Alexander, Nathaniel (from Research Branch, NC OA&H) [1]

NATHANIEL ALEXANDER

Governor: 1805-1807

by Wilson Angley, Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History, 2005; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, June 2023
https://www.dncr.nc.gov/about-us/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program [2]

See also: Nathaniel Alexander [3], *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*

Pages from the Alexander Family Bible record. Click on the image to view the Bible record in its entirity.

[4]Nathaniel Alexander (1756-1808), who served as a surgeon in the American Revolution, lived near Harrisburg in a house on the present site of Lowes (Charlotte) Motor Speedway. Born on March 5, 1756, in present-day Mecklenburg (then Anson) County, he was the eldest of six children born to Moses Alexander and the former Sarah Taylor. Little is known of his early youth or preparatory education, but in 1776 he graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) with a degree in medicine. Two years after graduation, he was commissioned a surgeon in the North Carolina Continental Line, where he served until the close of the Revolution. In the field he labored with great difficulty, given the scarcity of supplies. Alexander married Margaret Polk, daughter of Colonel Thomas Polk [5] of Charlotte. They had no children.

Nathaniel Alexander practiced medicine for several years in South Carolina following the Revolution, but then returned to his native Mecklenburg County [6]. He was active in Charlotte in establishing local Masonic lodge. He represented the county in the lower house of the North Carolina General Assembly in 1797 and in the upper house in 1801 and 1802, affiliating himself in the legislature with the ascendant Jeffersonian Republicans. He was then elected to the United States House of Representatives, where he served from 1803 to 1805. He resigned from Congress in November of 1805, having been elected by the state legislature to replace James Turner [7] as governor. Reelected without opposition in 1806, he served as chief executive for just over two years.

Although a Republican, Alexander enjoyed considerable Federalist support as well. The Raleigh Minerva, a Federalist newspaper, freely acknowledged that he was “an ornament to the predominant party, and like few of them, a “scholar and a true patriot.” As governor, Alexander attempted to settle the lingering border dispute with Georgia and was an early advocate of education and internal improvements [8]. Historians have acclaimed him as the forerunner of the prominent line of politicians with a grasp of the importance of education.

It was during Alexander’s governorship that the Court Act of 1806 brought significant reform to the state’s judicial system, creating a separate superior court in each county. The legislation had been generally supported by Republicans, but

opposed by Federalists. Alexander himself feared that the additional courts would place undue demands on both judges and eligible jurors. Ironically, it was almost certainly his call for repeal of this legislation in 1807 that cost him a third term as governor. Because many of his Republican supporters deserted him in the election of that year, he was defeated by Federalist Benjamin Williams [9] on the third ballot. He died in Salisbury on March 6, 1808, less than a year after leaving office, and was buried in the cemetery of the First Presbyterian Church in Charlotte [10].

Update from N.C. Government & Heritage Library staff:
This person enslaved and owned other people. Many Black and African people, their descendants, and some others were enslaved in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865. It was common for wealthy landowners, entrepreneurs, politicians, institutions, and others to enslave people and use enslaved labor during this period. To read more about the enslavement and transportation of African people to North Carolina, visit https://aahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-0. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

References and additional resources:

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