

McDougald, Samuel ^[1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1991

fl. 1782–94

Samuel McDougald, clerical impostor, appeared on the tax lists of Northampton County ^[2] in 1782 along with his brother James. Their antecedents are unknown, and both were unmarried. It is probable that they were schoolteachers. The existing records suggest an association between the McDougalds and General Allen Jones ^[3] of Mount Gallant in Northampton County. From his first appearance in North Carolina, Samuel presented himself as a clergyman of the Church of England ^[4]. This deception was plausible at the time due to the dual role of many of the eighteenth-century clergy as minister and schoolmaster.

By 1786 Samuel McDougald had moved across the Roanoke River ^[5] to Halifax County ^[6]. In that year he was enrolled as a member of the Royal White Hart Masonic Lodge ^[7] in the town of Halifax. Soon afterwards he began serving the lodge as chaplain, an office that had not been filled since the death of the Reverend Charles Edward Taylor late in 1784. According to the lodge minutes, McDougald also became active as a clergyman in the neighborhood. He must have made a good impression in the lodge, for late in 1787 he was one of its representatives to the meeting of the Grand Lodge held in Tarboro. Earlier in the same year General Allen Jones had proposed a bill in the North Carolina legislature, then meeting in Tarboro, that the Reverend Mr. McDougald be made chaplain of the Assembly ^[8]. The measure was defeated. In the same year McDougald is said to have officiated as a clergyman in St. Mary's Parish, Edgecombe County ^[9].

Less is known about James McDougald. In 1789 a Reverend James McDougald advertised in the *Edenton State Gazette* that he planned to open an academy seventeen miles above the town of Halifax on 1 November of that year where he would teach English, Latin, Greek, and French as well as writing, arithmetic, bookkeeping, and geography. Nothing further is known about the academy. As there is no other reference to James McDougald as a clergyman, the advertisement may have been an error and Samuel intended instead of James. It is possible, of course, that both brothers posed as clergymen. The only property that Samuel McDougald owned in Halifax County was a tract of twenty-five acres located in the area where the proposed academy was to be established. It was not far from Quankey Chapel of the old colonial establishment, but it is not known if McDougald held services there. He sold this land to Edward Good in 1791.

James McDougald died late in 1793. He and Samuel may not have been on good terms at the end, as James devised his whole estate to his nephew in his will, probated in Halifax in February 1794. It is of interest that Allen Jones, his wife Mary, and their son-in-law, John Sitgreaves ^[10], were the witnesses for this document. Samuel McDougald tried to substitute a will naming himself as beneficiary, but the forgery was detected. For this crime, described by his fellow Masons as disgraceful to humanity and derogatory to his character as a Mason, he was brought before the lodge and, after being given a chance to defend himself, was found guilty and expelled from the membership. His clerical deception undoubtedly came to light at this time. McDougald left Halifax in disgrace and nothing further is known of him.

On 9 Nov. 1789 the Reverend Charles Pettigrew ^[11] had written to McDougald to enlist his support for and participation in the Tarboro convention of the Episcopal church ^[12] planned for the following year. There was no reply to the letter and McDougald took no part in any of the Tarboro meetings. From his later history, it is clear why he did not. In 1830 the Reverend Robert J. Miller, then about eighty years old, wrote a letter to the historian and clergyman Francis L. Hawks on the state of the Episcopal church in North Carolina during the post-Revolutionary period. He mentioned that Samuel McDougald was then living in Halifax and had charge of the congregations that had formerly been under the care of the Reverend Thomas Burges ^[13] and the Reverend Charles E. Taylor ^[14]. He went on to say that McDougald had proved to be an impostor, which had a pernicious influence on the Episcopal church in that part of the state.

References:

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