

## **Leslie, James** <sup>[1]</sup>

## **Leslie, James**

by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1991

**ca. 1720–81**

James Leslie, founder of the town of [Halifax](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, was born in Northern Ireland. It may be significant that he first appeared in North Carolina not long after the arrival of Governor [Arthur Dobbs](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, himself a native of Ulster. On 8 Feb. 1757 David Crawley sold to James Leslie, merchant, three hundred acres on [Roanoke River](#) <sup>[4]</sup> near Quankey Creek in [Edgecombe County](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. Later that year, the [Assembly](#) <sup>[6]</sup> passed an act creating a town on one hundred acres of the land Leslie had so recently purchased. The commissioners of the new town, [Thomas Barker](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, [Alexander McCulloch](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, John Gibson, Richard Browning, and Robert Jones, the younger, were directed to lay off streets and alleys with a hundred lots of half an acre each. Four acres were to be reserved for a marketplace, and a public quay or landing was to be established on the [Roanoke River](#) <sup>[4]</sup>. The act further provided that the ferry owned by James Leslie and already established by law over the river was to be the only ferry allowed at the new town. The proceeds from the sale of lots in the town were first to be applied to paying Leslie for the land and second towards building a bridge over Quankey Creek. The town a year later was named Halifax and became the seat of the new county of Halifax, created from the northern part of Edgecombe County in 1759.

There are few records pertaining to Leslie in his later years. Throwing his lot with the Patriot cause, he was appointed a member of the [Committee of Safety](#) <sup>[9]</sup> in the Halifax District in 1775. On 26 July 1776 he joined several other merchants in the town of Halifax in posting bond of £5,000 for a shipload of staves to be sent to some port in Spain or Portugal, there to be sold to procure a supply of salt and "war like stores" for the use of the state.

Leslie made his will on 23 Sept. 1781, and it was probated in Halifax the following November. He had no children by his wife Mary. Leslie bequeathed to his brother and sisters in Ireland lands in Colerain in the counties of Londonderry and Antrim in Ulster. He devised his New Hope property near Halifax to his nephew George, the son of his sister Elizabeth and her husband, John McClelland. New Hope later became the site of a well-known racetrack.

### **References:**

Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina* <sup>[10]</sup>, vols. 11, 23, 25 (1895, 1904, 1906).

Halifax County Will Book (Halifax County Courthouse, Halifax).

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### **Subjects:**

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### **Authors:**

[Smith, Claiborne T., Jr.](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

### **Origin - location:**

[Halifax County](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

[Halifax](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

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