

Bryan, Joseph Hunter ^[1]

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by Daniel M. Mcfarland, 1979; Revised November 2022.

1782–January 1840

See also: [Henry Hunter Bryan](#) ^[2], brother

Joseph Hunter Bryan, congressman and planter, was born in Windsor, [Bertie County](#) ^[3]. He represented Bertie in the House of Commons in 1804, 1805, 1807, 1808, and 1809. He was a trustee of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[4] from 1809 to 1817. In 1810 he was defeated in an attempt to gain the Halifax District seat in Congress from the incumbent, [Willis Alston](#) ^[5]; but after Alston decided to step down in 1814, Bryan again became a candidate and defeated Thomas Burgess, Federalist, by over two hundred votes.

Bryan served two terms in Congress, from March 1815 to March 1819. While in Washington, he formed close friendships with Philip P. Barbour and John Randolph of Virginia and joined them in opposition to all measures increasing the powers of the central government, such as the federal bank, tariffs, and [internal improvements](#) ^[6]. One of his last votes in Congress was against the amendment to the Missouri Bill introduced by James Tallmadge of New York, which would have prohibited further implantation of enslaved people into Missouri. In 1819 he did not run for reelection and [Hutchins G. Burton](#) ^[7] was elected to take his seat from the Halifax District.

Soon after he retired from Congress, Bryan moved to [Granville County](#) ^[8], where he had acquired property. He continued active in politics and was suggested as a candidate for governor in 1821, 1824 and 1832. He was frequently mentioned in the press of the time as a leader of the faction of [Richard Dobbs Spaight](#) ^[9], [Romulus M. Saunders](#) ^[10], and the Old Republicans. He was active in the [Jackson](#) ^[11] campaigns of 1824 and 1828 and was a delegate to the 1832 Democratic convention in Baltimore that nominated Jackson and Van Buren.

The trustees of The University of North Carolina appointed Bryan and [Archibald D. Murphey](#) ^[12] as their agents in a dispute over claims to escheated military bounty lands in Tennessee. An agreement was reached on 26 Aug. 1822, and both agents received grants of land as part payment for their services. Bryan must have moved to Tennessee in about 1835. He died there at La Grange, Fayette County.

References:

Biog. Dir. Am. Cong. (1971).

William Henry Hoyt, ed., *The Papers of Archibald D. Murphey*, vol. 1 (1914).

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Additional Resources:

"Bryan, Joseph Hunter, (1782 - 1839)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000990> ^[13] (accessed December 11, 2013).

"Appendix: Copy of a Letter from Judge Potter to Judge Cameron, specifying the sale of lots, with accompanying diagram." *Early times in Raleigh : addresses delivered ... at the dedication of Tucker Hall, and on the occasion of the completion of the monument to Jacob Johnson with maps of the city of Raleigh, for the years 1792, 1834 and 1847*. [Raleigh, N.C. : Walters, Hughes & Co. 1867. X-XI. <https://archive.org/stream/earlytimesinrale00swai#page/n93/mode/2up> ^[14] (accessed December 11, 2013).

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