

Hooper, Thomas ^[1]

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by Vernon O. Stumpf, 1988

Ca. 1746–ca. 1821

Thomas Hooper, Wilmington and Charleston merchant, and alleged Loyalist ^[2], was born in Boston, Mass., the son of Mary Dennie and the Reverend William Hooper, who became rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in 1747. He was the younger brother of William ^[3], a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and George ^[4]. Thomas received his preparatory education at the Boston Latin School ^[5] but unlike his older brother William, who studied law, he went into service in a mercantile house with his brother George. After William was admitted to the bar in Boston in 1764, Thomas and his two brothers went to Wilmington, N.C., where they were welcomed by the planters, merchants, and lawyers of the town. The Hooper brothers were said to be handsome, with charm, grace of manner, and cultivated minds but tempered with aristocratic reserve. Thomas and George established a mercantile partnership in the lower Cape Fear and later Thomas opened a branch of their firm in Charleston, where he rapidly accumulated a great fortune.

During the American Revolution ^[6], Thomas became suspect as a British merchant and some of his goods were seized by Patriot committees. On 21 Jan. 1779 he petitioned the House of Commons of the General Assembly ^[7] to be admitted as a citizen of the state but he was rejected. In 1780 Hooper was one of several signers of an address to General Sir Henry Clinton in Charleston, but his large mercantile business still prospered. His wife became ill and went to England in 1782; Hooper followed and they soon traveled to France, returning to Wilmington in July 1785.

In July 1786, Governor William Moultrie of South Carolina wrote to Governor Richard Caswell ^[8] of North Carolina asking that he intervene with the commissioner of confiscated property to restore Hooper's property to him. Moultrie advised Caswell that Hooper had become a citizen of South Carolina on October 10, 1783. Caswell submitted the letter to the General Assembly and implied that the state should honor another state's request. By the winter of 1786–87, with the ratification of the Definitive Treaty ^[9] between the former colonies and Britain, Thomas and his brother George were free from threat of banishment and their property was restored to them.

Thomas Hooper married Mary Heron, the daughter of the Honorable Benjamin ^[10] and Mary Howe Heron. Benjamin was deputy surveyor and auditor of His Majesty's revenue, clerk of the Crown, naval officer, and member of the North Carolina royal governor's Council in 1763; he died in England in 1770. Mary's brother, Edward Heron, remained loyal to the state of North Carolina, although in 1782 he asked for permission to visit his sister when she was ill and on her way to England. It is not clear whether Hooper had any children who survived to adulthood. While he lived in Wilmington or visited there, he attended St. James Episcopal Church. He died in Charleston, S.C.

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Additional Resources:

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<http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/h/Hooper,George.html> ^[16] (accessed January 10, 2014).

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