

## **Wynns, Benjamin** <sup>[1]</sup>

## **Wynns, Benjamin**

by Thomas R. J. Newbern, 1996; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, January 2023

### **1710s–1788**

See also: Wynns, Thomas <sup>[2]</sup> (from the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*)

Benjamin Wynns, state assemblyman, militia colonel, and planter, was born in Chowan Precinct, the son of Captain George and Rose Bush Wynns. George Wynns was a large landowner on the Chowan River and Wiccacon Creek area of present Hertford County <sup>[3]</sup>, as well as a justice of the peace, an assemblyman, and a captain in the county militia. The Wynnses descended from the inhabitants of the ancient royal residence of Gwydir Castle of northern Wales who lived in and around Canterbury, England, for three or more centuries before migrating to Virginia. Members of the family figured prominently in political and social circles in London as well as colonial Virginia as early as 1609.

Benjamin Wynns was mentioned in public life as early as 1740, when he was listed as freeholder <sup>[4]</sup> and juryman in Bertie County <sup>[5]</sup>. A long and distinguished career as a public servant began in 1744 with his appointment as deputy clerk of court and justice of the peace in Bertie. From 1744 to 1746 he was deputy surveyor <sup>[6]</sup> under the surveyor general of the Crown. His depositions taken on behalf of the Crown were used in an attempt to prove charges of corruption against Governor Gabriel Johnston <sup>[7]</sup> for violating land grant laws. In 1748 Wynns was the clerk of court in nearby Edgecombe County <sup>[8]</sup>, but he returned to Bertie in that capacity from 1756 to 1759.

Benjamin Wynns represented Bertie County in the colonial Assembly <sup>[9]</sup> from 1754 to 1760. In 1759 he sponsored a bill in the Assembly that founded Hertford County from surrounding Bertie, Chowan <sup>[10]</sup>, and Northampton <sup>[11]</sup> counties. From 1762 to 1768 he represented this new county in the Assembly. He also served as the first clerk of court for Hertford County from 1760 to 1764. Since 1754 Wynns had tried to have a town incorporated on his plantation at Barfield Landing along the Chowan River. He competed for this honor with his neighbor, Alexander Cotton. Cotton's death in 1766 opened the way for Wynns, and in 1768 the Assembly passed a bill incorporating the town on 150 acres donated by Wynns and named Winton in his honor. This was the only incorporated town in the county for twenty years and was a public landing and area trade center. Wynns again represented Hertford County in the Assembly during the 1771–72 and 1773–74 terms.

At the general muster of the Hertford County regiment of militia on 28 May 1772, Benjamin Wynns was listed as the regiment's colonel. This appointment by the Crown was reaffirmed by the Provincial Congress <sup>[12]</sup> at Hillsborough on 9 Sept. 1775. In late 1775 and early 1776 he led these troops as a part of the colonial force attempting to expel Lord Dunmore from Norfolk. They participated in the Battle of Great Bridge and the subsequent siege of Norfolk. When Wynns led his troops home to Hertford County in early 1776, he "was met with great rejoicing among the people and was rewarded with the unbounded praises of the Americans along his route."

After 1776 Wynns seems to have retired from public life to have more time for his growing interests along the Chowan River. He had been trained as a carpenter during his youth and had inherited land from his father along the Chowan River. In 1745 he acquired a gristmill near his holdings at Barfields. The Hertford County tax list of 1779 showed him owning over 2,500 acres and enslaving 23 people. His land's location along the river gave him access to foreign markets for his plantation wares and enabled him to engage in shipbuilding <sup>[13]</sup> as well. The brig *Fair American* was built on his Barfields plantation in 1780 by two of Wynns's sons and their Edenton partners but was captured by the British on its maiden voyage. Relatives in England and the West Indies aided Wynns and his sons in carrying on a busy trade from his Chowan River plantation.

Benjamin Wynns married twice. His first wife was Catherine Baker, the daughter of Henry III and Catherine Booth Baker, sister of General Laurence Baker <sup>[14]</sup>. They had three children—George, William, and Benjamin, Jr.—all of whom represented Hertford County in the Assembly and served in the Revolutionary War. Benjamin Wynns's second wife was Margaret Pugh, the daughter of Colonel Francis and Ferebee Savage Pugh and the stepdaughter of Thomas Barker <sup>[15]</sup> of Edenton. They also had three children: Mary, Margaret, and Thomas <sup>[2]</sup>, who became a U.S. congressman and a general in the state militia. Benjamin Wynns died in Murfreesboro, where he was buried along with his son Thomas.

### **References:**

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John Hill Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina* (1851). [18]

Benjamin B. Winborne, *The Colonial and State History of Hertford County, North Carolina* (1906). [19]

#### **Additional Resources:**

The Wynns Family Papers, 1824-1927. State Archives of North Carolina. [http://ead.archives.ncdcr.gov/MfP\\_91\\_Wynns\\_Family\\_Papers.html](http://ead.archives.ncdcr.gov/MfP_91_Wynns_Family_Papers.html) [20] (accessed February 18, 2014).

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