

Tatom, Absalom ^[1]

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Tatom, Absalom

by Neil C. Pennywitt, 1996

1742–20 Dec. 1802

Absalom Tatom, military leader, delegate to the [Constitutional Convention of 1788](#) ^[2], and a member of Congress, was born in [Granville County](#) ^[3]. He first appears in North Carolina records as a sergeant in the local [militia](#) ^[4] in 1763. On 1 Sept. 1775, in anticipation of the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[5], he was commissioned first lieutenant in the First North Carolina Continental Regiment; he was promoted to captain on 19 June 1776. The reason for his resignation in the fall, on 19 September, is unknown, but on 15 Aug. 1778 he enlisted in state service as assistant quartermaster and keeper of the arsenal at Hillsborough. Before the end of the year he also became contractor for the town. He resigned both positions when commissioned major of the detachment of North Carolina Light Horse on 12 Feb. 1779, but in July he was named clerk of the [Randolph County](#) ^[6] Court and later in the year was elected to represent that county in the [House of Commons](#) ^[7]. The latter position was invalidated, however, as he was already county clerk. In 1781 he appears as district auditor for Hillsborough.

Why Tatom was there is not clear, but at the [Battle of Elizabethtown](#) ^[8] in August 1781 he was captured by [Tories](#) ^[9] but escaped under cover of darkness. In 1782 the [Continental Congress](#) ^[10] named him one of three commissioners to survey lands to be granted to Continental soldiers in the western territory that later became Tennessee. For a time he was actually in the West, where one of his servants was captured by Indians, yet it was also in 1782 that Tatom served as private secretary to Governor [Thomas Burke](#) ^[11] and as the state [tobacco](#) ^[12] agent. Clearly a busy man and one of many talents, in May 1785 he was elected surveyor of North Carolina by the Continental Congress and soon afterwards was named by the state as a commissioner to sign paper money. In 1788 he was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention as well as the Hillsborough borough representative in the legislature. He served in the next six sessions as well but died shortly before the end of the last one.

Tatom's name does not appear in the 1790 census for North Carolina, but at the time of the 1800 tally of [Orange County](#) ^[13] he was recorded as being over forty-five years of age and owning eight slaves but having no family. Following a brief illness he died in [Raleigh](#) ^[14] during the 1802 legislative session and was buried in the Old City Cemetery.

Available records make no mention of Tatom's family, marital status, or religious affiliation, although it is known that he was a member of the Grand Order of [Masons](#) ^[15], Eagle Lodge No. 19 (now No. 71) at Hillsborough. He served as senior grand warden pro tem of the Grand Lodge on 25 Jan. 1795.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

Note on the history of the Eagle Lodge in Hillsborough: The lodge was originally chartered in 1791 as Lodge #19 in the North Carolina Masonic organization. It soon became inactive. By 1819 it was re-organized and given #71. In 1932 the lodge petitioned for restoration of its original number -- #19 -- which was restored at that time.

References:

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Subjects:

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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Orange County ^[25]

Hillsborough ^[26]

Randolph County ^[27]

From:

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[28]

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