

Macknight, Thomas ^[1]

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fl. 1757–87

Thomas Macknight, Loyalist planter and public officeholder, was a native of Scotland. Little is known about him except for the years he spent in North Carolina, where he settled in 1757. A landowner in both the Albemarle ^[2] and Upper Cape Fear regions, he was also involved in shipbuilding ^[3] and the export trade in Norfolk, Va. He served in the North Carolina Assembly in 1762, 1771, 1773 (both terms), and 1775 and in the latter year was nominated to the Council. Governor Josiah Martin ^[4] described him as a "gentleman of character . . . of greatest weight and abilities."

At the New Bern Provincial Congress ^[5] of 1775, where Macknight represented Currituck County ^[6] as a Loyalist, he was the only member who refused to sign the Association approving the Continental Congress at Philadelphia. In an explanation published in the *North Carolina Gazette* on 14 Apr. 1775, Macknight said that, although he could comply with the nonconsumption and nonimportation agreements and give passive support to the nonexporting section, he could not repudiate debts to British merchants and asked for time to settle his obligations. Radical members refused to allow a delay, and the house, declaring that his intentions were "inimical to the cause of liberty," recommended that all persons "withdraw from all connection with him as an object of contempt." Macknight and other members for Currituck and Pasquotank then withdrew from the convention.

After he received threats, an attempt was made to assassinate him, and his house, crops, and the people he was enslaving were plundered, he fled to Governor Dunmore of Virginia at the end of 1775. At his own expense, he paid £150 to build a wall around Norfolk to help in its defense. In February 1776 he was with Governor Martin, in July and August he was in the Cape Fear region, and later in the year he fled to England. In England, he was given £500 on his arrival. Subsequently, he made claims for the loss of land, ships, merchandise, and people he enslaved in both North Carolina and Virginia valued at over £30,000. Macknight was last noted giving evidence on 19 Mar. 1787 with regard to the claim of another Loyalist. His later career is unknown, and his name does not appear in the 1790 census of North Carolina.

References:

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