

## Hill, William <sup>[1]</sup>

## Hill, William

by Lawrence F. London, 1988

**15 Apr. 1737–23 Aug. 1783**

William Hill, colonial official and merchant, was born in Boston, Mass., the son of John and Elizabeth Maxwell Hill and the grandson of Henry Hill who arrived in Boston in the latter part of the seventeenth century from Isle of Thanet, County Kent, England. Henry died in Boston in 1726, leaving his family large holdings of property including distilleries near Essex Street.

William Hill and his brother, John (1732–58), attended Harvard College, graduating in the class of 1756. In their freshman year they boarded in the home of President Holyoke. They were described as "quiet and orderly undergraduates." Shortly after his graduation William went to [Brunswick](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, N.C., a port town on the [Cape Fear River](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, to become the local schoolmaster. On 29 Sept. 1757 he married Margaret Moore, of Brunswick, daughter of Nathaniel and Elizabeth Webb Moore and granddaughter of Governor James Moore of South Carolina. The ceremony was performed at Orton Plantation by the Reverend John McDowell, an Anglican missionary in the Cape Fear section. They had nine children but only four reached maturity: John (1761–1832), William Henry (1767–1808), Nathaniel Moore (1769–1842), and Thomas (1770–1818).

Not long after settling in Brunswick, Hill gave up teaching to enter the mercantile business with [Parker Quince](#) <sup>[4]</sup> as his partner. His business was successful, and he seems to have been respected and liked in the Lower Cape Fear section where he was commonly referred to as "the elegant gentleman from Boston." In 1764 Governor [Arthur Dobbs](#) <sup>[5]</sup> appointed Hill collector of duties "on rum, [wine](#) <sup>[6]</sup> and other distilled liquors" for the port of Brunswick. He held this position until the end of the colonial period, and at the same time continued his mercantile business, exporting and importing goods to and from England.

Although the approaching break with the British government seriously affected his business, Hill was sympathetic towards the grievances of his fellow colonists. On a visit to North Carolina in March 1773, Josiah Quincy, Jr., of Massachusetts, wrote: "Lodged last night in Brunswick, N.C., at the house of William Hill, Esq., a most sensible, polite gentleman, and though a crown officer, a man replete with sentiments of general liberty, and warmly attached to the cause of American freedom." On 25 July 1774, Hill wrote the English firm of Kelly and Co. that the tea he had repeatedly ordered had not arrived but that he did not complain because "the flame into which this whole Continent is thrown by the operation of the Boston Port Bill will presently show itself in an universal stop to all intercourse between Great Britain and the Colonies. My little connection in trade must cease with the rest." Three months later Hill wrote Kelly that he had received a shipment of tea that he was returning in the same vessel, remarking that even if he was disposed to accept it "the people here would not suffer it to be landed. Poison would now be more acceptable." He pointed out that the British were greatly mistaken in their belief in "a disunion among the American Provinces, and I can venture to assure you that North Carolina will not be behind any of her sister Colonies in virtue." In the same letter he refused to accept the agency "for supplying his Majesty's ships," and declined further trade until "the present difficulties are happily over, which, as a warm friend of Great Britain and her Colonies, I sincerely wish may be speedily accomplished."

In November 1775, there being no longer any commerce out of the port of Brunswick, Hill gave up his position as naval officer and shortly afterwards moved to Wilmington. In 1780 he was elected to the House of Commons from New Hanover, but was declared ineligible to take his seat because he already held a county office, commissioner of forfeitures. Remarking on his election Hill said that the "Choice was made without my Privity or Consent, and I knew not that any Person had set me up as a Candidate till near the close of the Poll." Following this reversal, he was placed in charge of administering the law relative to encouraging the importation of arms and munitions into the port of Brunswick. When commerce on the Cape Fear was resumed, he was appointed one of the commissioners to regulate pilotage on that river.

A member of the Anglican church, Hill served as a vestryman and lay reader of St. Philip's Parish, Brunswick, where he was buried. Referring to Hill's death in a letter to a friend, [Archibald Maclaine Hooper](#) <sup>[7]</sup> said, "Mr. Hill died . . . of obstinate quackery," not calling in a physician until "about four days before his death."

### References:

Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 14–15 (1896–98).

"Extracts from the Letter-Book of William Hill, of Cape Fear, N.C.," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 13 (October 1859).

Don Higginbotham, ed., *The Papers of James Iredell*, vol. 2 (1976).

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#### Additional Resources:

"CSR Documents by Hill, William, 1737-1783." Colonial and State Records of North Carolina. Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr10452><sup>[9]</sup>

Edenton (N.C.) Papers, 1717-1937 (collection no. 01910). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Edenton\(N.C.\)Papers.html](http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Edenton(N.C.)Papers.html)<sup>[10]</sup> (accessed April 23, 2014).

Gault, Charles B. *Some of the descendants of William Hill of Boston, Massachusetts, and Brunswick, North Carolina, and his wife, nee Margaret Moore*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: C.B. Gault,<sup>[11]</sup> 1969.<sup>[11]</sup>

#### Subjects:

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[Merchants](#)<sup>[13]</sup>

[Public officials](#)<sup>[14]</sup>

#### Authors:

[London, Lawrence F.](#)<sup>[15]</sup>

#### Origin - location:

[Brunswick County](#)<sup>[16]</sup>

[New Hanover County](#)<sup>[17]</sup>

[Wilmington](#)<sup>[18]</sup>

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#).<sup>[19]</sup>

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