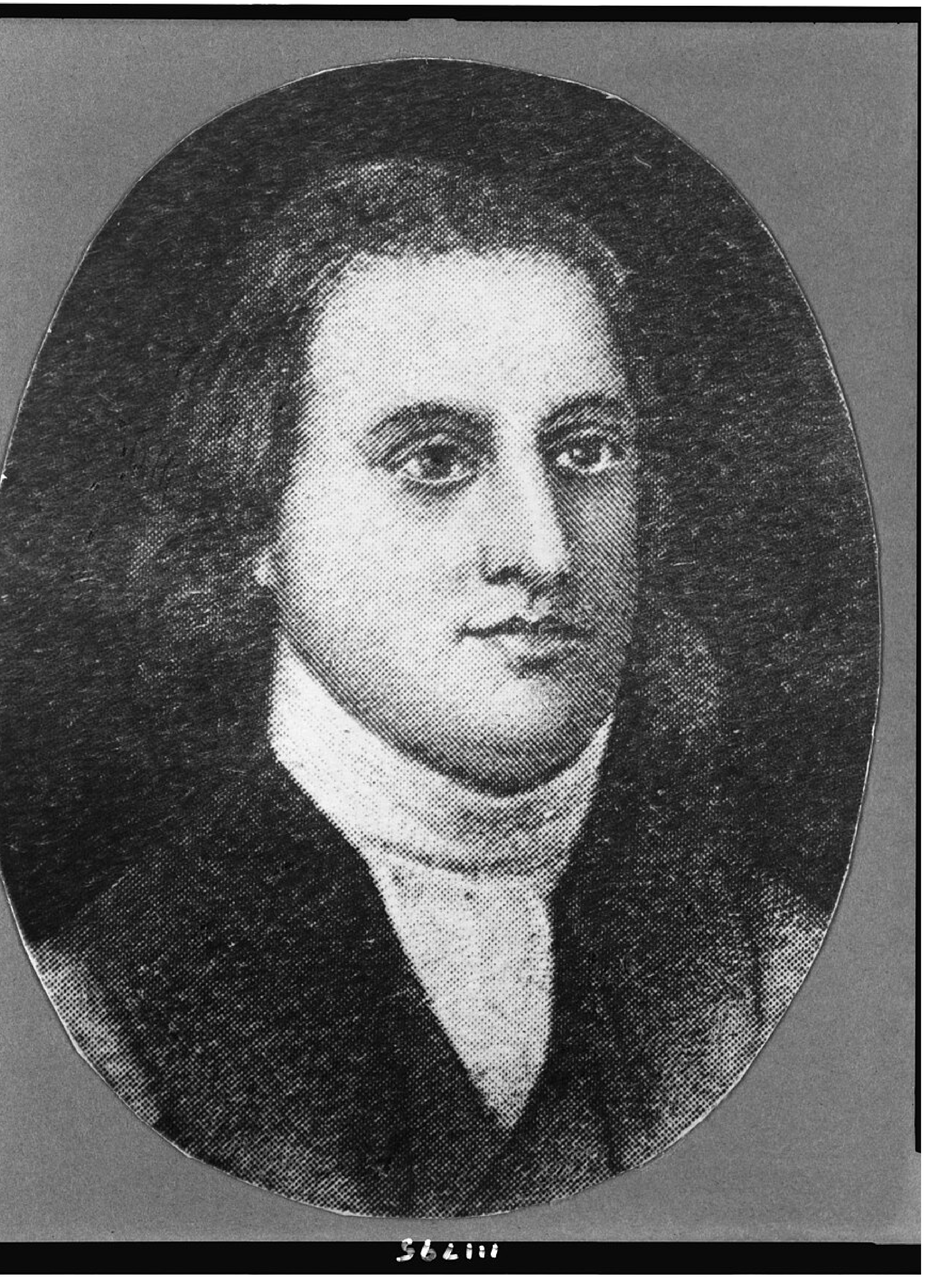
Georgia's Revolutionary Voice

A Conversation with Button Gwinnett



Thought to be by Jeremiah Theus (Charleston, South Carolina/Swiss, 1719-1774) - https://www.thegatemuseum.org/img/exhibition/gwinnett.jpg, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=145174350

Gwinnett



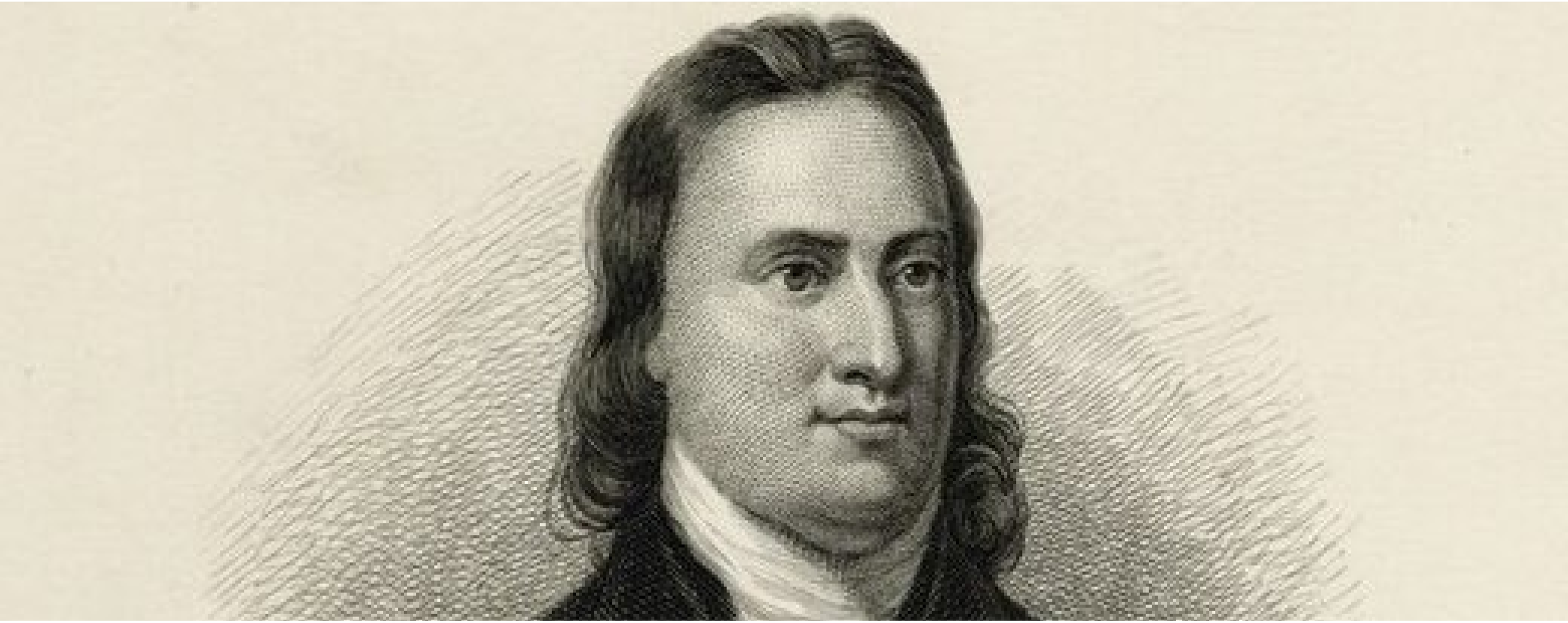
A Founder Without a Face

"He was about six feet in height, and his person was properly proportioned, lofty, and commanding."

– Hugh McCall, Early Georgia Historian

By Miscellaneous Items in High Demand, PPOC, Library of Congress - Library of Congress Catalog: https://lccn.loc.gov/94509791Image download: https://cdn.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3c10000/3c11000/3c11700/3c11795v.jpgOriginal url: https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94509791/, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=68163040

