

## **MacNair, Ralph** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **MacNair, Ralph**

by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1991

**16 Feb. 1742–October 1784**

Ralph MacNair, merchant, legislator, and Tory, was born in Glasgow, Scotland. His father is said to have been killed on the battlefield of Culloden in the ranks of the Duke of Cumberland when he defeated Prince Charles Edward Stuart in 1746. While a young man MacNair, with his brothers, Ebenezer and John, settled near Hillsborough, N.C., where he became a merchant. He named his new home Blanton Farm.

During the trouble with the [Regulators](#) <sup>[2]</sup> in [Orange County](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, Ralph MacNair became identified with the local officials and wrote a long letter to [Herman Husband](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, the rebel leader, setting forth his thoughts on the matter. Governor [William Tryon](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, on his expedition to subdue the Regulators, bought supplies from MacNair's Hillsborough store, including such unusual items as Delft bowls and gilt tin cups. Elected to represent Orange County in the [Assembly](#) <sup>[6]</sup> in December 1771, MacNair served until late 1775. With the onset of the [American Revolution](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, he became a [Tory](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and had to leave North Carolina. [Alexander Telfair](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, the Scottish merchant and Tory of [Halifax](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, who had married Pauline Hall, the sister of MacNair's wife, bought a brig to help evacuate the North Carolina Loyalists. It appears that the MacNair family sailed on this ship, which landed first at New York before proceeding to England. Ralph MacNair remained on Long Island for the duration of the war. His North Carolina holdings were confiscated by the state in 1779.

With the advent of peace he made an unsuccessful attempt to return to his North Carolina home. On 21 Jan. 1784 Governor [Alexander Martin](#) <sup>[11]</sup>, in response to a request from MacNair to have his citizenship restored, wrote that he would send his petition on to the legislature, noting that the letter enclosed from General Nathanael Greene on MacNair's behalf and the services MacNair had rendered the American prisoners on Long Island would carry weight. The governor could not resist lecturing the petitioner, remarking that, while on a personal level he would always be his friend, "You have deserted the country in which you say you wish to spend your days. What satisfaction can you have in returning to her in her triumphant prosperity, when your late principal desire is frustrated which was to subjugate her to British despotism." MacNair's petition was rejected by the legislature.

On 9 Aug. 1784 he took the oath of allegiance in Philadelphia before William Rush, later the well-known American sculptor, and became a citizen of that commonwealth. He died in exile in Richmond, Va. In 1785 his brother-in-law, Edward Hall of Tarboro, as executor of the deceased's estate, successfully petitioned the legislature for the return of his property to the three orphans of MacNair and his wife.

MacNair married Dorothy Hall, the daughter of Thomas Hall, a native of Prince George County, Va., who settled in Tarboro, N.C. Her brother, Edward Hall, a Tarboro merchant, was clerk of the court of [Edgecombe County](#) <sup>[12]</sup> (1772–1818). Her nephew, Thomas H. Hall, was a member of Congress. Mrs. MacNair died at sea en route from New York to Charleston, S.C., on 9 Oct. 1782. She was buried at sea, latitude 25°40', longitude 75°50'. Ralph MacNair and his wife had two sons who reached maturity, Thomas Ebenezer and Edmund Duncan.

#### **References:**

Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 17, 19–20, 24 <sup>[13]</sup> (1899–1905).

[James B. MacNair, McNair, McNear, and McNeir Genealogies \(1923\).](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

Thomas C. Parramore, *Launching the Craft: The First Half Century of Free Masonry in North Carolina* (1975).

Personal papers of Ralph MacNair (possession of Mrs. Thomas H. Battle).

William L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol. 9 <sup>[15]</sup> (1890).

#### **Additional Resources:**

DeMond, Robert O. 2005. *The loyalists in North Carolina during the Revolution* Cranbury, NJ: Scholar's Bookshelf.

#### **Subjects:**

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

[Merchants](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

[Public officials](#) <sup>[18]</sup>

**Authors:**

Smith, Claiborne T., Jr. [19]

**Origin - location:**

Orange County [20]

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