

Cotton, James ^[1]

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by Robert M. McBride, 1979

3 Aug. 1739–22 Dec. 1785

James Cotton, colonial officeholder and Loyalist ^[2], was born in Hamlet Parish, Ipswich, Mass., son of Leonard and Mary Frieze Cotton. He was the grandson of the Reverend Thomas and Bridget Hoar Cotton of London and of Jacob and Rachel Chase Frieze of Hampton, N.H. His great-grandfather, Dr. Leonard Hoar, was the third president of Harvard. Cotton's father was a teacher in the church under the pastorates of his cousins, John and Theophilus Cotton.

James Cotton received a thorough classical education. As a youth he removed with his parents to the Piedmont of Virginia and, upon his majority, to Rowan (now Anson) County. There, by the eve of the American Revolution ^[3], he had become Anson County ^[4]'s wealthiest and most prominent citizen. He was one of the advisers of colonial Governor Josiah Martin ^[5], a member of the assembly, lieutenant colonel in the provincial militia, magistrate of Anson County, deputy collector of his majesty's quitrents ^[6], surveyor and registrar of Anson County, ranger of woods and wastes, and keeper of the land office for the back counties. His wife, Margaret Williams, member of a well-known Loyalist family, bore him three children, James, Thomas, and Alicia Cotton.

Cotton recruited a company of Loyalists and took part in the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge ^[7] on 27 Feb. 1776. Proscribed by the provincial congress ^[8] and the committee of safety ^[9], he went into hiding and eventually made his way to the British fort of St. Augustine in East Florida. After being re-outfitted by Governor Patrick Tonyn, he joined General Sir Henry Clinton at Charleston, S.C. After the British loss of Fort Moultrie in the Battle of Sullivan's Island later in the year, he went with Clinton to New York, by then the Loyalist and British capitol of the American colonies. After a year in the quartermaster department under General William Howe, Cotton went to England and lived in London until 1784. He successfully brought a claim before the Wilmot-Coke Commission for his confiscated property (over £12,000) and the loss of the offices he had enjoyed under the Crown ^[10] (£250 annually). The final property settlement was the sum of £3,387 and an annual allowance of £100 for the loss of his offices. He then, with his second wife, Ann (daughter of a Lancaster clergyman), and two small children, removed to the British West Indies. He died at St. Jago de la Veyga, Jamaica. His wife went to North Carolina after his death and there received for many years a British pension as his widow; his oldest son, James (1765–1838), received an American pension for *his* services as a Patriot in the Revolution.

As his biographer has pointed out, Cotton's life and career, "against the background of an incipient and accomplished revolution, illustrates the dilemma of Colonial officials, the bases for their continued loyalty to Great Britain, the reasons for the exodus of many Loyalists from America, the losses of property and liberties suffered by loyal colonials, and finally the nature and methods of partial compensation for losses so incurred."

References:

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Additional Resources:

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<https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr10-0068> ^[13] (accessed January 21, 2014).

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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