Gwinnett



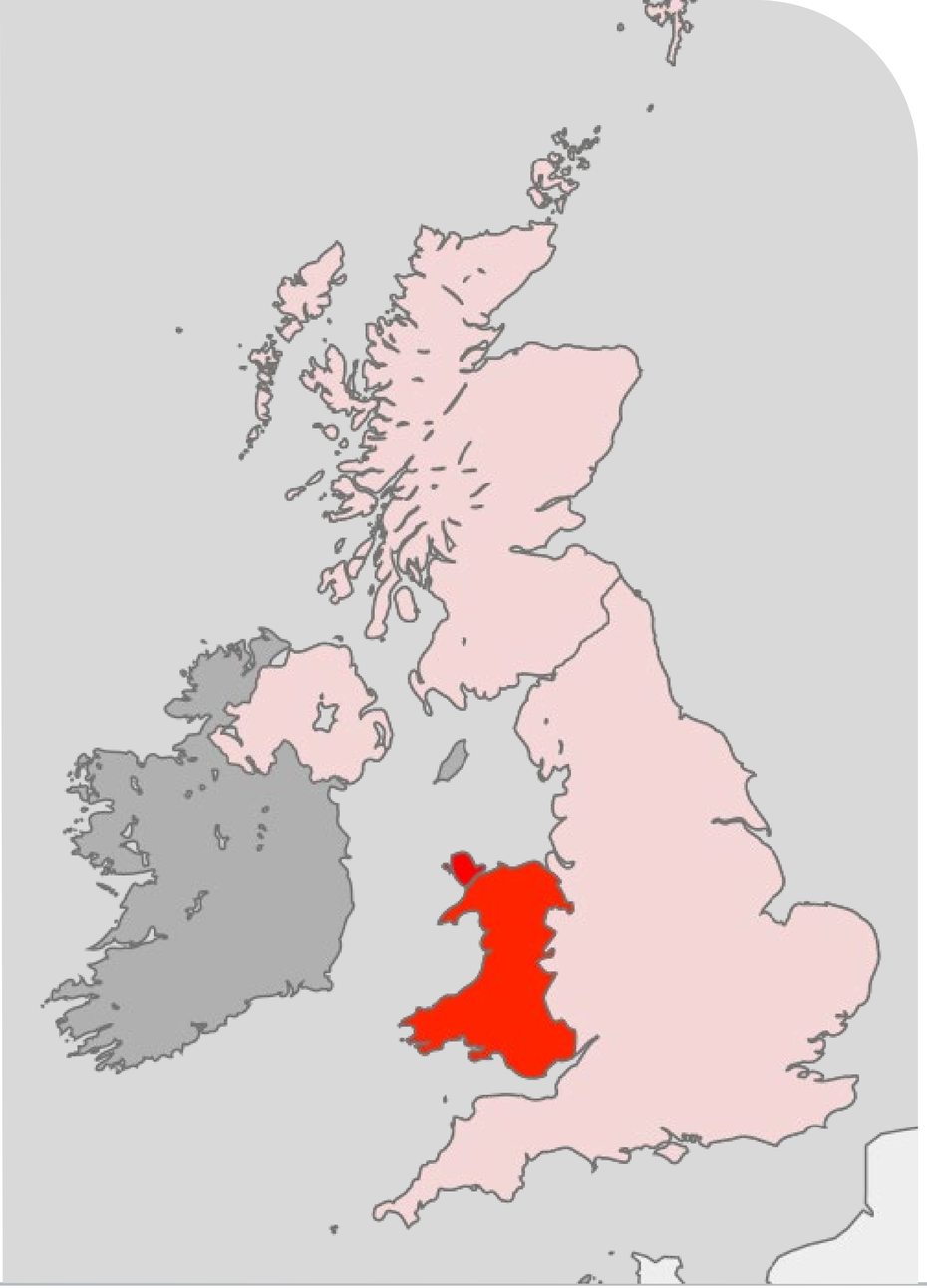
By Scan by NYPL- https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-28ad-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99, Public Domain,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=46421187



By Artist: Nathaniel Hone the Elder (Irish, 1718-1784) - http://www.artnet.com/artists/nathaniel-hone-the-elder/portrait-of-button-gwinnett-signer-of-the-geX3kn9qqdZwb9RI5yW0CA2, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=92458292

Gwinnett


IN CONGRESS,
The unanimous Declaration



Gwinnett's Birth

- Born around March/April of 1735
- Colony of Georgia established in 1733
- Born in Gloucestershire, England
  - Village of Down Hatherley
    - Current population of 420

By Kanchelskis - Own work based on: British Isles United Kingdom.svg, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3212792

Gwinnett


St Mary & Corpus Christi



Gwinnett's Parents

- Father – Samuel
  - Served as Vicar of Saint Mary and Corpus Christie (for 48 years)
- Mother – Anne Emes
- Parents of Seven Children
- Anne died in 1767
- Samuel died in 1775

By Philip Halling, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13788461

Early Childhood in Gloucester

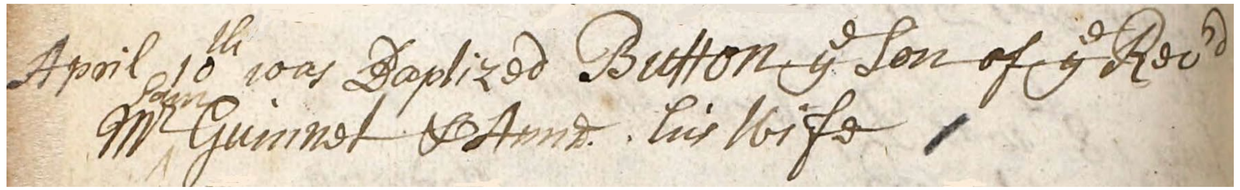
- Samual also served as Vicar at Saint Nicholas Church – Gloucester for 40 years
- Button most likely attended school (College School at Gloucester Cathedral)
- Family rented property in the city, including 10 College Green



By P L Chadwick, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11615564

Gwinnett

Gwinnett's Baptism



Photograph of entry in St Catherine's Register, Gloucester, displayed by courtesy of Gloucestershire Archives. Ref: PMF 154/7

- Baptized on April 10, 1735, in Saint Catherine's Parish (Gloucester)
- Named after his mother's cousin (Barbara Button)
- Barbara was Button's Godmother and left him 100 pounds upon her death

Gwinnett



Gwinnett's Youth

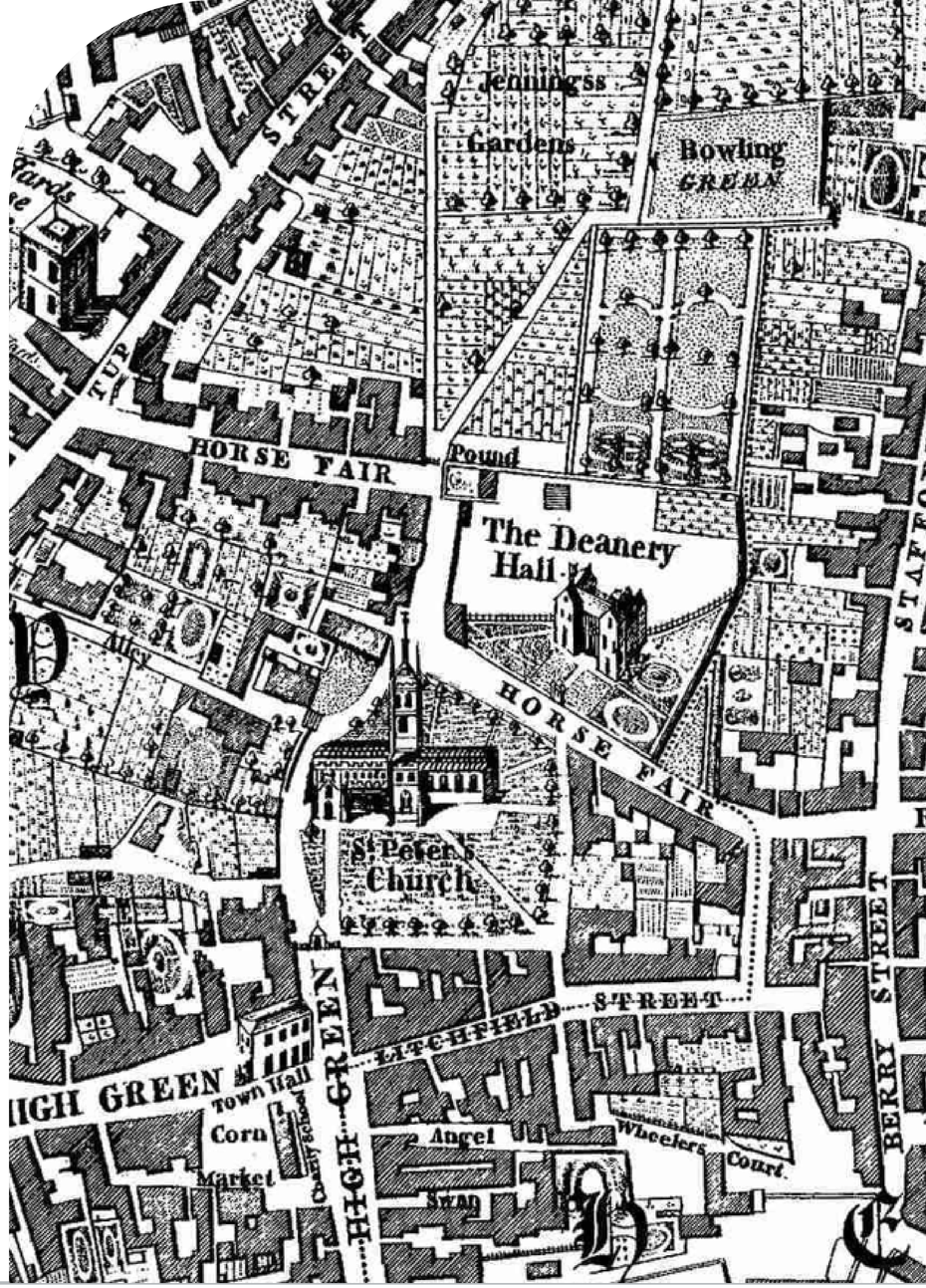
- Sent to Bristol to apprentice or work for his Uncle William/George at age 14/15
- Uncle William was a grocer while Uncle George was a "corn factor"

By William James Müller - Art UK, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=164514472

Gwinnett

Gwinnett's Move to Wolverhampton

- Was apprenticed to John Weston Smith in 1754 – at age of 19
- Ironmonger – sells items for the house/garden – "hardware merchant"
- Meets Ann Bourne (the daughter of local grocer – Aaron Bourne)

