

Kenan, Felix ^[1]

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by Neil C. Pennywitt, 1988

d. 1785

Felix Kenan, sheriff of [Duplin County](#) ^[2] and active Tory in the [American Revolution](#) ^[3], is said by family tradition to have settled in the 1730s with his two brothers, Thomas and William, in the upper part of [New Hanover County](#) ^[4] that later became Duplin. In 1754 Felix was a member of the company of militia commanded by a Captain Gregg, and in June 1758 he was appointed a justice of the peace for Duplin County which had been created in 1750. He remained a justice until 1770. From 1762 to 1768 he served as a member of the [colonial](#) ^[5] Assembly, where his committee assignments dealt mainly with fiscal matters; he also was a member of the committee that determined the location of [Fort Johnston](#) ^[6].

Kenan was involved in area land matters, serving on the Claims Commission for the county from 1764 to 1769, and as a member of the 1766 commission that determined the boundary between [New Hanover](#) ^[4] and [Duplin](#) ^[2] counties. During much of this time he was also land agent and attorney for [Henry McCulloch](#) ^[7], who owned large tracts of land in the area. Kenan was sheriff on two occasions—in 1760–61 and again from 1769 to 1776. In May 1776 he was removed from the office because of his involvement in Tory activities, particularly at the [Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge](#) ^[8] in February when he bore arms with the [Loyalist](#) ^[9] forces under General [Donald MacDonald](#) ^[10]. He was captured by the Patriots and returned to Duplin County. On 11 May 1776 the Assembly passed a resolution removing him from the office of sheriff, noting that he had been "inimical to the Liberties of America" and was "truly unworthy to execute any longer the trust and confidence reposed in him by his appointment as Sheriff." In March 1777 he was rumored to be at the head of a Tory insurrection in the state, and in July his arrest was ordered for his alleged involvement in a conspiracy against [Governor Richard Caswell](#) ^[11]. Surviving records, however, do not reveal whether he actually was detained. One report said that Kenan "had not the independence to be a Tory, or the honesty to be a [Whig](#) ^[12]."

In 1754 Kenan married Catharine Norris Love, the daughter of George and Sarah Norris and widow of Daniel Love. Their children were William and Rose, both sons, and Nancy and Jane. He died in Duplin County sometime between 9 Apr. and 18 July 1785 and was buried near the Duplin-[Sampson county](#) ^[13] line.

References:

Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 11, 22, 23 (1895, 1907, 1904).

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Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists in the American Revolution*, vol. 1 (1864).

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vols. 9, 10 (1890).

Additional Resources:

Patrons of the press: subscription book purchases in North Carolina, 1733-1850, North Carolina Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/patrons-of-the-press-subscription-book-purchases-in-north-carolina-1733-1850/2149092> ^[14]

Molton family and kinsmen : Hooks, Hunter, Whitfield, Linn, Tuttle, Henley, Harris, Summerlin, Ware, Glover, Smith, Williams, Upmann and others : reminiscences to the year 1857, North Carolina Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/molton-family-and-kinsmen-hooks-hunter-whitfield-linn-tuttle-henley-harris-summerlin-ware-glover-smith-williams-upmann-and-others-reminiscences-to-the-year-1857/1229392> ^[15]

Letter from Cornelius Harnett to Richard Caswell, Harnett, Cornelius, 1723-1781, August 23, 1777, Volume 11, Page 590, Documenting the American South, UNC Libraries: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr11-0496> ^[16].

Report by the Committee of both Houses of the North Carolina General Assembly concerning public claims North Carolina. General Assembly, November 06, 1769, Volume 08, Pages 141-143, Documenting the American South, UNC Libraries: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr08-0069> ^[17]

Subjects:

[American Revolution \(1763-1789\)](#) ^[18]

[Biographies](#) ^[19]

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Authors:

Pennywitt, Neil C. [21]

Origin - location:

Duplin County [22]

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