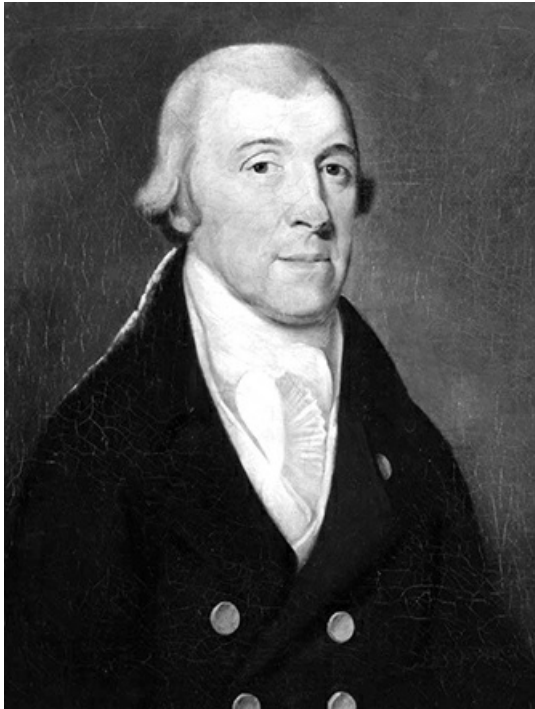


Willcox (or Wilcox), John ^[1]

Willcox (or Wilcox), John

by George W. Troxler, 1996; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, January 2023

21 June 1728–1793



A black and white photograph of a portrait of John Willcox by an unknown artist. Image from the North Carolina Museum of History.

^[2]John Willcox (or Wilcox), [Chatham County](#) ^[3] iron manufacturer, was born in Concord, Chester County, Pa., the first son of Thomas and Elizabeth Cole Willcox. About 1759 he moved to Cross Creek where he operated a store and [gristmill](#) ^[4]. Later he lived in Deep River, [Orange County](#) ^[5]. An active supporter of the [Regulator movement](#) ^[6], he was one of those excluded from Governor [William Tryon](#) ^[7]'s pardon on 31 May 1771. Later that year Chatham County was created out of [Orange](#) ^[5], and Willcox was elected to represent the new county in the Provincial Assembly.

By 1771 Willcox had built an [ironworks](#) ^[8] on Deep River where he discovered deposits of both iron ore and coal. Iron was in short supply during the Revolution, and Willcox operated one of the two ironworks in the province. His bloomery and forge supplied the area with good bar iron from which rough wrought iron utensils could be forged. In April 1776 the Fourth [Provincial Congress](#) ^[9] sent a committee either to hire Willcox's ironworks or "purchase and repair" the Speedwell Works in [Guilford County](#) ^[10]. Following the committee's recommendation, the Revolutionary government advanced Willcox the needed funds to complete a furnace under construction on Tick Creek about ten miles from his bloomery and forge. They also allowed him to hire enslaved laborers that had been confiscated as [Loyalist](#) ^[11] property. Willcox and his brother-in-law and partner, William England, were to supply molten metal to founders employed by the state.

After various delays in getting the furnace into operation Willcox sold the ironworks to the state in February 1777 for £5,000. The state-appointed manager was no more successful than Willcox had been in keeping the furnace going. In April 1778 after months of haggling, the legislature restored Willcox's property and paid him £1,000 for damages he had sustained from public interference with his ironworks. When Willcox resumed management of the furnace, he turned out at least a few pots and possibly as much as five tons of pig iron. In June 1780 a [fresher](#) ^[12] destroyed the furnace. When his accounts were settled in 1783, Willcox received £386.18s.6d. specie in payment "for sundries furnished for the use of the public."

In 1771 he married Rebecca Butler, of Philadelphia, by whom he had eight children. Willcox kept the [Roman Catholic](#) ^[13] faith of his parents, and the records of St. Joseph's Church in Philadelphia indicate that at least three of their children were taken to Philadelphia for baptism. Willcox died in [Richmond County](#) ^[14].

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[Public officials](#) [22]

Authors:

[Troxler, George W.](#) [23]

Origin - location:

[Chatham County](#) [24]

[Richmond County](#) [25]

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1 January 1996 | Troxler, George W.

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