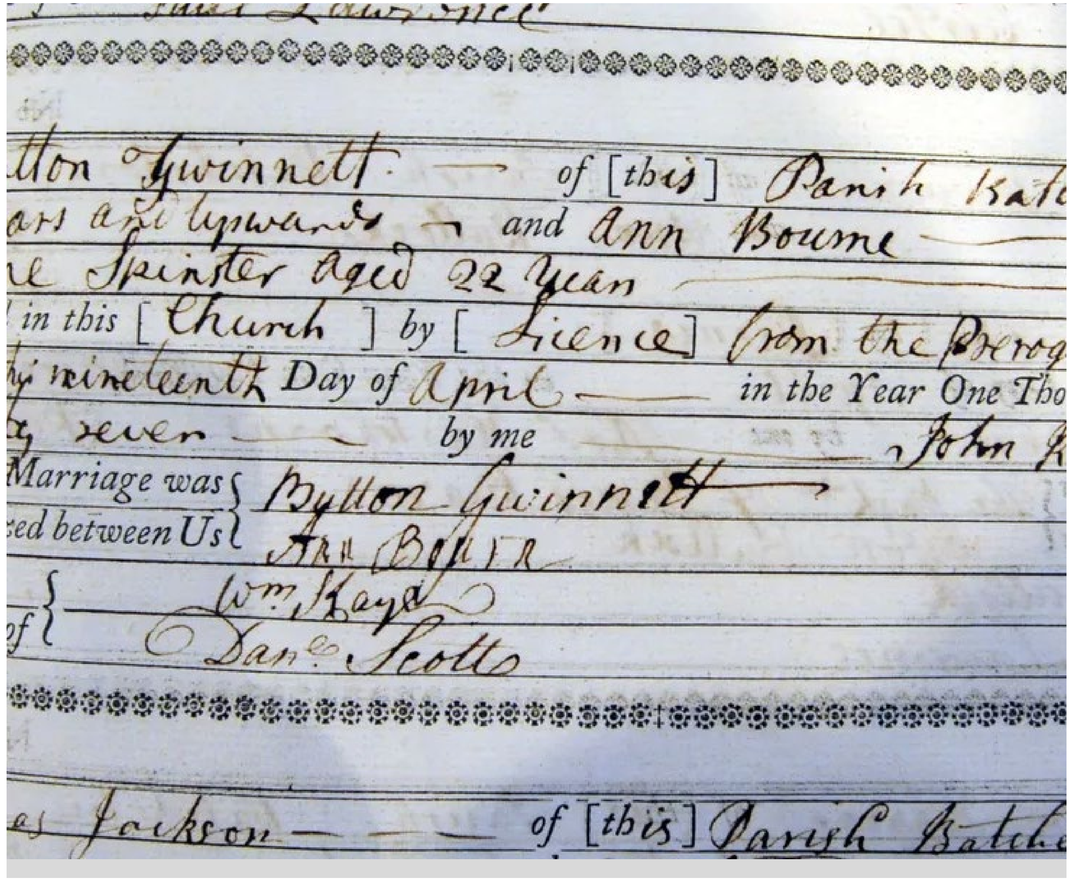


Taylor, Isaac. A Plan of the Township of Wolverhampton [map] 1750 Wolverhampton City Archives

Gwinnett

Gwinnett's Marriage

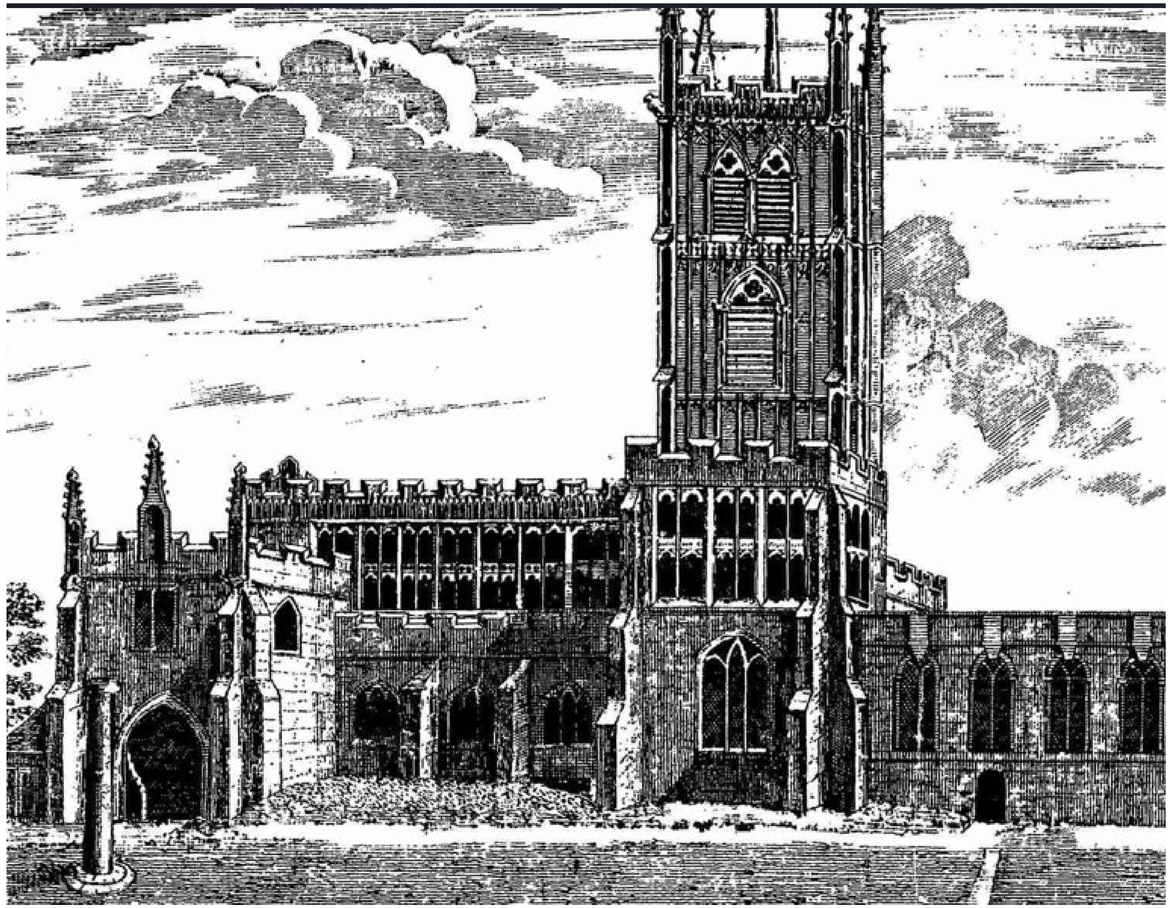
"Button Gwinnett of this parish – Batchelor aged 22 years and upwards and Ann Bourne of the same – Spinster aged 22 years were married in the Church by License from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury this nineteenth day of April in the year one thousand seven hundred and fifty-seven by me – John Kaye, Clerk."



Registry of the Church of Saint Peter – Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, England (page 97, number 385)

Gwinnett

Saint Peter’s Collegiate Church



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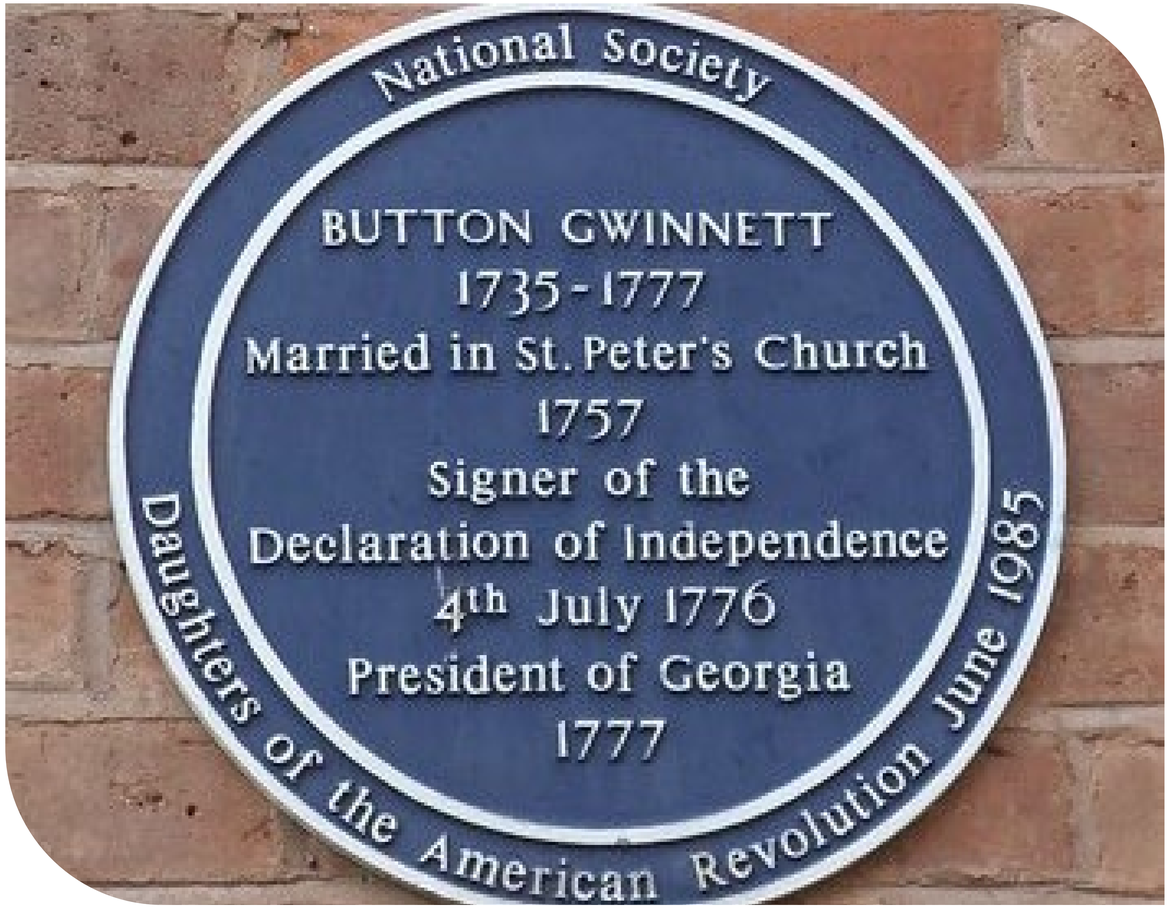


By Gwinnett Plaque by Gordon Griffiths, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=125970577

Gwinnett

Gwinnett's Growing Family



COUNTRY NEWS.

