

Nixon, John ^[1]

Nixon, John

by Mattie Erma E. Parker, 1991

ca. 1623–92

John Nixon, Council member ^[2], speaker of the Assembly ^[3], and governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, first was in North Carolina (then called Albemarle) as commander of a vessel trading between England and the American colonies. Nothing is known of his parents or his birthplace, but he was known personally to some of the Lords Proprietors ^[4] of Carolina, particularly Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury ^[5], and Sir John and Sir George Colleton. At some unspecified time, according to his own statement, he was in the East Indies. In 1668 and subsequently he brought letters and other documents from the Proprietors ^[4] to Albemarle officials. By May 1671 Nixon had settled in Albemarle and was a member of the Council. He remained on the Council until 1675, when acting governor John Jenkins ^[6] was forcibly ousted and his government was overthrown by a faction led by Thomas Eastchurch ^[7].

In July 1677 Nixon again became a Council member, taking office under a commission issued by the Proprietors the previous November and delivered in July. The government then was headed by Thomas Miller ^[8], a prominent supporter of Eastchurch. Although the Proprietors had commissioned Eastchurch ^[7] governor, he had stopped in Nevis on his way home from London and had sent Miller ^[9] to govern in his stead, having issued to Miller a commission of doubtful legality. Miller's oppressive measures as acting governor, the colonists' doubts as to the legitimacy of his claim to office, and other situations resulted in the overthrow of Miller and his government in December 1677 in an uprising now called Culpeper's Rebellion ^[10]. Nixon, like other Council members, was imprisoned at the beginning of the uprising, but he either escaped or was released and went to London.

By August 1679 Nixon was back in Albemarle serving as a Council member in the government headed by John Harvey ^[11], whom the Proprietors had recently appointed. He also sat on the Council in November. As he had been named governor of the Hudson's Bay Company ^[12] on 23 May of that year, he was in Albemarle for only a brief time, perhaps primarily attending to personal matters. He served from the trading settlement of Moose Factory in northeastern Ontario, Canada, until he was replaced on 31 Jan. 1683. His record there was not particularly distinguished, as his concerns were largely related to improving relations with the natives and expanding trade to benefit the company. It was under his leadership, however, that Charlton Island was occupied and some buildings were constructed on the island. His inability to get along with others and his age were sometimes the causes of complaints against him.

The scant surviving records in North Carolina do not reveal when he returned to the colony, but he was again living in Albemarle ^[13] on 4 Feb. 1688, when he made his will, witnessed by some of his neighbors. In 1689 he was elected to the Assembly and served as speaker. He died before 8 Aug. 1692, when his will was probated.

Nixon's public career raises questions about his political affiliations and motives. In a period of bitter factional rivalry and fierce animosities, he served in the government of first one faction and then the other. His participation in the government of Thomas Miller has been interpreted as evidence that he had joined the Eastchurch-Miller faction, but that interpretation is open to question. The Proprietors may have appointed Nixon to the Council because they knew him personally, not because of a recommendation by Eastchurch, who was in London when the appointment was made. Apparently most of the other Council members were appointed then as well. Likewise, Nixon may have accepted the commission because of his friendship for the Proprietors rather than because of any loyalty to Eastchurch and his party. In August 1679, when Miller was brought before a court on charges of treason and blasphemy, Nixon testified against him, although in 1673, while a Council member and judge in John Jenkins ^[14]'s government, he had dismissed similar charges against Miller for insufficient evidence. Perhaps Nixon was not a partisan of either faction, but from friendship and loyalty for the Proprietors worked with whatever government was in power, attempting to use his influence to promote the Proprietors' interest as he saw it.

Nixon lived in Pasquotank Precinct, where he owned three hundred or more acres of land. He was a master mariner and in the 1670s was commander of the bark *Patience*, then trading between the West Indies and the mainland colonies. Although there is no evidence as to his religious views, he may have tended towards Quaker ^[15] beliefs. His second wife appears to have been a Quaker, and many of his Pasquotank neighbors, including a relative, Zacharias Nixon, were devout followers of that faith.

Nixon was married twice and had a daughter by each wife. His first wife, Elliner, and their daughter, Africa, appear to have come to the colony with him or to have joined him soon afterwards. His second wife, Em, was the mother of his younger daughter, Ann, who was still a minor when Nixon made his will. After Nixon's death, Em married Edward Mayo, a Quaker. She died about 1701. Apparently Ann Nixon died about the same time or soon afterwards, for court records of 1706 concerning a plantation formerly owned by Nixon indicate that Africa and her husband, Samuel Pike, were the heirs. As Nixon had named only Em and Ann in his will, presumably Ann as well as Em was then dead and Africa inherited under

the common law.

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Additional Resources:

"HBCA History." Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Archives of Manitoba. http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/about/hbca_history.html [12] (accessed September 30, 2014).

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[Colonial period \(1600-1763\)](#) [22]

[Biographies](#) [23]

[Public officials](#) [24]

Authors:

[Parker, Mattie E. E.](#) [25]

Origin - location:

[Coastal Plain](#) [26]

[Pasquotank County](#) [27]

[Perquimans County](#) [28]

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) [29]

1 January 1991 | Parker, Mattie E. E.

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[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/nixon-john> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/council-state> [3] <https://ncpedia.org/general-assembly> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/lords-proprietors> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/cooper-anthony-ashley> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/jenkins-john> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/eastchurch-esthurn-thomas> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/miller-thomas> [9] <https://ncpedia.org/miller-thomas> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/culpepers-rebellion> [11] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/harvey-john> [12] http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/about/hbca_history.html [13] <https://ncpedia.org/history/colonial/albemarle> [14] <https://ncpedia.org/jenkins-john> [15] <https://ncpedia.org/quakers> [16] <https://archive.org/details/abstractofnorthc01nort> [17] <https://archive.org/details/northcarolinahis01hath> [18] <https://archive.org/details/northcarolinahis02hath> [19] <https://archive.org/details/northcarolinahis03hath> [20] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/volumes> [21] <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/13772> [22] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/colonial-period> [23] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [24] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/public-officials> [25] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/parker-mattie-e-e> [26] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-pl> [27] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-36> [28] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-37> [29] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>