin](#) ^[8] authorized him to erect the king's standard, to enlist and arm the loyal subjects of Surry County, and "to oppose all rebels and traitors." During the war Wright led the [Tories](#) ^[9] at the [Battle of Shallow Ford](#) ^[10] on 14 Oct. 1780. Land owned by both Gideon and his brother, Giery Wright, was confiscated after the war. Both men must have operated very cautiously, however, as they seem not otherwise to have been punished. Gideon was able to purchase 200 more acres of land at the very time land of Tories was being confiscated.

Wright died near the end of 1782. In 1790 his widow, Elizabeth Durling Wright, listed 69 acres for taxation, and in 1791 she and her son, Hezekiah, deeded the land to Leonard Scott. The other Wright children were Sarah, Elizabeth, Susannah, and Catherine. By inheritance the land passed to John W. Scott and then to his children, Wiley and Cora (m. Hoke Petree). The site of the early Wright courthouse was on land owned by the Petree family in the late twentieth century. The only evidence remaining of the early county power struggle was a depression in the ground where the courthouse cellar had been, together with a pile of stones that had once been the chimney of the Wright home. Nearby is the family burial ground.

Descendants of the Wright family continued to live in the community and took more than a passing interest in the fate of the newer courthouse. In August 1830 a cyclone destroyed the town, and the site was abandoned.

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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