Gloceſter, May 13. Laſt Saturday Corn ſunk Price very conſiderably here, and we have great Hopes of its Sinking every Market. We have the ſame good News likewiſe from the neighbouring Towns.

A few Days ago Mr. Button Gwinnett, Son of the Rev. Mr. Gwinnett, Rector of St. Nicholas in this City, was married to Miſs Bourn, Daughter of Mr. Aaron Bourn, an eminent Grocer of Wolverhampton, in Staffordſhire, a moſt agreeable Lady, with a Fortune of 10,000l.

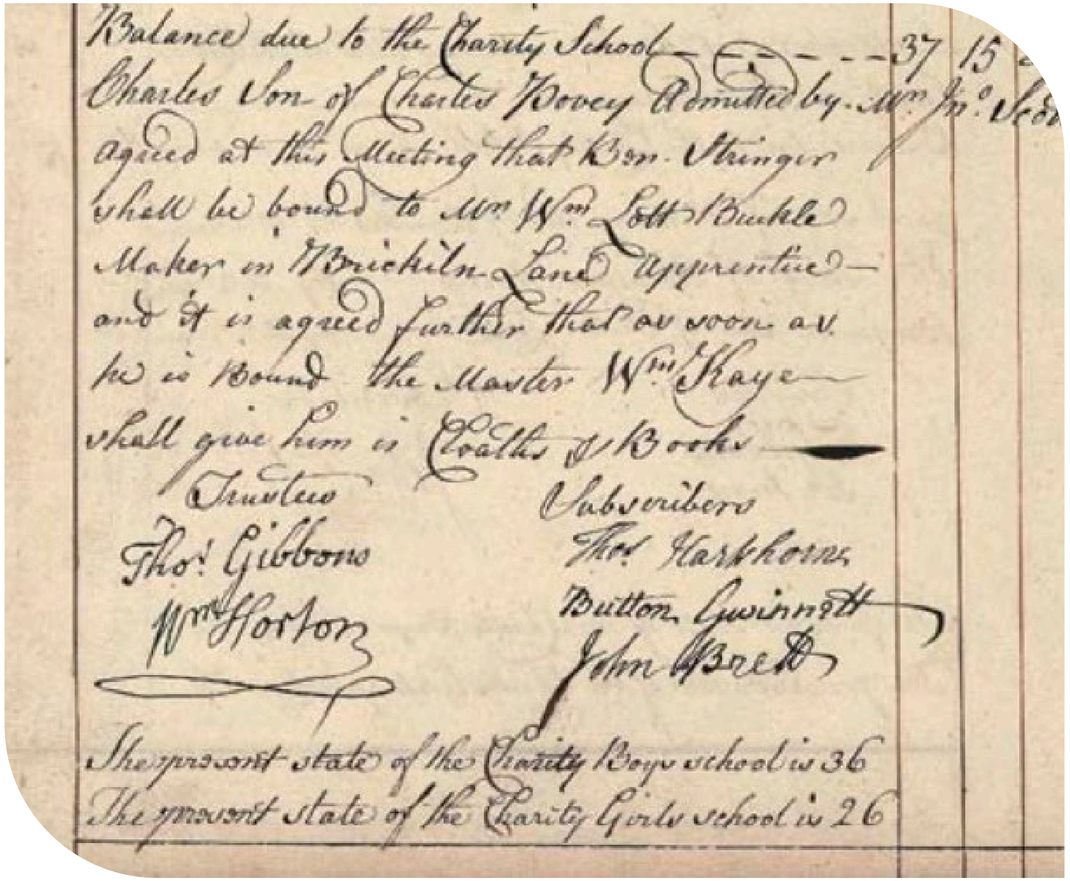
Wedding Announcement from *Oxford Journal*, Oxfordshire May 14, 1757

- Amelia – Born in February 1758 and died in March 1762
- Ann – Born in May 1759 and died in December 1759
- Elizabeth Ann – Born in January 1762 – Lives to maturity and referenced in Gwinnett's 1777 will – marries Peter Belin of Charleston but dies about 1780.

Gwinnett

Gwinnett – Merchant, Man About Town

- Becomes a partner in his father-in-law's business
- Sets up in Bristol as a trader in goods with the colonies (possibly sugar, tea, coffee, chocolate, tobacco)
- Owned a ship (Nancy) – 60 tons and a crew of eight men


Balance due to the Charity School - - - - - 37 15
Charles Son of Charles Povey Admitted by Mr Jno Scott
agreed at this Meeting that Ben Stringer
shall be bound to Mr Wm Lott Buckle
Maker in Brickiln Lane Apprentice
and it is agreed further that as soon as
he is Bound the Master Wm Kaye
shall give him is Cloaths & Books
Trustees
Thos Gibbons
Wm Horton
Subscribers
Thos Harthorne
Button Gwinnett
John Brett
The present state of the Charity Boys school is 36
The present state of the Charity Girls school is 26

(n.d.) .American Battlefield Trust. Retrieved February 18, 2026 from Button Gwinnett | The American Revolution Experience

Gwinnett



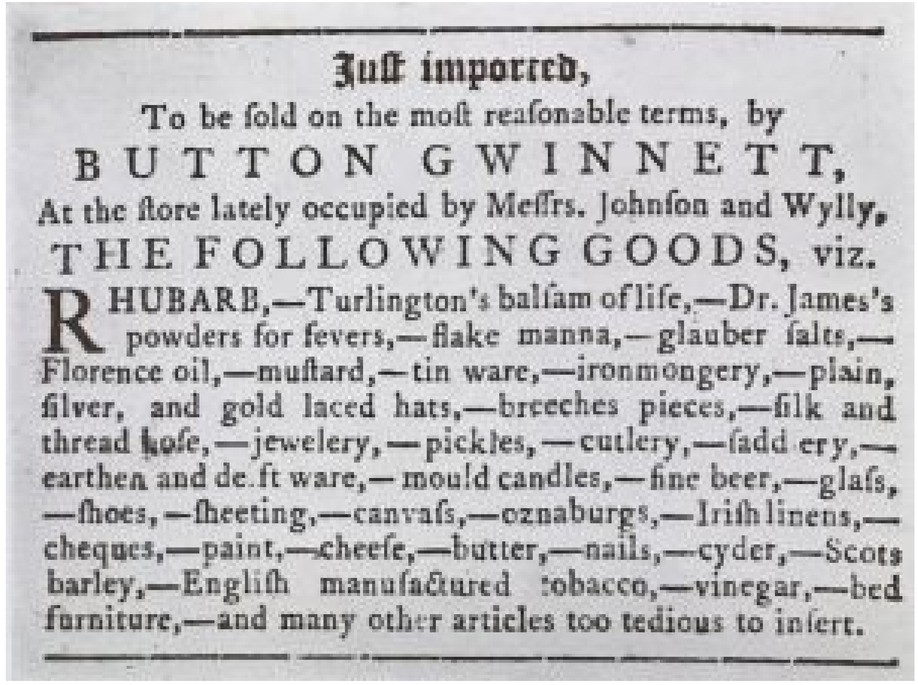
Financial Troubles

- Economic downturn in 1760s
- Gwinnett forced into liquidation
- Nancy is supposedly seized by the Sheriff of Bristol
- Begins to consider a move to the American colonies
- Last known signature in England – December 1761

By Lawson Dunn - nmm.ac.uk, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11888056

Gwinnett

A New Start in Georgia



Juſt imported,

To be ſold on the moſt reaſonable terms, by

BUTTON GWINNETT,

At the ſtore lately occupied by Meſſrs. Johnſon and Wylly,

THE FOLLOWING GOODS, viz.

