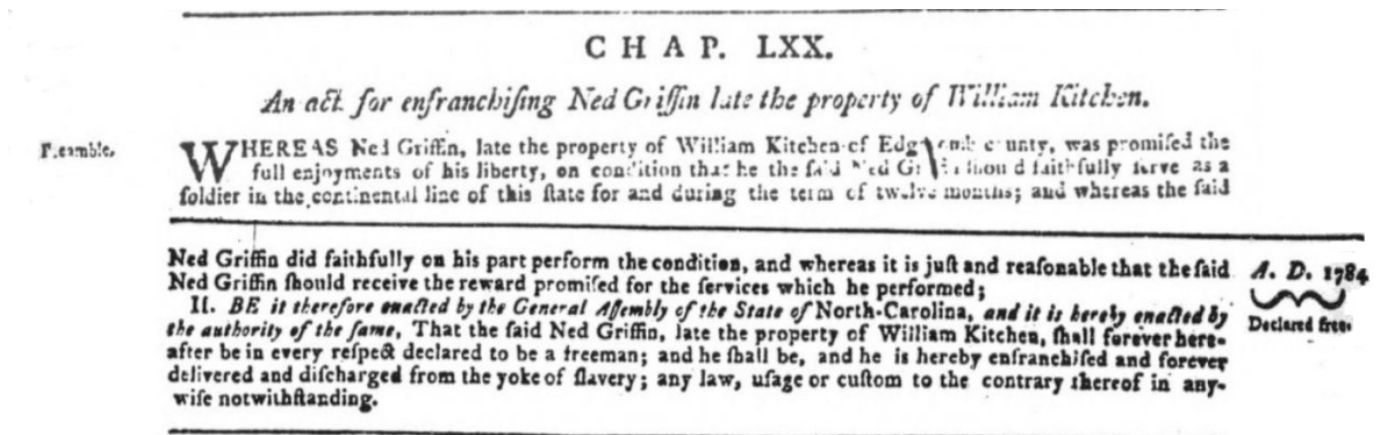


Griffin, Edward "Ned"^[1]

Griffin, Edward "Ned"

By Kemisa Kassa, December 2023

fl. 1770 - d. 1802



"An Act for Enfranchising Ned Griffin, Late the Property of William Kitchen" from the Acts of Assembly of the State of North Carolina, April 1784 session. Image courtesy of North Carolina Digital Collections.

^[2]Edward "Ned" Griffin (Griffis, Griffes, Griffen) was a multiracial landowner and soldier during the American Revolution. Griffin was likely born in the mid-18th century. Edward's true age, as well as many details of his early life, are unknown.

The earliest possible documentation of Edward Griffin comes from Edgecombe County. On April 5, 1770, the will of John Gosney, an Edgecombe County planter, was probated. In the will, Gosney left to his wife, Martha Gosney, an enslaved person identified as "mulatto Ned." This enslaved person was likely Edward Griffin and John Gosney was likely Griffin's first enslaver. Upon Martha's death, ownership of "mulatto Ned" was to transfer to the Gosney's daughter, Oney Gosney Griffis.

William Griffin (Griffis, Griffes), an executor of John Gosney's will, was also Oney's husband and the first definitively documented enslaver of Edward "Ned" Griffin. Sometime between 1770 and 1781, ownership of "mulatto Ned" (Edward Griffin) transferred from Martha Gosney to her son-in-law, William Griffin.

In June 1781, William Griffin sold Edward to William Kitchen (Kitchin). Kitchen had ^[3]deserted the Continental service prior to the ^[4]Battle of Guilford Courthouse and was recalled. To avoid serving, Kitchen purchased from Griffin "a certain Mulatto man slave named Ned... to put into the Continental service as a substitute." For serving, Kitchen promised to free Edward from slavery.

Edward served in the Revolutionary War as a substitute during his enslavement to Kitchen. Edward was inducted into the Continental service as a private by "Colo. James Armstrong at Martinsborough [now Greenville, NC]." He was received as "a free man" and served twelve months before he was honorably discharged in July 1782. For his year of service, Edward's ^[5]heirs were granted 640 acres of ^[6]bounty land in Tennessee in October 1783.

Upon his release from service, Edward returned to Edgecombe County to become emancipated. When he returned, Kitchen reneged on the agreement. He immediately sold Edward to Abner Roberson, another enslaver in Edgecombe County. In response, Griffin petitioned Edgecombe County court for his freedom. In February 1783, Edgecombe County's court read Griffin's petition. William Griffin, John Taylor, and Thomas Cromwell were summoned by the court to serve as testimony witnesses for Edward's freedom.

In May 1784, the ^[7]Committee on Propositions and Grievances received Edward's petition. According to the Committee, Edward became "property of the State" when Kitchen offered him as a substitute and was no longer enslaved as his personal property. Additionally, the Committee moved that Edward be freed for "meritorious services" to the state. After a ^[8]1777 statute, this was the only way an enslaved person could be legally manumitted.

The Committee's findings and Edward's petition reached the North Carolina General Assembly during the April - June 1784 sessions. In response, the Assembly passed "An Act for Enfranchising Ned Griffin, Late the Property of William Kitchen^[9]." It stated that "Ned Griffin... shall forever hereafter be in every respect declared to be a freeman; and he shall be, and he is hereby enfranchised and forever delivered and discharged from the yoke of slavery." The act granted Edward his freedom and recognized him as a legal citizen of North Carolina.

After the passage of the act, Edward lived as a free person of color. He resided in Edgecombe County until his death in 1802. According to census records from Edgecombe County, Griffin never married or had any children. Both the 1790 and 1800 censuses list "Edward Griffin" as a single, free person of color. He was also listed as head of household with no other family members each time.

Edward also bought land while living freely in Edgecombe County. On February 24, 1801, Edward bought "20 ¼ acres & 25 ^[10]poles [of land (160 poles are present in one acre)] on the north side of Folks Branch, joining Lewis Fort." for fifteen pounds, five shillings.

Edward died around October 1802. He was likely indebted during his lifetime based on his will and the probate of his estate. Upon Griffin's death, an administrator named Joseph Pitt was summoned by the courts to execute administration of his estate. Complaints and court summons dealing with debt suits spanned from 1802 until 1804. At least four different creditors filed suits against Edward's estate after his death: Amy Stewart, John Wilson, Zachariah Griffin (son of William Griffin), and Nanny Anderson. Edward's estate was not settled until 1804.

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