Owen, Thomas

by William S. Powell, 1991

1735–2 Nov. 1806

Thomas Owen, Revolutionary officer, was born of Welsh ancestry in Chester County, Pa., but moved to North Carolina
with his father when he was about five. The family may have lived first in Granville County but soon was established in
Bladen County. Nothing is known of Owen's early training and education, but over time he acquired three thousand
acres of land and in 1790 owned thirty-seven slaves. In August 1775 he was elected a justice of the Bladen County Court
of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, and on 9 Sept. 1775 he was made major of the local militia company.

During the American Revolution, he was promoted to colonel of state troops, and at the Battle of Camden on 16 Aug.
1780 he earned a reputation for bravery. A year later he saw action at the Battle of Elizabethtown, where the Tories
were routed and their commander, John Slingsby, was killed. A contemporary who knew him well said: "Tom Owen was
a warm-hearted friend, generous to a foe, and as brave a soldier as ever wore a sword."

Owen represented Bladen County in the Third Provincial Congress in 1775 and in the Fifth Provincial Congress in
December 1776, when the state constitution was adopted. He early demonstrated his Revolutionary sentiments as a
member of the county safety committee. Owen also served in the House of Commons in 1777 and in the state senate in
1778–79, 1779–80, 1784–85, 1787, and 1790. Intermittently during the war, he was a member of a legislative
committee to consider ways of bringing the Tories of the Cape Fear section "to justice" and of a committee concerned with
obtaining material from the Wilcox Iron Works on Deep River in Chatham County. On one occasion he was
reimbursed for expenses in connection with taking four Continental army deserters to headquarters. At the Hillsborough
convention of 1788, when North Carolina declined to approve the new U.S. Constitution, he was a delegate from Bladen County. Reelected to the Fayetteville convention of 1789, he voted with the majority to adopt the Constitution.

Owen's wife was Eleanor Porterfield, the daughter of James Porterfield and the sister of Captain Dennis Porterfield, who
was killed at the Battle of Eutaw Springs, S.C., in September 1781. Thomas and Eleanor Owen were the parents of John
and James, a general and congressman; and Mary, who married Elisha Stedman.

References:


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John H. Wheeler, Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851 (1851).

Additional Resources:

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1 January 1991 | Powell, William S.