

Backhouse, John ^[1]

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by Tucker Reed Littleton, 1979; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, May 2023

d. 1784 or 1785

John Backhouse, legislator, planter, mariner, and salt maker, first appeared in Carteret County ^[2] records about 1758. That same year, he became a justice of the peace for Carteret County. In four deeds dated from 1758 to 1774, he is listed as a mariner; four other deeds executed between 1763 and 1775 list him as a planter or farmer. At first, Backhouse appears to have lived on Houston's (Holston's) Creek, a part of Carteret County that is now in Jones County ^[3]. His last residence was on Pettiver's (Pettiford) Creek in Carteret County near the mouth of the White Oak River, where it is presumed he was buried.

Backhouse represented Carteret County in the North Carolina House of Commons during the third, fourth, and fifth assemblies under Governor Arthur Dobbs ^[4], 1761–62. In the fifth assembly, he served on the Committee of Propositions and Grievances and on a special committee to prepare a bill for amending and continuing the act for the inspection of tar, pitch, turpentine ^[5], beef, pork, and so on.

In 1772, Backhouse is mentioned as owning a lot in the town later named Swansboro ^[6], but no further deed record can be found for his town lot or his disposition of it. In 1776 he represented Carteret County in the fourth provincial congress ^[7], after which he appears to have dropped out of public life and perhaps to have entered into a period of steadily declining health. His will was made in 1782. In 1783 he patented two tracts of land adjoining his plantation. His will, as recorded, evidences some copying inaccuracies but seems to indicate that he was the owner of two salt works or of one large operation with two pans or vats at the time of his death. One portion of his river shore land still bears the name Salt Works Point.

Backhouse first married Elizabeth Dudley, widow of the Thomas Dudley who resided on White Oak River and died there in 1753. Elizabeth was the daughter of John (d. 1745) and Katherine Jarratt. Elizabeth Jarratt Dudley Backhouse died on 30 May 1767 in her fifty-ninth year and was buried beside a son, Abraham Dudley, in the Houston Cemetery (north side of Holston's Creek, a tributary of White Oak River, in Jones County). By his first wife, Backhouse had one son, Allen.

Backhouse was married again, to Mary Williams, daughter of Colonel John Pugh Williams of Fort Barnwell in Craven County ^[8]. The bond for this marriage was dated 31 Dec. 1768. By this union, Backhouse appears to have had four children: John Pugh, who died intestate before 1815, when Allen Backhouse claimed to be his sole surviving heir; Sarah; Mary; and Catherine ("Kitty").

Backhouse evidently died late in 1784 or extremely early in 1785. His will was probated in March 1785; but by that time his widow was already remarried to her neighbor, Guillaume (William) Ferrand, who together with her was granted administration of Backhouse's estate.

Allen Backhouse, John's eldest son, married first Elizabeth Starkey, a daughter of John Starkey, Jr., on 13 July 1796. She appears to have died before January 1797. Allen's second wife was Ruth Wilson, widow of James Wilson of New Bern. Their marriage occurred on 5 Aug. 1809, while Allen was the postmaster of Swansboro and a merchant there. By 1811, however, he was listed as a merchant of New Bern, where in 1838 he was also operating a boarding house. Through Allen, John Backhouse had a grandson, John Allen, who became a well-educated and well-known minister. John Allen Backhouse is also listed in a deed of 1837 as the publisher of the Carolina Sentinel ^[9] of New Bern. Another grandson, Benjamin Williams Backhouse, was a student at The University of North Carolina ^[10] from 1830 to 1833 and was on the way to becoming a prominent lawyer when he died in July 1836, at the age of twenty-two.

On 4 Nov. 1804, Kitty Backhouse married Samuel Chapman of New Bern, a clerk of Craven County Court. Their son, Samuel Edward Chapman, became a physician; his uncle, Dr. Stephen Lee Ferrand ^[11], bequeathed all his medical books and equipment to him.

By her second husband, William Ferrand, Mary Williams Backhouse Ferrand had two sons, Dr. Stephen Lee and William Pugh, Sr. She died in August 1796 and was buried on the Backhouse-Ferrand Plantation on Pettiver's Creek, not far from the town of Swansboro, where she died.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

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> [12]. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery> [13]. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

References:

"John Backhouse." *Wills and Estate Papers (Carteret County), 1663-1978*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Division of Archives and History. March 25, 1782. Accessed May 5, 2023 at Ancestry.com.

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vols. 5–6 (1887–88).

Additional Resources:

Journal of the proceedings of the Provincial Congress of North Carolina, held at Halifax on the fourth day of April 1776, North Carolina Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/journal-of-the-proceedings-of-the-provincial-congress-north-carolina-held-at-halifax-on-the-fourth-day-of-april-1776/2689737> [14]

Colonial and State Records Search, Documenting the American South, UNC Libraries: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/search> [15]

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