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North Carolina Biographical Gazetteer

The following sketches outline the political careers of the principal North Carolina leaders who participated in the process of ratifying the U.S. Constitution. When known, their political positions are indicated (1) on the Constitution in 1787–1789; and (2) in national politics after 1789.

BLOODWORTH, TIMOTHY (1736–1814) Antifederalist/Republican

Born, New Hanover County, N.C. Not formally educated but practiced a variety of artisanal occupations before entering politics. Known for providing ordnance to the Continental Army, advocating harsh treatment for Loyalists, and being politically radical. Representative (New Hanover) state House of Commons, 1778–81, 1783–85, 1787, 1791–92, 1794–95 (speaker), 1801; and state Senate, 1788–89, N.C. delegate, Confederation Congress, 1786–87. A vigorous Antifederalist, Bloodworth was one of the state's leading opponents of ratification. Delegate (New Hanover), Hillsborough Convention (1788) and Fayetteville Convention (1789), where he opposed ratifying the Constitution. Unsuccessful candidate for U.S. Senate, 1789. Member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1790–91. Lieutenant colonel of the Wilmington, N.C., militia, 1792–93, but resigned in protest over President Washington's proclamation of neutrality. Member, U.S. Senate, 1795–1801. Collector, Port of Wilmington, 1801–7, apparently forced to resign. He died still owing a large sum of money to the United States.

BLOUNT, JOHN GRAY (1752–1833) Federalist/Federalist

Born, Bertie County, N.C. Surveyor, merchant, and land speculator. Established, with his brothers, a large mercantile enterprise and vast landholding. Never held a national office, but was a person of great political influence in North Carolina. Representative (Beaufort) state House of Commons, 1782–89, 1793–94 and state Senate, 1794–96; Appointed to Annapolis Convention but did not attend, 1786. Delegate (Beaufort), Hillsborough Convention (1788) and Fayetteville Convention (1789), where he supported ratifying the Constitution.

CALDWELL, DAVID (1725–1824) Antifederalist/Republican

Born, Lancaster, Pa. Presbyterian minister and educator. Graduate, College of New Jersey (Princeton University), 1761. Moved to Guilford County, N.C., as a missionary in 1765. Served as minister to several congregations in the Greensboro area until his death. Established his "log college" in 1767, which offered a classical education to leading young men of the South. Represented Guilford County in the Fifth Provincial Congress, 1776. Supported the Patriot cause

during the Revolutionary War and had his property burned by British in retribution. Delegate (Guilford), Hillsborough Convention (1788), where he opposed ratification.

DAVIE, WILLIAM R. (1756–1820) Federalist/Federalist

Born, County Cumberland, England. Lawyer and planter. Emigrated to America with his family in 1763. Graduate, College of New Jersey (Princeton University), 1776. Revolutionary War officer. Wounded in the Battle of Stono Ferry (1779) and read law under Judge Spruce Macay while convalescing. Lieutenant, N.C. militia, 1779; commissioned commissary-general under Nathanael Greene, 1781. N.C. delegate, Constitutional Convention (1787). Delegate (Town of Halifax), Hillsborough Convention (1788) and Fayetteville Convention (1789), where he supported ratification. Partnered with James Iredell in getting the debates of the Hillsborough Convention published. Representative (Northampton) state House of Commons, 1784–85; representative (town of Halifax) state House of Commons, 1786–87, 1789, 1791–92, 1793–96, 1798 (left mid-term when elected governor). Influential in founding the University of North Carolina, 1789. N.C. governor, 1798–99. U.S. diplomatic envoy to France, 1799–1800.

IREDELL, JAMES (1751–1799) Federalist/Federalist

Born, Lewes, England. Lawyer and jurist. Emigrated to Edenton, N.C., 1768, where he read law with Samuel Johnston. Appointed deputy king's attorney, 1773. Although sympathetic to colonists' demands, he wrote several influential political tracts supporting a compromise with Britain. He sided with the revolutionaries after independence was officially declared and was disinherited by wealthy English relatives. Judge, N.C. Superior Court, 1777–78; N.C. attorney general, 1779–82. Elected N.C. Council of State, 1788 (president). Revised and published code of state laws, 1788–89. Champion of ratification in North Carolina. Published responses to George Mason's objections to the Constitution in newspapers and as a pamphlet under the pseudonym "Marcus." Represented the town of Edenton in the Hillsborough Convention (1788), where he supported ratification. Partnered with William R. Davie in publishing the debates of the Hillsborough Convention. Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court, 1790–99.