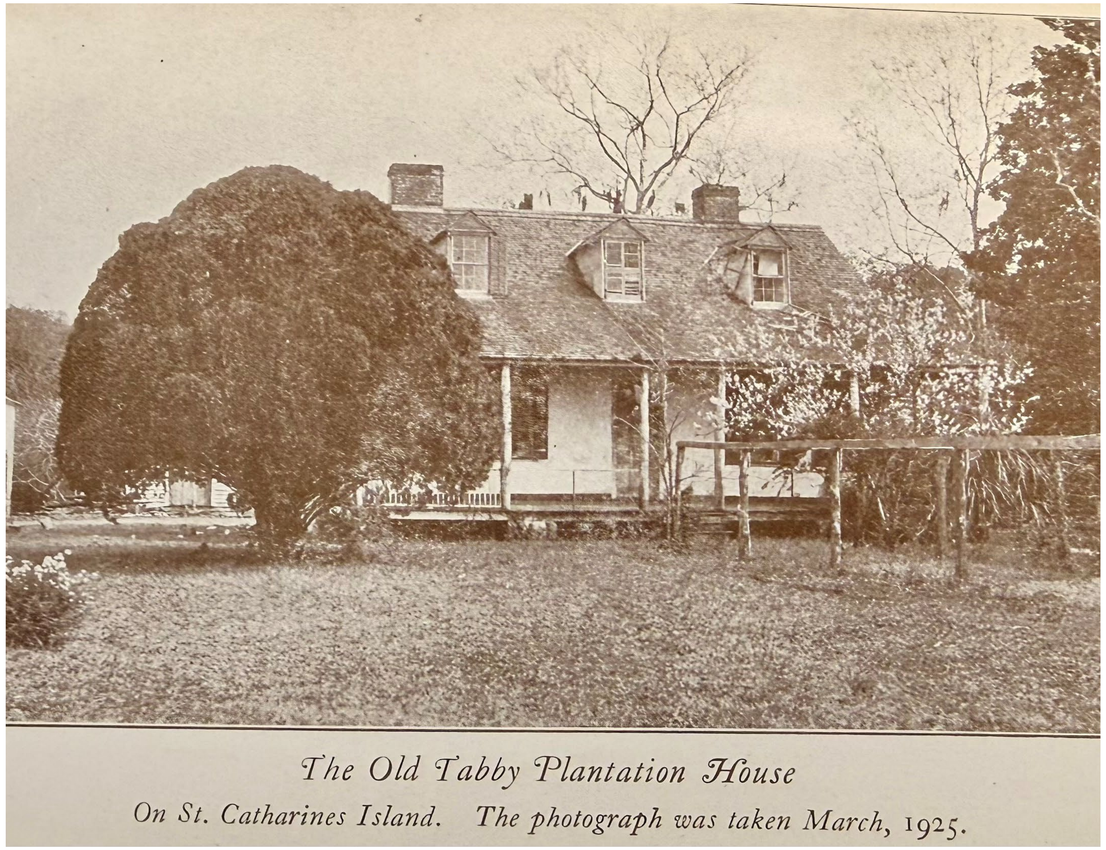
RHUBARB,—Turlington's balſam of life,—Dr. James's powders for fevers,—ſlake manna,—glauber ſalts,—Florence oil,—muſtard,—tin ware,—ironmongery,—plain, ſilver, and gold laced hats,—breeches pieces,—ſilk and thread hoſe,—jewelery,—pickles,—cutlery,—ſaddlery,—earthen and deſt ware,—mould candles,—fine beer,—glaſs,—ſhoes,—ſheeting,—canvaſs,—oznaburgs,—Iriſh linens,—cheques,—paint,—cheeſe,—butter,—nails,—cyder,—Scots barley,—Engliſh manufactured tobacco,—vinegar,—bed furniture,—and many other articles too tedious to inſert.

- Leaves England (Anne and Elizabeth remain)
- May have potentially lived in Charleston
- Active business participant in Savannah by 1765
- First known signature in America – March 5, 1765
- Sets up shop as a merchant
- Abruptly switches careers and becomes a planter in 1765

The Georgia Gazette (Savannah, Ga.) 1763-1776, September 12, 1765, Image 2 « Georgia Historic Newspapers

Saint Catherine's Island

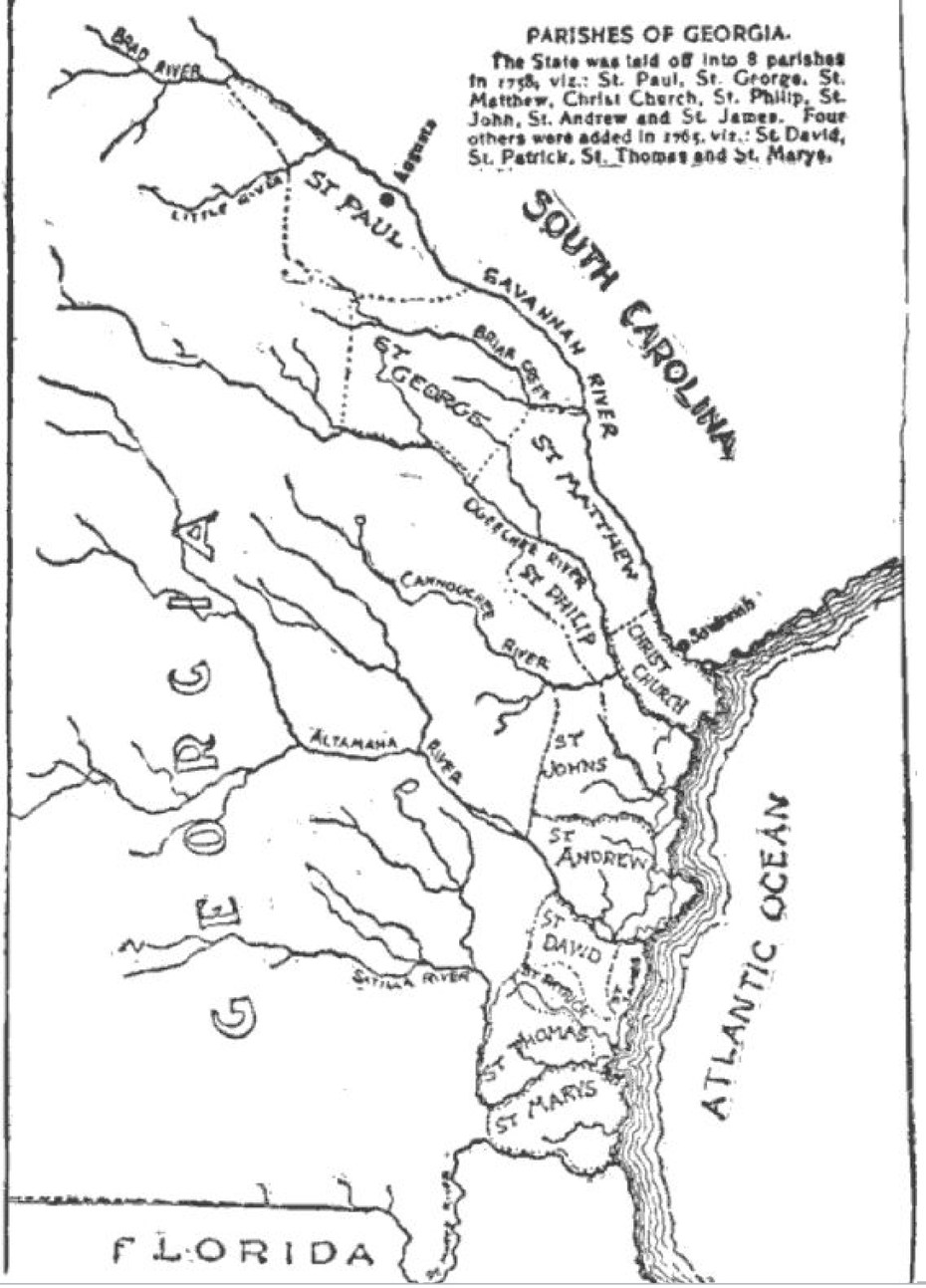
- Purchases a 500-year lease from Reverend Thomas Bosomworth (3rd husband of Mary Musgrove)
- Eventually borrows and purchases more land (Barber Islands)
- Occupies a home on Saint Catherine's Island
- Ann visits in 1767, returns to England after one year, comes back to Georgia in 1771



The Old Tabby Plantation House
On St. Catharines Island. The photograph was taken March, 1925.

Unknown. *[The Old Tabby Plantation House]* 1926. Photograph. In Charles Francis Jenkins, *Button Gwinnett, Signer of the Declaration of Independence* [following page 30]. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1926.

Gwinnett



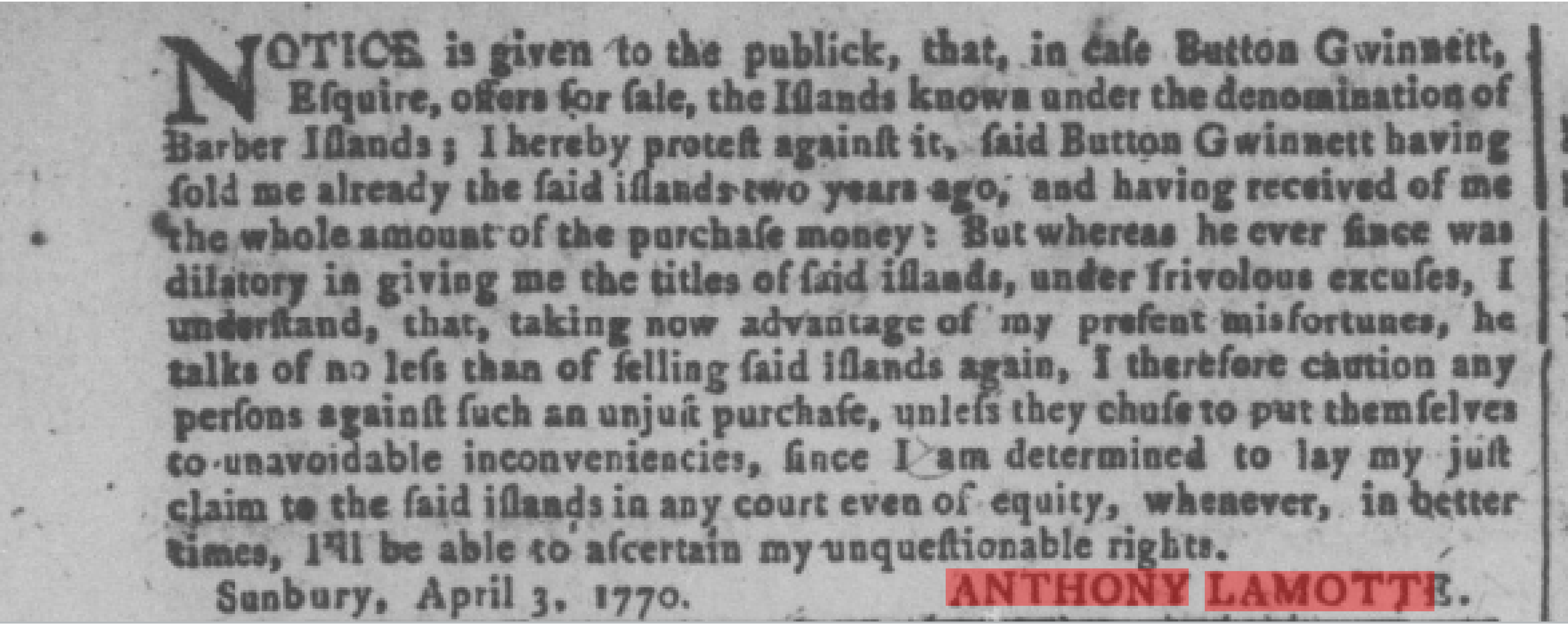
Public Office

- Befriends Dr. Lyman Hall (neighbor in Sunbury)
- 1768 – Appointed as one of the King's Justices of the Peace for the Georgia Colony
- 1769 – Elected to Georgia's Colonial Legislature (St. John's Parish)

