Burges, Thomas [1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1979

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Thomas Burges, Church of England [2] clergyman, was born in the parish of Standon, Staffordshire, England, where he was baptized 6 Sept. 1712. He was the fourth of the fourteen children of John Burges and his wife, Dorothy, the daughter of William Lovatt of Clayton Hall in Staffordshire. It is not known what school he attended or when he took orders.

Burges was sent to America by the Bishop of London in 1741 and announced his intention of locating in North Carolina. However, for twenty years he was rector of Nottoway Parish in Southampton County, Va. According to the Halifax Registry, Thomas Burges "of Southampton County" bought 640 acres in Halifax [3](then Edgecombe) County in 1750; as Thomas Burges, "clerk," he sold the tract the following year. This purchase may reflect an abortive attempt to settle in North Carolina some years before he actually did so. In October 1759 the wardens and vestry of Edgecombe Parish, Halifax County [3], made an agreement with Burges to pay him £100 per annum as salary and £120 extra per annum in lieu of a glebe [4]. He appears to have moved to his new charge in 1759, as he preached the funeral sermon of a Mr. Thomas at his home on Roanoke River [5] near Norfleet's ferry in that year. In 1760 he purchased a lot in the town of Tarboro, which had just been laid out. On 20 Apr. 1762, Alexander Campbell of "the island of Martinico," merchant, sold Burges lot number 118 in the town of Halifax.

In 1756, prior to Burges's removal to North Carolina, the assembly had divided Edgecombe Parish of Edgecombe County [6], and the southern portion was given the name St. Mary's. In 1759 the upper part of Edgecombe County, which contained Edgecombe Parish, was constituted Halifax County, while the area encompassed by St. Mary's retained the old name of Edgecombe. The confusing combination Edgecombe Parish-Halifax County was the result. When Burges took over his duties, there were, in addition to the parish church at Conoconara, a few miles southwest of the present town of Tillery, chapels at Kehukee in eastern Halifax and Quankey in the northwestern part of the county and a chapel in Halifax Town. Burges resided near the main church at Conoconara. On 15 Feb. 1764, Egbert Haywood [7]conveyed to him 1,041 acres on Conoconara Creek. In 1774, Elizabeth Parish was cut off from the western part of Edgecombe Parish; Halifax Town was included in the new parish, which appears to have been named for Elizabeth, wife of the current royal governor, Josiah Martin [8]. From Burges's will, it is certain that he served both parishes until his death. Little is known of his ministry in North Carolina, but Governor William Tryon [9] in 1768 referred to him as a "clergyman of worth and much respected [10]."

Burges was buried in the yard of his parish church at Conoconara. His will, dated 1777, was not probated until 1794. A bill was passed by the legislature in 1787 to enable the wardens of the poor, the successor of the old parish vestry, to levy a special tax on the inhabitants of the county of Halifax to discharge debts due Burges, "now deceased," for ministerial duties performed in the year 1776.

Burges was married first in 1742 at Indian Springs in Southampton County, Va., to Miriam, surname unknown. Indian Springs was the glebe [4]for Nottoway Parish and had been given to the vestry by Francis Clements in 1721. Mrs. Burges died in 1758 at age forty-two, leaving a son and two daughters. In 1760, in North Carolina, Burges married Mary, the daughter of Colonel John Haywood [11] and his wife, Mary Lovatt. Burges's mother was a Lovatt, and the families may have been related. Of the children by his first marriage, Anna Maria married General Laurence Baker [12] of Gates County [13] and Dorothy married Colonel John Bradford of Halifax. The son, Henry John, was ordained by the Bishop of London in 1768 and on his return to America served at St. Mary's Parish, Edgecombe County, for a year. In 1772 he became rector of Newport Parish, Isle of Wight County, Va. An active patriot, he was a member of the committee of safety [14] of the county in 1775 and later was imprisoned by the British. Thomas's son, Albridgeton S. H., attended The University of North Carolina [15], 1805–9, and became a physician. He lived in Raleigh for a time and was one of the founders of Christ Church there.

Burges and his second wife had only one child, a son, Lovatt, who was clerk of the Halifax County Court for many years. Among Lovatt's children was Thomas H., a prominent attorney in Halifax, who represented the borough in the legislature in 1819, 1821, and 1822. He inherited the lot in Tarboro his grandfather had purchased in 1760. In 1834 he deeded this property to Calvary Church, Tarboro, and it forms part of the lot on which the present Calvary Church now stands. A prayer book, printed in London in 1749 and inscribed "The Rev. Thomas Burges, Edgecombe Parish, Halifax County," was inherited by Burges's great-granddaughter, Mrs. Melissa Long, and was exhibited at the Convention of the Diocese of North Carolina held at Tarboro in 1890.

References:

J. B. Cheshire, ed., *Sketches of Church History in North Carolina* (1892).

Deeds and Wills of the County of Halifax (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

North Carolina Booklet, vol. 23 (1926).

Stuart Hall Smith and Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., *The History of Trinity Parish* (1955).

Additional Resources:

"An Act to increase the Salary of the Reverend Thomas Burges, Minister of Edgcomb Parish in the County of Halifax." *Complete revisal of all the acts of Assembly, of the province of North-Carolina, now in force and use: together with the titles of all such laws as are obsolete, expired, or repealed: with marginal notes and references, and an exact table to the whole.* Newbern [N.C.]: James Davis. 1773. 336. https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/complete-revisal-of-all-the-acts-of-assembly-of-the-province-of-north-carolina-now-in-force-and-use-together-with-the-titles-of-all-such-laws-as-are-obsolete-expired-or-repealed-with-marginal-notes-and-references-and-an-exact-table-to-the-whole/1955563?item=2094827 [16] (accessed December 17, 2013).

William Tryon to the Bishop of London, Newbern, North Carolina, January 15, 1768. *Correspondence of William Tryon and other selected papers: Volume 2.* Raleigh [N.C.]: Division of Archives and History, Dept. of Cultural Resources. 1981. https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/correspondence-of-william-tryon-and-other-selected-papers-volume-2/2148955?item=2232958 [10] (accessed December 17, 2013).

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