JOHNSTON, SAMUEL (1733–1816) Federalist/Federalist

Born, Dundee, Scotland. Lawyer and planter. In 1735, Johnston's family emigrated to North Carolina, where his paternal uncle was the royal governor. Johnston attended Yale, but did not graduate, finishing his education by reading law in Edenton, N.C. Appointed clerk of the court of Edenton, 1755. Represented Chowan or Edenton in colonial assemblies, 1759–75. Johnston was sympathetic to the cause of independence, but opposed radicalism. During the North Carolina War of Regulation (1765–71), he supported the "Bloody Riot Act" which sought the death penalty for rioters who refused to surrender themselves or answer a court summons. Appointed, N.C. Committee of Correspondence, 1773. He was a member of the first four Provincial Congresses, 1774–76, serving as president of the third and fourth. Lost bid for reelection in the Provincial Congress in 1776. Represented Chowan, N.C. Senate, 1779, 1783–84. He was a N.C. delegate to the Continental Congress, 1780 and in 1781 was chosen as president of the Confederation Congress but declined to serve because of ill-health. N.C. governor, 1787–89. While governor, he served as president of both the Hillsborough Convention (1788) and the Fayetteville

Convention (1789), where he supported ratification. Member, U.S. Senate, 1789–1793. Judge, Superior Court, 1800–1803. He was James Iredell's brother-in-law.

JONES, WILLIE (1741–1801) Antifederalist

Born in Surry County, Va. Planter and businessman. His father, the land agent of Earl Granville, owned extensive properties. Educated at Eton in England. Returned to North Carolina estate (The Groves) in Halifax. Captain in the colonial forces that put down the N.C. Regulators, 1771. Represented Northampton in the N.C. Colonial Assembly, 1766–68, 1770–71. Elected from Halifax for all five Provincial Congresses, 1774–76. Member, Provincial Council, 1776. President, N.C. Council of Safety, 1776 (governor ex officio of independent North Carolina). Representative (Halifax) state House of Commons, 1777–80. N.C. delegate, Continental Congress, 1780. Represented Halifax in the state Senate, 1782–84, 1788. Elected to the state Council of State, 1781, 1787 (as president). Elected as N.C. delegate to the Constitutional Convention (1787), but declined to serve. Represented Halifax County at the Hillsborough Convention (1788) where he led Antifederalists in refusing to ratify the Constitution without previous amendments. Declined to campaign for election to the Fayetteville Convention (1789) and retired from politics. Helped to establish the University of North Carolina and served as a trustee. Helped to found and to locate the state capital in Raleigh.

MACLAINE, ARCHIBALD (1728–1790) Federalist/Federalist

Born, Banbridge, Ireland, to Scottish parents. Lawyer. Immigrated to Philadelphia in 1750 and to Wilmington, N.C., in 1752. After failing as a merchant, read law and became an attorney. Identified with the Patriot cause during the Stamp Act crisis and served on the Committee of Safety for the Wilmington District, 1774–76. Represented the town of Wilmington and Brunswick County in the Provincial Congress, 1775, 1776 respectively. Represented Brunswick, in the state Senate, 1777, 1780–82. Nominated to the Superior Court, 1779, but declined to be a candidate. Representative (Wilmington) state House of Commons, 1783–87. A staunch Federalist, he wrote in favor of ratifying the Constitution under the pseudonym of "Publicola." He represented Wilmington at the Hillsborough Convention (1788) where he supported ratification. In 1782 he was seriously injured by a mob at the Bladen County courthouse while representing a Tory.