The image appears written by George Gillman Smith. The author provided the following caption to accompany the image: "This excellent map was originally prepared under the direction of the University Publishing Co., who published Evans's History, and was transferred from their book to the pages of the Constitution, which has kindly furnished it to me." - https://books.google.com/books?id=3TEUY4QlCbcC The Story of Georgia and the Georgia People, 1732 to 1860, p. 52, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=116814999

Gwinnett

Another Round of Financial Troubles



NOTICE is given to the publick, that, in caſe Button Gwinnett, Eſquire, offers for ſale, the Iſlands known under the denomination of Barber Iſlands; I hereby proteſt againſt it, ſaid Button Gwinnett having ſold me already the ſaid iſlands two years ago, and having received of me the whole amount of the purchaſe money: But whereas he ever ſince was dilatory in giving me the titles of ſaid iſlands, under frivolous excuſes, I underſtand, that, taking now advantage of my preſent misfortunes, he talks of no leſs than of ſelling ſaid iſlands again, I therefore caution any perſons againſt ſuch an unjuſt purchaſe, unleſs they chuſe to put themſelves to unavoidable inconveniencies, ſince I am determined to lay my juſt claim to the ſaid iſlands in any court even of equity, whenever, in better times, I ſhall be able to aſcertain my unqueſtionable rights.

Sunbury, April 3. 1770. ANTHONY LAMOTTE.

The Georgia gazette. (Savannah, Ga.) 1763-1776, April 04, 1770, Image 2 « Georgia Historic Newspapers

Gwinnett

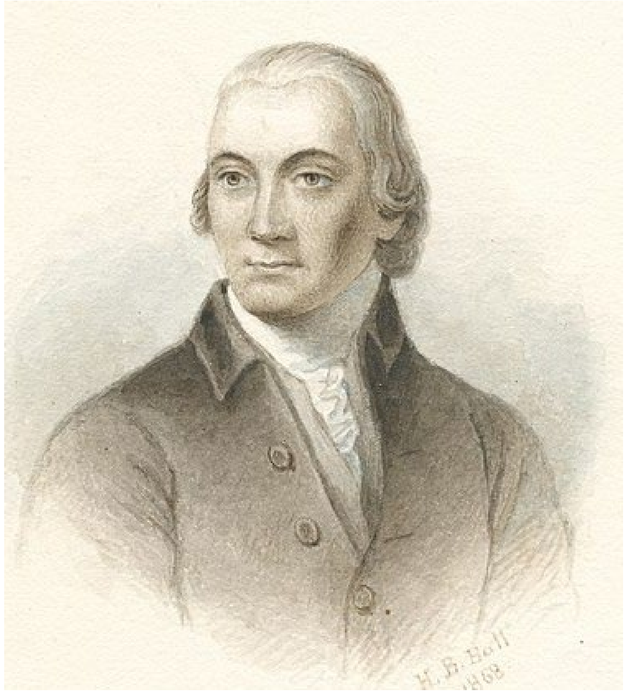


McIntosh – The Nemesis

- Gwinnett elected to lead Georgia's Continental Battalion
- Withdraws in compromise and becomes delegate to Second Continental Congress
- Lachlan McIntosh becomes leader of the Georgia Militia

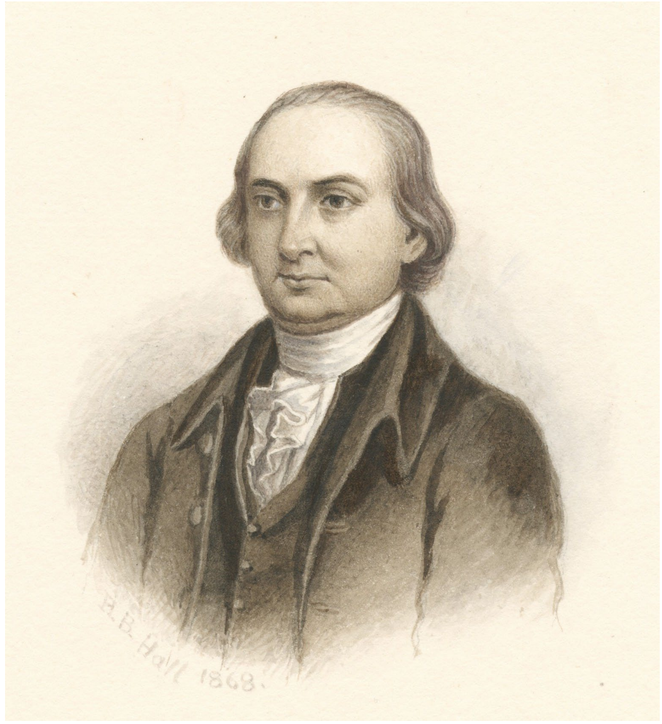
Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1752501

Georgia's Other Signers



Dr. Lyman Hall

By Scan by NYPL - https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-2a9e-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=46457150



George Walton

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Gwinnett

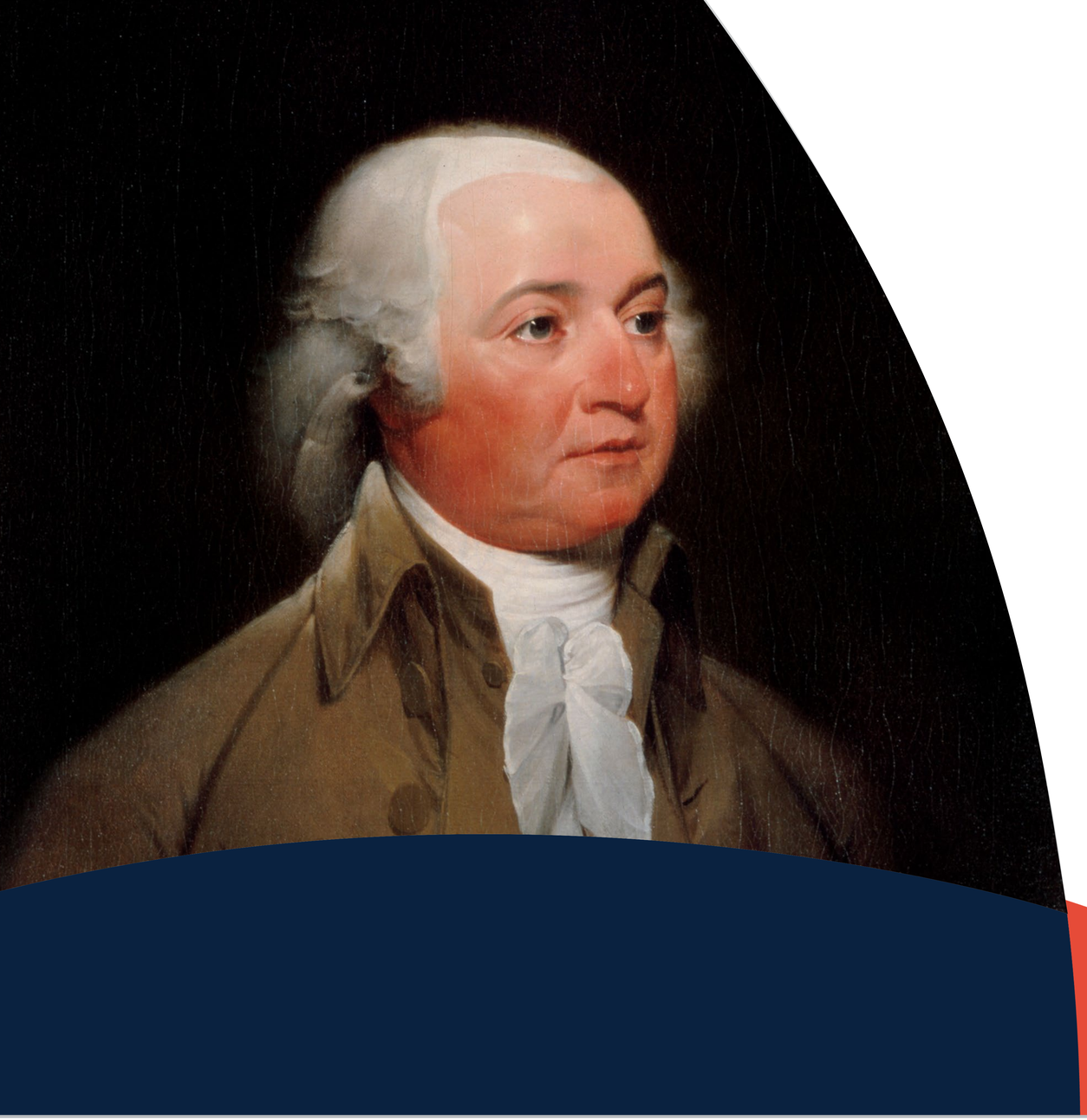
Delegate Instructions

"We therefore, Gentlemen, shall rely upon your Patriotism, Abilities, Firmness, and Integrity, to propose, join, and concur in all such measures as you shall think calculated for the common good, and to oppose such as you shall appear destructive."

