Marsden, Rufus [1]

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by Lawrence F. London, 1991

1695–1750

Rufus Marsden, merchant and legislator, was born in the Chorley-Liverpool section of Lancashire, England. He settled in the Cape Fear [2] region of North Carolina in 1736. The next year he was granted 1,040 acres in New Hanover County [3], and over the next five years he continued to receive additional grants. In 1743 the freeholders of Wilmington [4] elected Marsden one of five commissioners for the town and reelected him each year thereafter until his death. He also served for several years as one of the justices of the peace for New Hanover County.

Marsden was elected a member of the House of Burgesses from New Hanover for the session that met in New Bern on 12 June 1746. This Assembly was shortly prorogued by Governor Gabriel Johnston [5] to meet at Wilmington the following November. It marked the beginning of the controversy between the northern and southern counties concerning representation in the House of Burgesses. Until then the Albemarle counties had five representatives each in the house, while the other counties had only two each. On 22 Nov. 1746 Marsden introduced a bill in the house providing for "establishing a more equal Representation of all his Majesty's subjects in the House of Burgesses." Three days later it was passed by both houses of the Assembly.

While continuing to represent New Hanover in the house through 1749, Marsden served on several important committees. One of his most significant pieces of legislation was a bill calling "for the Encouragement of James Davis [6] to set up and carry on his Business of a printer [7] in this province, and for other purposes therein mentioned." He introduced the bill on 6 Apr. 1749; four days later it was passed by both houses. In June James Davis established his printing business in New Bern.

By the time of his death Marsden had acquired considerable properties. He owned a plantation, Lotham, on Smiths Creek; a brigantine, *John and William*; and several lots and houses in Wilmington. On 7 July 1732 he married Alice Rigby, and they had three children: Hannah (1735–56; m. Arthur Mabson), Alice [8](1746–1813; m. Benjamin Heron [9]), and Peggy (1748–86; m. first Edward Chivers and second John London [10]).

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