PERSON, THOMAS (1733–1800) Antifederalist/Republican

Born, Surry County, Va. Surveyor, planter, and philanthropist. Began his career as a surveyor for Earl Granville, amassing substantial land holdings. Rose to prominence during the North Carolina War of Regulation (1765–71) as a secret adviser to the Regulators, for which he was arrested in 1770 but released for lack of evidence. Was delegate to all five Provincial Congresses, 1774–77, and served on the committee that wrote the Halifax Resolves (1776), the first formal call for independence. Member, Council of Safety, 1776. Served as brigadier general in the Hillsborough militia during the Revolutionary War. Loaned the state \$50,000 in 1781, which was never repaid. Represented Granville County nearly continuously in the Colonial Assembly and state House of Commons, 1769–97. Represented Granville County in state Senate, 1787, 1791–92. Represented Granville County at the Hillsborough Convention (1788) and the Fayetteville Convention (1789)

where he led Antifederalists in opposing ratification. Federalists burned him in effigy for alleged derogatory remarks made about George Washington. Unsuccessful candidate for U.S. Senate, 1789. Sponsored legislation chartering the University of North Carolina, 1789. Served on the university's board of trustees, 1789–95; Person Hall is named in his honor.

SPAIGHT, RICHARD DOBBS (1758–1802) Federalist/Republican

Born, New Bern, N.C. Planter. Great-great nephew of N.C. colonial Governor Arthur Dobbs. Orphaned as a child, he was sent to Great Britain for his education. Graduate, University of Glasgow. Returned to North Carolina, 1778. Served in the N.C. militia at the Battle of Camden (1780). Representative (New Bern) state House of Commons, 1779–83 and 1792. N.C. delegate, Confederation Congress, 1783–85. Representative (Craven County) state House of Commons, 1785–87 (speaker, 1785). N.C. delegate to the Constitutional Convention (1787). Represented Craven County at the Hillsborough Convention (1788). Ill-health forced Spaight to retire from public life, 1788–92. Returned briefly to the House of Commons, 1792, but resigned his seat to serve as N.C. governor, 1792–95. Presidential elector, 1793. Member U.S. House of Representatives, 1798–1801. In the 1790s, his views aligned with the Jeffersonian Republicans. Represented Craven in the state Senate, 1801, and was reelected to serve in 1802. As a leader of the New Bern Republicans developed a feud with John Stanly, the leader of the New Bern Federalists. Stanly killed Spaight in a duel in September 1802 on the fourth exchange of fire.

SPENCER, SAMUEL (1734–1793) Antifederalist/Republican

Born, East Haddam, Conn. Jurist and planter. Graduate, College of New Jersey (Princeton University), 1759. Appointed clerk of court for Anson County, 1765. Represented Anson in the colonial Assembly, 1766–68. Represented Anson in the Provincial Congress, 1775–76. Member, Provincial Council, 1775–76. Justice, N.C. Superior Court of Law and Equity, 1777–93. As justice, ruled on many important cases, including *Bayard v. Singleton* (26 November 1787) in which the court declared unconstitutional an act of the legislature. Represented Anson County in both the Hillsborough Convention (1788) and the Fayetteville Convention (1789), where he twice voted against ratification. Spencer is reported to have died from an infection that resulted from being attacked by a wild turkey.

WILLIAMSON, HUGH (1735–1819) Federalist/Federalist

Born, Chester County, Pa. Surgeon, scientist, and scholar. Earned his B.A. (1757) and M.A. (1760) degrees from the College of Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania). He earned his M.D. from Utrecht University (1772). Returned to Pa. in 1768 to begin a private medical practice and engage in scientific pursuits. Witnessed the Boston Tea Party in 1773. In 1775 published *The Plea of the Colonies* warning of civil war if the British did not change their policies. In 1777 relocated to Edenton, N.C., to enter the mercantile trade and reestablish his medical practice. As surgeon general of N.C. during the Revolutionary War, he implemented sanitary practices that enhanced the health of soldiers. Treated both American and British wounded after the Battle of Camden (1780). Representative (Edenton and Chowan County) state House of Commons, 1782 and 1785, respectively. N.C. delegate, Confederation Congress, 1782–85, 1788. In early 1787 he published a pamphlet, *Letters from Sylvius*, in which he criticized paper money and

imported luxuries, and advocated import duties to encourage American manufactures. N.C. delegate, Constitutional Convention, 1787, where he served on five committees. He supported many key compromises that made ratification possible, including on the issue of slavery. In 1788 he was appointed one of two North Carolina commissioners to settle the state's accounts with Congress. Member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1790–93, after which he retired from public life to New York City. He wrote the two-volume *History of North Carolina* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1812) during his retirement.

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