

Cary, Thomas ^[1]

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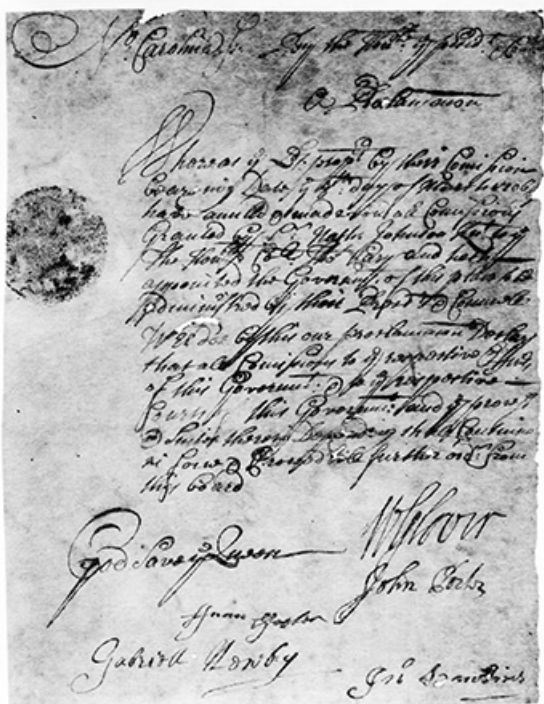
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Cary, Thomas

by William S. Price, Jr., 1979

d. ca. 1720

See also: [Thomas Cary](#) ^[2] (Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History), [Cary Rebellion](#) ^[3]



Proclamation regarding Thomas Cary from 1708.

Image courtesy the State Archives of North Carolina.

Thomas Cary, deputy governor and council president, was born in England and related by marriage to the Quaker proprietor [John Archdale](#) ^[4]. Cary apparently emigrated to South Carolina late in the seventeenth century. He established himself as a merchant and, by 1702, owned several sailing vessels. In June 1702 he was one of two men posting the two thousand pound bond required by the [Lords Proprietors](#) ^[5] for [Sir Nathaniel Johnson](#) ^[6] to become governor of Carolina. At the same time, Cary posted a similar bond for the new governor of the Bahamas. Clearly, he was a man of some wealth.

Despite his relationship to Archdale, Cary may have been [Anglican](#) ^[7]. Sir Nathaniel Johnson, who made Cary his deputy governor in March 1705, was a "high Church" man himself, and it is hard to believe that he would have sent a dissenter into religiously troubled North Carolina, no matter what their personal relationship was. Upon his arrival in the [Albemarle](#) ^[8] region in March, Cary allied himself with the powerful Anglican faction there. He enforced the statute requiring oaths of allegiance in order to hold public office and thereby excluded numerous [Quakers](#) ^[9] from the November 1705 meeting of the assembly.

The [dissenters](#) ^[10] retaliated by sending [John Porter](#) ^[11] to England to seek Cary's removal by the proprietors. Armed with instructions suspending Johnson's authority over North Carolina and removing Cary from office, Porter returned and effected the election of [William Glover](#) ^[12] as president of the council, and thereby new chief executive, in October 1707. Cary had been inspecting his holdings in South Carolina while this event transpired, and upon his return in November he began to seek ways to regain his office. By the summer of 1708, Glover had broken with the dissenters. Seeing his opportunity, Cary began courting the favor of Porter, the dissenters, and Bath County residents, who were dissatisfied with a political framework that favored the Albemarle region over any other.

At the assembly meeting in October 1708, two groups of councilors attended, one pledged to Glover and the other to Cary. Through the machinations of Porter and Edward Mosely ^[13], Cary's faction triumphed, and Glover fled to Virginia. The assembly then proceeded to nullify all test oaths. As council president, Cary replaced some local officials with dissenters, liberalized the land grant ^[14] policy, and lowered the quitrent ^[15] rate in Bath County.

Early in 1711, Cary was displaced by Edward Hyde ^[16] as governor and withdrew to his home in Bath County. When Hyde called on the March assembly to enact new legislation against dissenters and urged the arrest of Cary and John Porter, Cary rallied his supporters, and the rebellion ^[3] that took his name began. In addition to the Anglican-dissenter confrontation, there was a definite sectional aspect to the struggle. Of those Cary lieutenants who fought in the rebellion from start to finish, every one was a Bath County man.

On 27 May 1711, Hyde and a 150-man force marched on the Pamlico region to seize Cary. Armed with five artillery pieces and about forty men, Cary successfully withstood Hyde's assault; and on 1 June, Hyde returned northward. Heartened by this development, Cary outfitted a brigantine and sailed for Albemarle Sound in mid-June to overthrow the government. After a series of indecisive engagements, Governor Alexander Spotswood ^[17] of Virginia sent a military force into North Carolina early in July to support Hyde. By 17 July, Cary's brigantine had been seized and he and his officers forced to flee into Virginia. There, in late July, Spotswood found Cary and his lieutenants hiding with the Kecoughtan Indians on the James River. He sent them to England to stand trial before the Lords Proprietors.

In September, Cary and four of his allies arrived in England. They appeared before the proprietors on 20 Nov. 1711. Hearings continued intermittently for nearly a year, after which the proprietors released the rebels. No representative of Hyde's government ever appeared in London to press charges, the colony being engulfed in the Tuscarora War ^[18]. Cary returned to North Carolina in the spring of 1713, and as late as September some Albemarle leaders feared that he would lead another uprising. The proprietors had ordered that no local charges could be brought against him until Francis Nicholson had investigated the rebellion, and he never did so.

Cary apparently spent his few remaining years in Bath County in relative tranquility. He died between late 1716 and 1722: he was involved in a court action on the former date, and his son and heir, John, was in court on the latter.

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"N_84_2_21." Proclamation re. Thomas Cary, 1708; from CCR.192, Colonial Court Records, Miscellaneous papers, 1677-1775, House of Burgesses and Gov and Council folder, NC Council Minutes, 1708. State Archives of North Carolina.

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