Archibald Bulloch, Provisional President of Georgia



Gwinnett



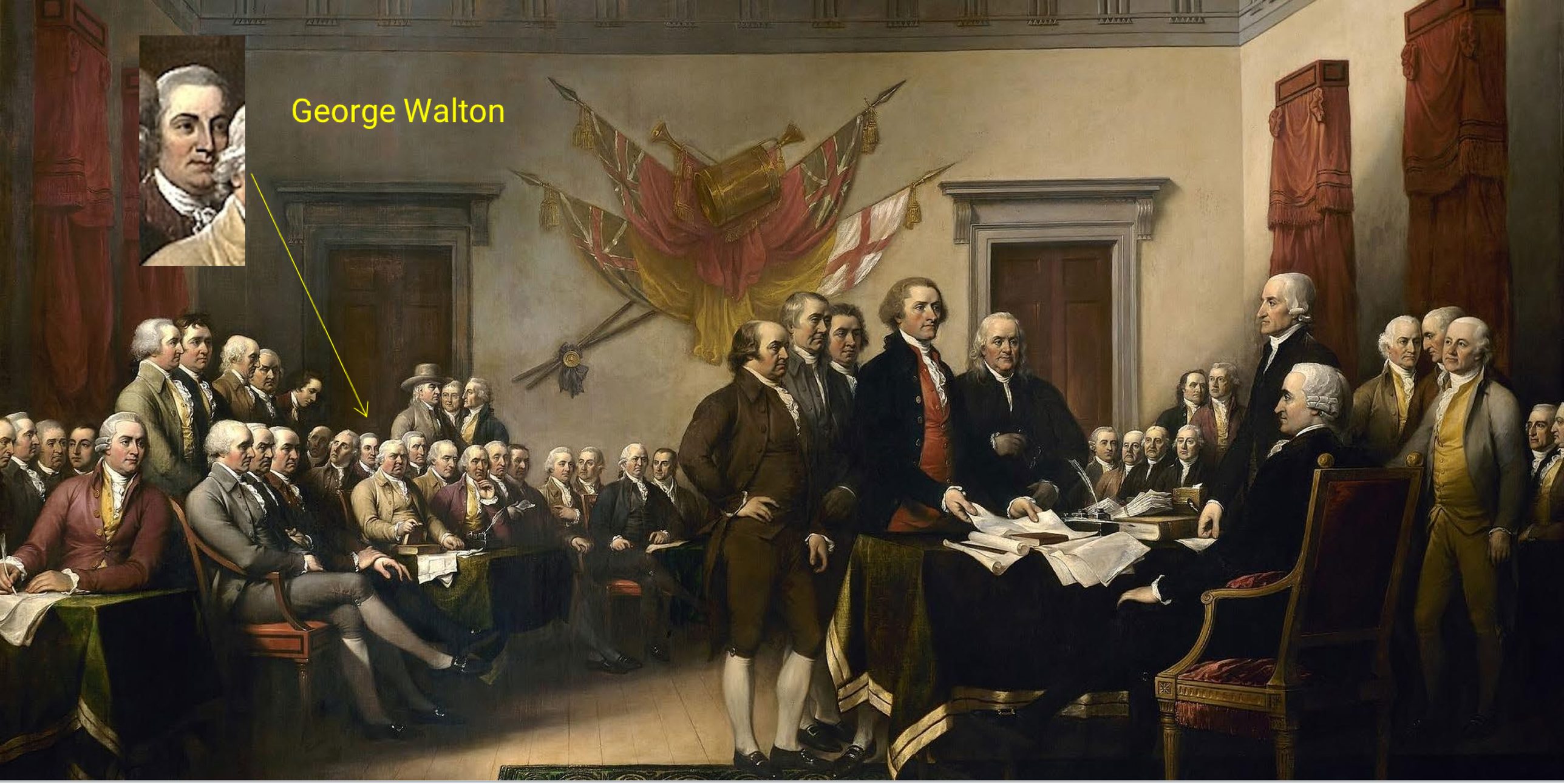
John Adams' Thoughts on the Georgia Delegates

"Every Post and every Day rolls in upon Us Independence like a Torrent. The Delegates from Georgia made their Appearance, this Day, in Congress, with unlimited Powers, and these Gentlemen themselves are very firm."

Letter to James Warren – May 20,1776

By John Trumbull - http://www.whitehouseresearch.org/assetbank-whha/action/viewHome, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20179126

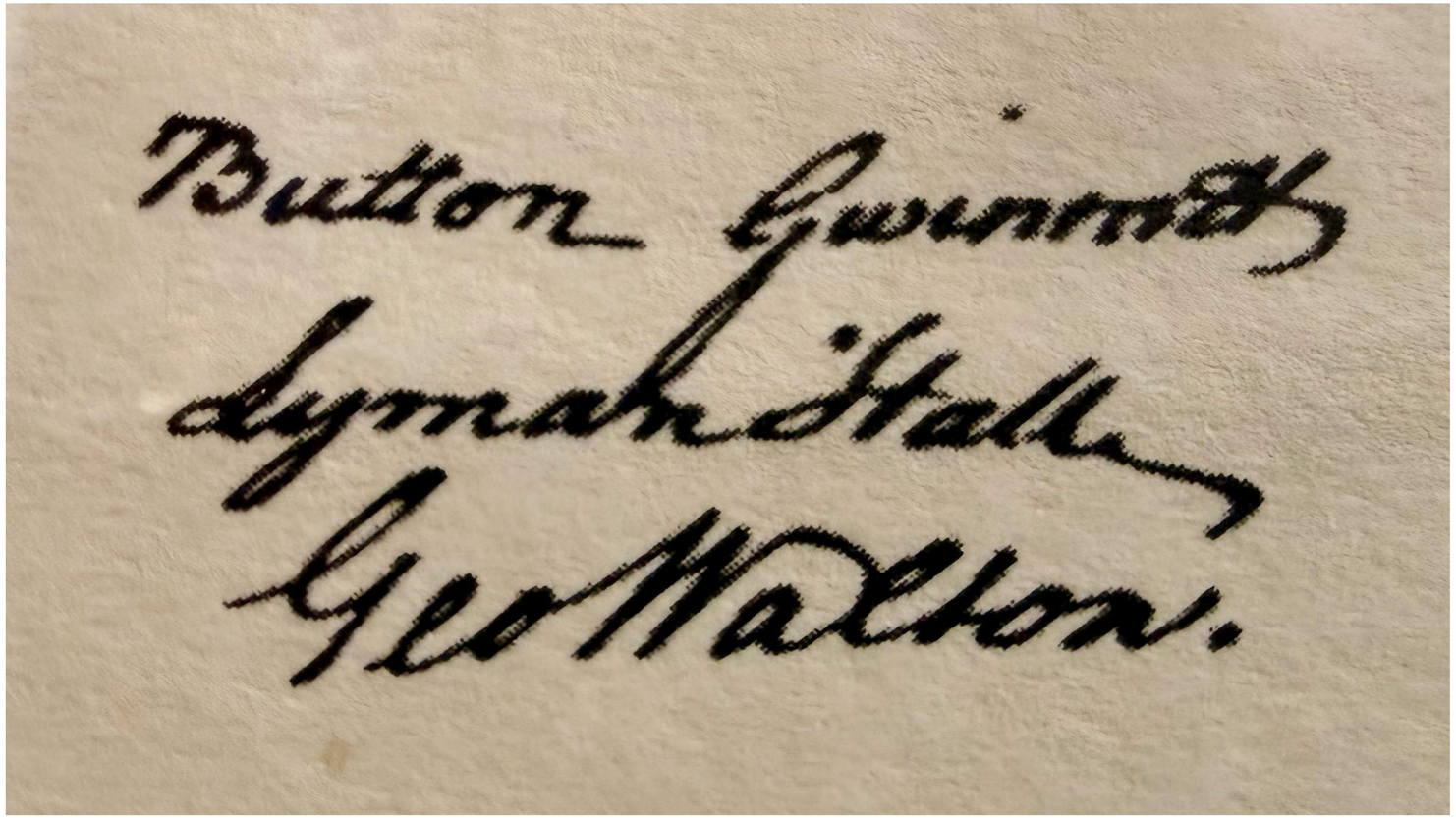
Gwinnett



By John Trumbull - Original Painting in Capitol building in Washington DC, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39580097

Gwinnett

August 2, 1776



Gwinnett

Speaker Gwinnett: Getting Things Done

- Main architect of Georgia's first Constitution – Unicameral legislature, executive elected by legislature (serves state for 12 years)
- Expanded suffrage
- Involved in design of state's first seal



FIRST GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA.
(*Obverse.*)



FIRST GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA.
(*Reverse.*)

