

Iredell Jr., James ^[1]

JAMES IREDELL JR.

Governor: 1827-1828

by Wilson Angley

Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History, 2004.

<https://www.dncr.nc.gov/about-us/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program> ^[2]

See also: [James Iredell Jr.](#) ^[3], *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*



James Iredell Jr. (1788-1853) was born in [Edenton](#) ^[4] on November 2, 1788, to parents of the highest social and political standing. His father, James Iredell Sr., was a prominent Federalist leader and associate justice of the United States Supreme Court. His mother, the former Hannah Johnston, was the sister of Governor [Samuel Johnston](#) ^[5] of Edenton and niece of royal governor [Gabriel Johnston](#) ^[6]. Because young Iredell was only ten years of age when his father died, it is probable that his uncle Samuel, the former governor, exercised a powerful and lasting influence over the boy's development. Iredell's wife was the former Francis Johnston Treadwell of Edenton. Their marriage produced seven children.

Iredell received his early education locally at the Edenton Academy. Later he attended the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), from which he graduated in 1806. Returning to North Carolina, he pursued the study of law and was admitted to the bar in 1809. During the [War of 1812](#) ^[7] he commanded a company of volunteers in the defense of Norfolk; and in 1815 he was commissioned a brigadier general in the North Carolina militia. In 1813 he was elected from Edenton to the lower house of the General Assembly, where he again represented the town from 1816 to 1820 and from 1823 to 1828. During five of these legislative sessions, he served as either speaker or speaker pro tempore. On December 5, 1827, he was elected governor by his fellow assemblymen, but less than a year later resigned to fill the United States Senate seat vacated by [Nathaniel Macon](#) ^[8], patriarch of North Carolina's congressional delegation.

Because of its brief duration, Iredell's governorship left only a shallow imprint on the state's history. Significantly, it came during a period when the progressive [Whig Party](#) ^[9] was emergent, and when there were growing demands for constitutional reform, [internal improvements](#) ^[10], and public education. Like his predecessors, Iredell stressed the need for improved roads and waterways and for the encouragement of industry and agriculture. He expressed frustration, however, that so little had been accomplished in comparison with other states. By way of contrast, his address to the General Assembly contained only one passing reference to public education. Quite probably, this relative lack of emphasis stemmed from the state's poor financial condition and especially that of the Literary Fund. Indeed, investigations following the death of Treasurer [John Haywood](#) ^[11] during the previous year had revealed an unexpected shortage of more than \$28,000 in the fund, so that the state was hardly in a position to launch new or comprehensive educational initiatives.

Following his single term in the United States Senate, Iredell returned to North Carolina and established a law practice in Raleigh. During the next quarter century he served as a commissioner to revise the state's laws, reported cases for the [North Carolina Supreme Court](#) ^[12], conducted a law school, and published an authoritative three-volume digest of court cases in the state from 1778 to 1845. Iredell died in Edenton on April 13, 1853, and was buried in the Johnston family cemetery at Hayes Plantation.

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Additional Resources:

[WorldCat](#) [16] (Searches numerous library catalogs)

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