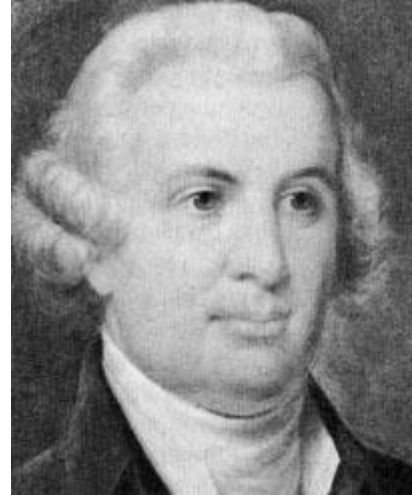


# Redeeming the Fathers of America

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## William Hooper, North Carolina (1742-1790)

As I began my research of this founder, I had no idea how influential he was, nor the range and character of patriotic servants that aligned with him to secure our nation's independence. I also underestimated the role of North Carolina in the American Revolution. The citizens of North Carolina, like other colonies faced challenges with oppressive taxation. This was exacerbated by corrupt sheriffs, county officials, and many of their royal governors. Even so, her people rose from the ashes of oppressive tyranny and corruption to be a shining light that other colonies could imitate. My hope is that your heart will be stirred to research the volumes of papers, journals, and periodicals available and to discover just how important the men and women of North Carolina were in America's pursuit of freedom.



Let us start by exploring the lineage of William Hooper, signer of the Declaration of Independence. His family tree can be traced to 1275 Dorsetshire, England and their family's name comes from the Saxon word hopper, meaning "dancer." Their lineage was an ancient and honorable one in English and Scotch annals and whose tenants were of the Priory of Montacute, including family members that were priests of that foundation.<sup>1</sup>

John Roy Hooper broke away from the pope and the Catholic Church and was burned at the stake by Queen Mary. With their lives in danger, the family moved to Scotland where our subject's father, Rev. William Hooper was born in Ednam Parish, Roxburghshire, Scotland. He was a graduate from Edinburgh University in 1723 and would serve as a minister of the

Congregational and Presbyterian faiths. He immigrated to Boston, Massachusetts where he became the first pastor of the West Congregational Church in June 1737.<sup>2</sup>

In 1739, Rev. William Bonnie Hooper married Mary Dennie, daughter of John Dennie, a respected Boston merchant. On June 28, 1742 the subject of this writing, William Hooper was born in Boston, the eldest of five children. His siblings were John, George, Mary, and Thomas. It was Rev. Hooper's desire that young William become a minister. To this end his father dedicated much time to his son's early education, and at age seven William was enrolled in John Lovell's Boston Latin School. Mr. Lovell and Rev. Hooper were known to be strong Loyalists. When William was sixteen, he entered Harvard University.

It was common for some religions of that period to be puritanical in nature. This was apparently something that Rev. William Hooper determined he had outgrown. In late 1746, he left the Congregational body where he had served for nine years and joined the more liberal Episcopal Church. We might think this is a turn for the worse, but liberalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century equated to what conservatism is today. Liberals were often considered patriots. This is not to say that Rev. Hooper had abandoned his loyalist philosophy in those days prior to the revolution. He traveled to England where he was ordained into the Episcopalian faith, then returned to Boston in 1747, where he became rector of Trinity Church and served until his death.<sup>3</sup>

William graduated from Harvard in 1760 with a degree of Bachelor of Arts, and in 1763 with a Masters of Arts. By 1760, William had already achieved success in public speaking, even exceeding that of his father. His studies had shaped him for his destiny, but it was not the ministry as his father had hoped, but that of the profession of law. Upon receiving his father's consent, William joined the law office of James Otis, Massachusetts' most brilliant lawyer. In contrast to Lovell, Otis was a solid patriot. In February, 1761 Otis delivered one of the greatest speeches of modern times—against the abominable tyranny of the Writs of Assistance.<sup>2</sup> When William heard this impassioned speech, he immediately committed his life to the cause of independence.

In those days the city of Boston was energized with an air of freedom, which captivated young Hooper's attention. As noted earlier, William's father was a loyalist and it appears that young William was the only family member that embraced the patriot cause.<sup>4</sup> Very little is written about young William's conviction and how they may have affected his family relationship.

