

Brevard, John, II ^[1]

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by Chalmers G. Davidson, 1979; Revised November 2022.

1716–15 Sept. 1790

John Brevard, II, colonial official and patriot, was the son of John Brevard, first of the Brevards in the colonies. According to his grandson, Alexander ^[2], the first John Brevard "is supposed to have come of the Huguenots ^[3] that had fled from the persecution in France. He came into America with a William Wallace and family from Ireland an orphan and then but a boy. The family of Wallace settled near the Head of Elk Cyclic County Maryland. My grandfather we expect must have conducted tolerably well, for he married in a McKnitt family [Katharine McKnitt] that were respected and settled near head of Elk where my father [John Brevard II] was born. My father learned the Blacksmith trade with a son of the said William Wallace and in the 30th year of his age married a Jane McWhorter [daughter of Hugh MacWhorter of New Castle County, Del.] and settled on land near where he was born [:] there their first child was born, Ephraim, after Doctor Brevard. He [John] then came on to Head of Rocky River, then Anson County ^[4], afterwards Rowan ^[5], now Iredell County ^[6]. . . ."

John Brevard II lived six or seven miles east of the present Centre Church in Iredell County. His early prominence is attested by his appointment as both vestryman (for the Parish of St. George), though a Presbyterian ^[7], and justice of the peace when Anson County was organized in 1749. The former appointment gave him a voice in local matters of charity, education, and religion, and the latter in law and government; as a justice of the peace he was entitled to be addressed as "Squire." The minutes of the court of common pleas and quarter sessions speak eloquently of his activities. Brevard owned enslaved people at an early date and probably also had white servants, as there is frequent mention in the court minutes of indentures being lengthened because of misdemeanors.

While manifestly not a gentleman of fashion, Brevard was not a rustic. During his membership in the provincial assembly from 1754 to 1760, he had occasion to reside in New Bern, which afforded North Carolina's best society. Trade must have taken him also both to Philadelphia and to Charlestown, S.C., the choicest capitals in the colonies. Yet despite these ameliorating influences, Brevard was a wages-of-sin Calvinist: when one of the people he was enslaving committed an unnamed crime, they were hanged until dead and then decapitated, with the head set up in grim warning to others.

Brevard had ample reasons, political, economic, and religious, for opposition to British rule in America. At the call of the first provincial congress ^[8] in New Bern, a public meeting was held in Salisbury on 23 Sept. 1774 to elect a committee of correspondence ^[9] as the congress had requested. Among the twenty-five appointees were Brevard and his son-in-law William Lee Davidson ^[10]. This committee made inquiries into the conduct of sundry citizens to determine whether they were friends or enemies of the American cause, and Brevard appears to have been an active member. When a committee of safety ^[11] for the District of Salisbury (comprising the western portion of the state) was appointed on 9 Sept. 1775, Brevard was a member. In 1776 he was a member of the provincial congress meeting at Halifax. He was too old for active service in the army, but it is claimed that all eight of his sons fought for independence, Ephraim, John, Alexander, and Joseph as officers in the Continental Line. Dr. Ephraim Brevard, graduate of the college at Princeton, was Mecklenburg County ^[12]'s most distinguished penman for liberty and a physician in the Continental Army; he died as a result of disease contracted during the war in Charlestown, S.C. After the defeat and death of General William Lee Davidson at Cowan's Ford ^[13], on 1 Feb. 1781, Banastre Tarleton's greencoats pillaged the helpless citizens, burning the Brevard homestead.

Brevard had retained his office as justice of the peace when Rowan County ^[5] was cut off from Anson in 1753, and he was reappointed by the provincial congress in 1776. In his latter years he was the most venerated citizen of lower Rowan (by then Iredell) County. Eighteenth-century records for Centre Presbyterian Church (Iredell County) have not survived, but there is no reason to doubt that Brevard was a ruling elder. He and his wife (who died 25 Mar. 1800, age seventy-three) are buried in the churchyard there.

Tradition states that Brevard called his plantation Purgatory. He reared a family of twelve children, many of whom achieved local prominence. Mary married General William Lee Davidson; Ephraim married Margaret Polk; John married Hannah Thompson; Hugh married Jane Young; Adam married Mary Winslow; Alexander married Rebecca Davidson; Robert probably migrated to Missouri; Benjamin migrated to Tennessee; Nancy married John Davidson (she and her husband were killed by the Indians in 1781); Joseph married Rebecca Kershaw; Jane married General Ephraim Davidson; and Rebecca married John Jones.

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