

Blount, Nathaniel ^[1]

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by Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, 1979

ca. 1748–1816

Nathaniel Blount, Anglican ^[2]clergyman, was born in Beaufort County ^[3], the third of five sons of Reading Blount ^[4]. Reared in a family of some means and influence in Eastern Carolina, Blount received sufficient education to study independently for Holy Orders. He was of an introspective and melancholy cast of mind, not a businessman, like many of his numerous Blount relatives, but devoted to religion. In 1773 he sailed to England, where he was ordained deacon on 19 Sept. and priest on 21 Sept. After he returned to America, one of his first acts was to erect a chapel on Chocowinity Creek in Beaufort County, near the present location of Washington. The structure was incorporated into present-day Trinity Church ^[5] and moved a short distance in 1939 to a site on the Chocowinity-Greenville highway. During the Revolution ^[6], he preached frequently by request at patriotic political meetings. After his contract with the vestry of Pitt County ^[7] was abrogated in the separation of church and state mandated by the state constitution of 1776, he lived almost entirely on the income from property left him by his father in 1776.



Photograph of Trinity Church in Chocowinity, 1954. Image from the North Carolina Museum of History.

^[8]Following the winning of independence, Blount was contacted by the Reverend Charles Pettigrew ^[9] of Edenton ^[10] to meet in convention at Tarboro in an attempt to organize the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. Four conventions were held between 1790 and 1794, three of which he attended. At the fourth, he took active part in formulating the procedure for choosing a bishop and in debates on a constitution (which he signed) and served as an elected member of the standing committee. He greatly deplored the fact that Pettigrew, who was elected bishop, never attended a triennial convention to be consecrated. For this and other reasons, the Episcopal church ^[11] in North Carolina declined steadily until 1817.

Blount was an energetic priest, riding great distances on horseback to preach, baptize, hold funerals, and perform marriages. He regularly attended two chapels near him, often visited three others in Beaufort County, and had three other counties on his busy schedule. Usually in poor health, he was nonetheless seldom prevented from trying to reach "poor perishing sinners" and lead them "by Faith, To The Throne of Grace." An advocate of infant baptism, he was bitter toward the Baptists ^[12]; he disapproved of the Methodist ^[13] separation from apostolic succession; and he likewise detested Thomas Paine ^[14] and "his horrid principles."

Some time prior to 1779 he married Ann (maiden name unknown), who died in November 1798. They had at least five surviving children: Selina, Edward, Rebecca, Levi, and James. Blount died in 1816. The exact date and place of burial have, however, vanished from all but tradition.

His underlying strength and devotion to duty kept alive the Episcopal church in his area of the state. In the year of his death, no other Episcopal cleric was resident in North Carolina, and the church appeared dead. In the following year, however, a successful convention was held, which began a revival that Blount had helped to make possible.

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