In 1764 William moved to Wilmington, North Carolina where he became a circuit court attorney for Cape Fear. Here he applied his education and manners to gain the good graces of attorneys, merchants, and farmers. William enjoyed the ceremony and merry-making which his occupation provided, and he gained many clients through these parties. Even so, William was not one to ignore the rigors his profession required.

In 1767, William Hooper married Anne Clark and that same year relocated to North Carolina. Anne was the daughter of Barbara Murray and Thomas Clark, Sr. who was a wealthy settler and late sheriff of New Hanover County. Anne bore three children; William (1768), Elizabeth (1770), and Thomas (1772). Anne's brother Thomas Clark, Jr. would become a colonel and brigadier general in the Continental Army.

William's court duties often required him to travel from town to town during the day and he would join in night time entertainment to advance his influence. He quickly moved up the ranks and was appointed deputy attorney of the Salisbury District in 1769 and he was appointed deputy Attorney General of North Carolina in 1770.

In September 1770, a group of 150 Regulators protesting high taxation and civil abuses placed on them by those called the "courthouse ring," marched into the Hillsborough District Superior Court and drove Judge Richard Henderson from the room. They whipped attorneys, John Williams and William Hooper and beat and dragged attorney Edmund Fanning through the streets and burned his home. The history of the Regulator War is well documented and available on several North Carolina web sites.<sup>4, 5</sup>

Mr. Hooper sought the assistance of Governor Tryon to stop the Regulator riotous opposition. The colonial militia was called to quell the radical and violent behavior of the Regulators at the Battle of Alamanace on May 16, 1771. Among them were William Hooper and fellow patriot and signer of the Constitution, William Blount. About 2,000 untrained Regulators were confronted by just over 1,000 trained militia. Two hours later the battle ended with many Regulators killed, wounded, and captured. The militia recorded 9 men dead and 61 wounded. Herman Husband, the leader of the Regulators and instigator of the violence escaped and fled to Pennsylvania.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of Hooper's actions in seeking aide from Governor Tryon, some accused him of being a Loyalist. But protecting one's life and livelihood against the mob hardly justifies the claim. I will address another false accusation at a later point.

In 1773 Hooper was elected to the North Carolina General Assembly and served in four sessions from January 1773-April 1775. In 1774 he was elected to the Provincial Congress and served from August 1774-December 1776. North Carolina sent Mr. Hooper as a delegate to the Continental Congress. This greatly annoyed Governor Martin who spitefully dissolved the Assembly, hoping that that Burgesses would be replaced with those less obstructive to his policies. But it was too late for Congress had already elected Caswell, Hooper, and Hewes as delegates to Philadelphia. These three successfully prepared a resolution to the King against the further importation of African slaves. Mr. Hooper continued to serve in 1775, 1776 Congresses, but resigned in 1777 to take care of his family.<sup>4</sup>

James Otis, his mentor since 1761 had great influence in shaping William Hooper's life of service, but his foundation in liberty would be greatly broadened as a result of direct relationships with, John Harvey, Richard Caswell, Allen Jones, Cornelius Harnett, Samuel Adams, Samuel Johnston John Ashe, and Francis Nash. Not all these men were Whigs like Hooper, but the wisdom and experience gained through their interactions enhanced his ability to represent the people of Wilmington and Brunswick.

Some of these colleagues were quicker with their words than with the pen. Hooper who was considered a great orator took this opportunity to write legislation coming out of two committees, one addressed the prevention of the willful and malicious killing of slaves.

To better serve the Assembly's intent of gaining colonial independence it passed its most far-reaching act in 1774, which established a nine-person committee to review and authenticate all acts and resolutions of the British Parliament. John Harvey, Robert Howe, Cornelius Harnett, and William Hooper were the first four names on this committee. James Iredell was also found among these great patriots. These men met to develop strategies whereby they would reject British acts of retaliation and set the course for a Constitutional Congress.

