

Walker, John (Jack) ^[1]

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by William S. Powell, 1996

10 Dec. 1741–September 1813

John (Jack) Walker, Revolutionary ^[2] officer and planter, was born in the parish of Reavley, near Alnwick Castle, Northumberland County, England. His parents were James and Anne Wodehouse Walker of a distinguished family; they moved directly to Brunswick, N.C., from England in 1761. Young Walker established himself as a planter and merchant and in 1762 was deputy collector of taxes for New Hanover County ^[3]. In 1765, when a naval officer and the master of his vessel engaged in a duel over a woman and the officer was fatally wounded, Walker was foreman of the coroner's jury.

Royal governor William Tryon ^[4] made his home at Brunswick ^[5], and Walker and Tryon undoubtedly were well acquainted; in 1771 Walker delivered a message from Tryon to Attorney General Thomas McGwire ^[6] about conditions on the frontier. Soon afterwards Walker was active in the militia against the Regulators ^[7] in the backcountry and served as hospital steward with the rank of captain shortly before the Battle of Alamance ^[8]. Just prior to the battle, however, he was made captain of artillery. On the eve of the battle, while on reconnaissance, he and Lieutenant John Ashe ^[9] were captured, severely flogged, and threatened with use as a shield should their captors be attacked. An agreement was reached between the opposing sides to exchange prisoners, but after the Regulators had been released Walker and Ashe were still being held. The battle began before they were freed, and after the fighting ended the two were found in the garret of a house where the Regulators had left them.

With the coming of the American Revolution Walker participated in the organization and equipping of the New Hanover County ^[3] militia and was present at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge ^[10] on 27 Feb. 1776. He was elected captain in the First North Carolina Continental Regiment and was sent to Charles Town, S.C., on 11 June 1776; he was on Sullivan's Island when the British under Sir Peter Parker and Lord Charles Cornwallis attacked the fort and were repulsed. Returning to Wilmington ^[11], Walker and his troops were ordered to join General George Washington in June 1777. They were at the battles of Germantown and Brandywine and present at Valley Forge. Following action there, Walker was promoted to the rank of major.

In December 1777 he was on Washington's staff as aide-de-camp with the rank of lieutenant colonel but afterwards was promoted to colonel. Assigned to duty in the southeastern region of North Carolina, he was there when the British under Major James H. Craig occupied Wilmington.

When the war ended Walker returned home to begin rebuilding his fortune, which had suffered during the war, particularly when his property was occupied by the British. At the legislative session of 1790–91 the General Assembly ^[12] awarded him, for his services, 5,000 acres of land on Duck River, then in far western North Carolina (now Tennessee).

Walker may never have married, as he bequeathed his large fortune for the most part to nephews and nieces in England and Scotland, at least one of whom moved to North Carolina to claim the estate. An early member of the Society of the Cincinnati ^[13], he died in Wilmington and was buried in the churchyard of St. James's Church, of which he was a member.

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