

## **Spicer, John** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by William S. Smith, Jr., 1994

### **d. March 1789**

John Spicer, port inspector, legislator, judge of the Admiralty Court, militia paymaster during the Revolutionary War <sup>[2]</sup>, and member of the Council of State, probably settled in North Carolina with his brother James before 1766. The penchant of the family to use the name John makes it difficult to sort out the events that should be attributed to this particular man, but the account below is that best supported by facts available in contemporary public records.

By 1767 John Spicer was named inspector for New Topsail <sup>[3]</sup>, replacing James Spicer. John held the position through 1773 and perhaps as late as 1775. The name appears in the deed books as early as 3 June 1754, when he bought land on the main branch of Queens Creek. In a 1768 purchase he is listed as "mariner." John Spicer, Jr., first appears in the records as a testator to a 16 Feb. 1770 deed to land that John Spicer bought. John Spicer frequently held his land for only a few years before reselling it.

Spicer began his legislative career by representing Onslow County <sup>[4]</sup> in the third General Assembly under Governor Josiah Martin <sup>[5]</sup> beginning on 4 Dec. 1773 at New Bern <sup>[6]</sup>. In 1775 and 1776 he represented the county in the last three Provincial congresses <sup>[7]</sup>. The assemblies of 1777, 1781, 1783, and 1785 also included him. He was elected by the legislature to one-year terms on the Council of State in 1780 and 1785. Service for an undetermined period following election by the Assembly to the post of judge of the Admiralty Court for the port of Brunswick in 1783 led to his resignation from the senate. In 1774 he sided with the majority in opposing proposed bills that would have decreased the power of the courts and the fees for the chief justice of the superior court. In November 1776 he was a member of the committee of the Fifth Provincial Congress that prepared the declaration of rights and the constitution for the government of North Carolina.

In December 1776 Spicer was named paymaster of the Second Battalion of the Continental troops raised in the state and about the same time was appointed a justice of the peace for Onslow County <sup>[4]</sup>. The returns from the county show that in 1777 both Captain John Spicer and Lieutenant John Spicer, Jr., held commissions. In December 1777 he voted with the majority in favor of confiscating property of persons deemed inimical to the United States. In 1780 he was appointed one of the money inspectors for Onslow County, a move made necessary because of the ease with which the paper money might be counterfeited. On taking his seat in the senate on 26 June 1781, he was referred to as "Colonel John Spicer," yet two days later the journal refers to "Colonel Williams, Mr. Spicer, & General Butler." In 1780 a ship belonging to John Spicer was sent with relief supplies for Americans held prisoner by the British in Charleston, S.C. There the ship was seized despite its letter of truce signed by the British commandant in Charleston.

In his later years in the senate Spicer voted with the majority to issue £100,000 in paper currency, voted against changing from 19 Apr. 1775 to 4 July 1776 the date after which people who opposed the state could not hold state office, voted with the majority against a bill to incorporate the Protestant Episcopal Church of Wilmington <sup>[8]</sup>, and voted with the majority in defeating an amendment to the money bill to change from 50 shillings maximum payment per hundred weight for tobacco for public use to the current price.

In January 1781 Cornelius Harnett <sup>[9]</sup> was trying to escape from the British in Wilmington when he suffered an attack of gout and took refuge in Spicer's Onslow County home. There the British found Harnett and forced him to walk towards Wilmington until he collapsed. He was then thrown across his horse and carried into Wilmington, where he soon died.

The May 1786 census taken by John Spicer, Jr., lists the elder Spicer in a household consisting of two white males between the ages of twenty-one and sixty and one older than sixty, three white females, and twenty-four blacks. The younger Spicer's household consisted of one white male between twenty-one and sixty, three younger than twenty-one, three white females, and a dozen blacks.

Spicer's will was written on 2 Feb. 1789 and probated in April. It mentions his wife Catherine, sons John and Elisha, and daughter Cate.

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## Authors:

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## Origin - location:

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[New Bern](#)<sup>[24]</sup>

[New Hanover County](#)<sup>[25]</sup>

[Wilmington](#)<sup>[26]</sup>

[Onslow County](#)<sup>[27]</sup>

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