A partial list of committees that William Hooper esq. served on while in the Continental Congress include; reporting statutes affecting trade, review of North Carolina and Massachusetts Bay colony sundry papers, settle disputes between Connecticut and Pennsylvania, superintend the treasury, inquire into accusations of military officer misconduct, determine just compensation for military officer service, plan to establish a military academy, and examine journals to list any unfinished matters.<sup>2</sup>

There was a fire-storm of enthusiasm and expectation as William Hooper was found at the forefront of county level meetings, calling for a convention. Within a month's time seventy members were elected and assembled in Newburn to defiantly oppose the royal government. The taste of freedom was in the air and they were not about to let it be extinguished!

Britain passed stupid and senseless acts of oppression against the colonies; the Molasses Act, the Stamp Acts, Port Bills, etc., which drove the colonists to economic desperation. The British Parliament's failure of leadership ignited the flame that would not go out. The foundations of defiance against taxation without representation remain a bedrock for America to this day.

As I set out to study the life and times of North Carolina I recognized an unexpected and rising excitement in my spirit. There were increasing degrees of anticipation with each advancing step toward freedom. There was much depth and richness due to the diligent efforts of so many North Carolinian patriots. Their actions culminated in the call of not one, but five Provincial Congresses during the turbulent years leading up to their statehood. I found this so inspiring.

These were not merely the exploits of rebels, but men who were cool and calculating, men who did not rely solely on their strength of will, but on the providence of God. They were fully aware of the weight of going against the world's number one military might, yet were committed to laying down their lives to deliver freedom as a legacy to their children's children.

On May 20, 1775 the people of Mecklenburg declared themselves independent and on April 12, 1776 the Provincial Congress instructed their delegates to concur this in a National Declaration. These events in North Carolina history are noteworthy, and spread throughout the other colonies, uniting them to the cause of freedom, but this did not infer that it was the official Declaration of Independence. When North Carolina met in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson used these events to accuse *North Carolina of sending a rank Tory to sign the Declaration of Independence*. He was referring to William Hooper.<sup>4,5</sup>

As to this Jefferson's accusation, I was shocked to learn how poignant and vicious his attack was. He not only attempted to discredit and demean Mr. Hooper, but the people of Mecklenburg and North Carolina in electing Hooper. I have always held Jefferson as one of our greatest presidents and I am not suggesting he was a villain. But after reading through letters of that day it appears that Jefferson may have yielded a bit to the power he warned so fiercely against. My goal here is not to discredit the greatness that Thomas Jefferson did for this nation, but to declare that William Hooper was falsely accused in this. The record shows that Hooper aligned himself with some of the greatest Whigs of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and he debated in courts and in congresses as a true American patriot. There was no evidence provided and therefore no justification for the accusation.

Only an in-depth study of that will reveal the extent of Jefferson's words or actions taken against leaders like Hooper, Washington, Hewes, and Caswell. I challenge the reader to examine a range of documents published prior to 1890, including *A Defence of the Revolutionary History of the State of North Carolina* by JO. Seawell Jones.

As to the major contentions that North Carolina faced they included the governor, authorities in England, and English merchants who wanted to conduct business with the colonies without being subject to the laws of the colony. It was a clear example of British greed. This is why North Carolina stands out in the fight for independence and why founders like William Hooper fought so hard as one of her representatives in the Continental Congress.

William Hooper and his family lived in their home on the Cape Fear River. Over the years they had suffered much at the hands of the Regulators, but now the British were becoming increasingly hostile. One British captain sailed up the river and shelled his home, driving his family inland to their plantation. They later moved back to Wilmington only to leave a second time and make their permanent residence in Hillsborough.

In 1786 Mr. Hooper experienced increasing difficulty with his health, the months and years of fighting for the independence of the colonies had taking its toll. He slowly resigned from his duties and sought the relaxation and comfort of his home. In life he carried himself well even though his stature was average. His manners were polite and his oratory distinguished among men. As an attorney he was well respected and honorable. In 1790, William Hooper, husband, father, lawyer, patriotic, and servant of the people, passed away at the early age of 48.<sup>6</sup>

During the Continental Congress, John Adams wrote; *Galloway, Duane, and Johnson were sensible and learned, but cold speakers, Lee, Patrick Henry and Hooper are the orators, etc.* This is a glowing tribute paid to the ability and memory of a great patriot.<sup>7</sup>

## **This has been Redeeming the Fathers of America**

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