

Bright, Simon ^[1]

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Bright, Simon

by Charles R. Holloman, 1979

ca. 1702–ca. 1777

Simon Bright, colonial planter, county official, Anglican church leader, and militia officer, was the son of John Bright (ca. 1670–ca. 1720) of Bath County and his wife, Elizabeth (ca. 1680–1744). John Bright settled in Bath County before 1704 and by 4 July 1704 was residing on a plantation on the west side of Matchapongo River.

Simon Bright married Mary Reel, daughter of Peter Reel, Sr., of Craven Precinct, in about 1730; they had at least two children, [Simon, Jr.](#) ^[2], and James, both of whom attained local prominence. A William Bright who died in Dobbs County in 1782 was probably also a child of Simon and Mary, and there may have been others.

Bright first entered public service in 1731 as a justice of the court for Craven Precinct. He served in that office until [Johnston County](#) ^[3] was formed from upper [Craven](#) ^[4] in 1746. By 1734 he had settled on a plantation called The Briery, situated on Great Briery Swamp north of Atkins' Bank (present Kinston); his brother, William, had settled on an adjoining plantation. Simon Bright's residence fell into the new county of Johnston, and he served that county alternately as justice and as high sheriff until 1757, when he refused reappointment. He also served as an officer of the [Johnston County](#) ^[3] militia regiment until 1759, when his area was separated from Johnston to form the new county of Dobbs.

Bright's most enduring contributions were made in religion and education. He supported the idea that organized religion and schoolmasters should spread inland with the frontier. He became a member of the original vestry of St. Patrick's Parish, organized in 1746 for Johnston County, and labored in the religious and educational interests of the parish the rest of his life. As early as 1 Mar. 1735, Bright and his brother induced a schoolmaster, John Vernon, to come and settle with them. Vernon supervised the operation of Simon Bright's [gristmill](#) ^[5] and taught children of the community until 1741, when he moved to [Onslow County](#) ^[6] and was replaced by Thomas Branton. In those days the Anglican church had responsibility for public education and for public relief of the poor, as well as for Anglican religious instruction and worship services. A local congregation was organized with the schoolmaster as reader. In 1747, soon after St. Patrick's Parish was formed, the Brights enlisted the aid of their neighbors and of William Heritage, absentee owner of a large nearby plantation at Atkins' Bank, to build a chapel accessible to the [Neuse River](#) ^[7] landing on the Heritage plantation, in the hope that an Anglican missionary could be brought to the community. It was several years before this hope was fulfilled by the arrival of the Reverend William Miller, who previously had served St. Gabriel's Parish in [Duplin County](#) ^[8]. Miller remained at the chapel until 1775, when he declared his [Loyalist](#) ^[9] sympathies and left North Carolina.

During his long tenure on the parish vestry, Bright was influential in the organizing of other Anglican congregations in Johnston County and later in Dobbs. At least two other chapels were built in Johnston during his tenure: Lee's Chapel was built in 1756 on lands of Timothy Lee accessible to a waterway thereafter called the Chapel Branch, a prong of Sandy Run, near the present community of Ormondsville in [Greene County](#) ^[10]; the following year the Middle Creek Chapel was built on lands of Lodowick Tanner on Little Middle Creek, a site now in the Panther Branch Township of [Wake County](#) ^[11], derived from Johnston County in 1771.

The exact date of Bright's death is unknown. He appears on a Dobbs County tax list for 1769 in a household with his son James. He is mentioned as a witness in 1775. Dobbs voter lists made at Kinston in March 1779 do not register his name, and it does not appear on lists of Dobbs landowners and lists of taxables for 1780. Family tradition holds that Bright was buried in the old Caswell Cemetery on The Hill plantation, adjoining his home plantation, the Briery.

References:

Beaufort County Deed Book 1 and Old Will Book, 1720–1842 (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Sketches of Church History in North Carolina (1892).

Craven County Court Minutes and deeds (1734–46), Deed Book (Miscellaneous Deeds, 1728–1868), and Will and Estate Settlement (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Edgecombe County Wills (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh), for the Will of Richard Lee, 1756.

Fulham Papers (Lambeth Palace Library, London).

Grantee Index of Johnston-Dobbs-Lenoir (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh), for Wardens of the Church entry from Timothy Lee and Dobbs County landgrants issued to Robert Hart (no. 26), Timothy Lee (no. 887), and Charles Markland (1787).

Johnston County Deed Book 1 (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh), for a 1757 deed.

Book 85 (Land Grant Office, Office of the Secretary of State, Raleigh), for a Bath County landgrant to Lewis Conner in 1730.

New Bern Sentinel, 13 June 1829.

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North Carolina Museum of History (Raleigh), for the Caswell family Bible, printed in 1737.

North Carolina State Archives (Raleigh), for File CCR 187.

Records of Superior Court for New Bern District (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh), for 1775 docket.

William L. Saunders and Walter Clark, eds., *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 5, 7, 9, 22, 23, 25 (1887–1905).

Additional Resources:

Colonial and State Records Search, Documenting the American South, UNC Libraries:
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/search> ^[12]

United States. Work Projects Administration. Historical Records Survey of North Carolina. *Pitt County Cemetery Survey Records*. 1937. <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p15012coll1/id/28180> ^[13] (accessed April 15, 2013).

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[Biography](#) ^[17]

[Clergy](#) ^[18]

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

[Craven County](#) ^[23]

[Duplin County](#) ^[24]

[Lenoir County](#) ^[25]

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[27]

1 January 1979 | Holloman, Charles R.

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