Gwinnett



President Gwinnett

- Archibald Bulloch dies February 22, 1777, three weeks after the adoption of the new state Constitution but before it is effective
- Gwinnett becomes Provisional President (Governor) March 4, 1777
- George McIntosh – only member to publicly oppose Gwinnett
- Tumultuous Two Months at the Helm

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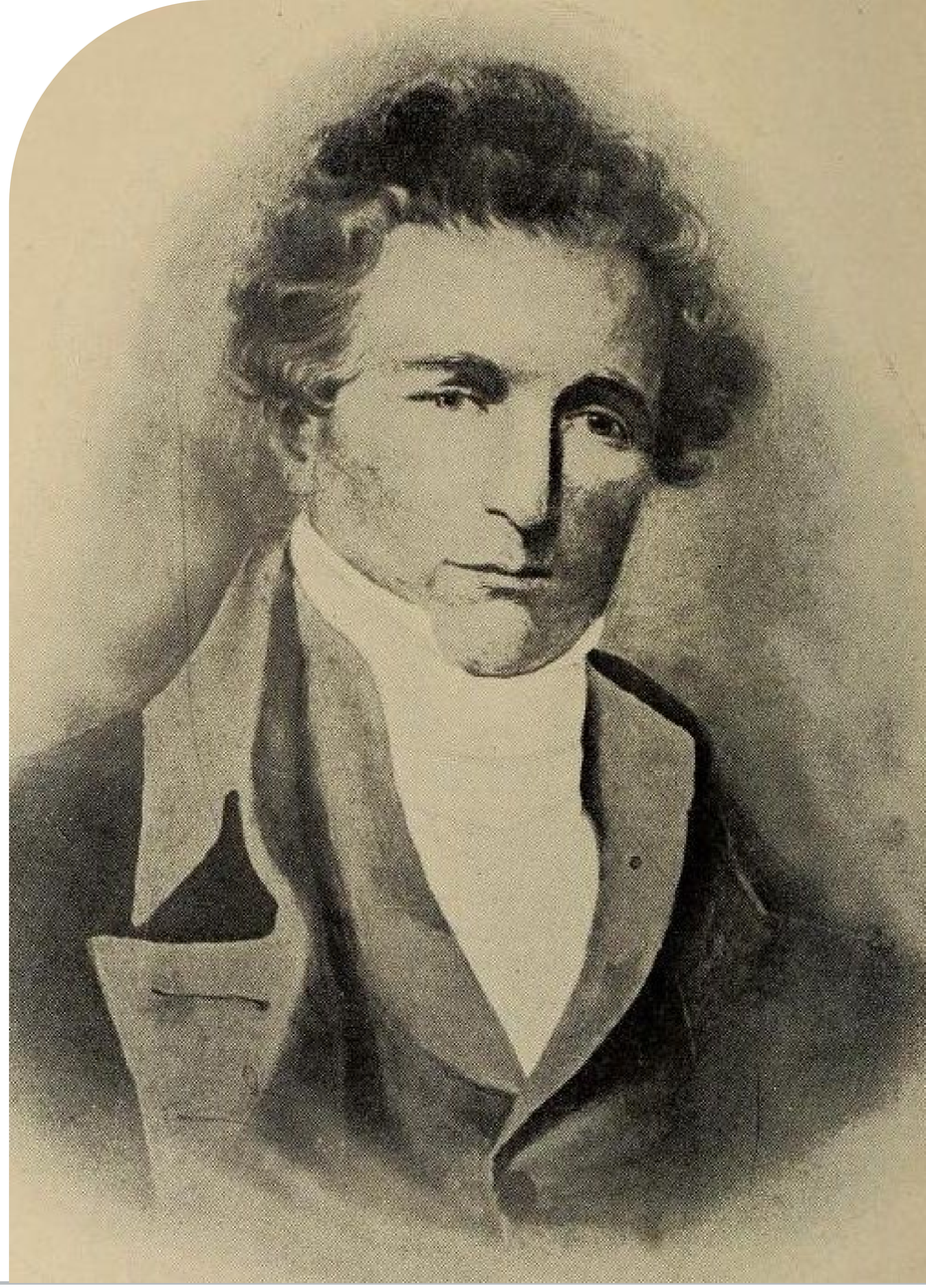
Gwinnett



Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. "The British colonies in North America." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections* 1777.
https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/410535b0-c5d5-012f-a81d-58d385a7bc34

Electoral Defeat

- John Treutlen defeats Gwinnett for election as Governor by “handsome majority” on May 8, 1777
- Lachlan McIntosh calls Gwinnett a “scoundrel and lying rascal”
- Gwinnett demands apology – McIntosh refuses



By Internet Archive Book Images - https://archive.org/stream/lutheranlandmark00finc#page/n247/mode/2upFinck, William J. Lutheran landmarks and pioneers in America: a series of sketches of colonial times. Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1913., Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=46437481

Gwinnett

How Dare You Sir . . .



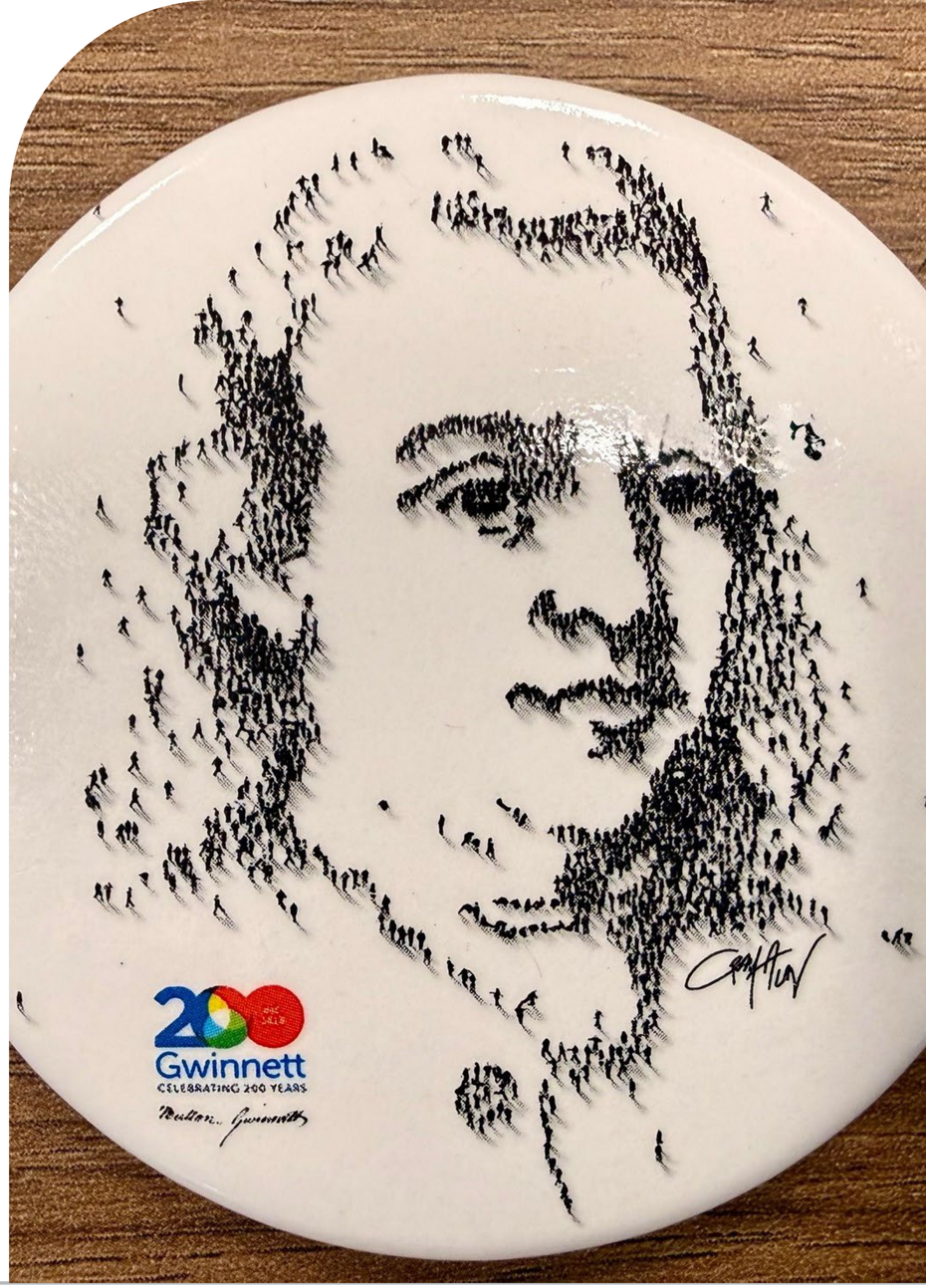
- Gwinnett challenges McIntosh to a duel
- Duel takes place in a meadow southeast of Savannah on May 16, 1777
- Both Gwinnett and McIntosh fired and hit each other
- Both "behaved like gentlemen"
- Gwinnett dies on May 19, 1777
- McIntosh is charged with murder but later acquitted

By Scan by NYPL - https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/bd2558d0-3e17-0133-addc-00505686d14e, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=116645290

Gwinnett

Gwinnett's Legacy

- Political turmoil
- No descendants
- Statue atop Mall of Georgia
- Namesake of the greatest county in the universe
- Most valuable signature of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence



Gwinnett

Questions?

Contact me at the following:

Jason.West@GwinnettCounty.com

Join us on **August 1, 2026,** for a joint America 250 celebration hosted by the City of Lawrenceville and Gwinnett County.

B2Anywhere.com
GwinnettEHC.com
GwinnettHS.org



Gwinnett