

Jack, James ^[1]

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by Norris W. Preyer, 1988; Revised December 2021

1731–18 Dec. 1822

James Jack, Revolutionary War officer, best known for his ride from Charlotte to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia to deliver a copy of the Mecklenburg Resolves, was the oldest son and one of nine children of Patrick and Lillis McAdoo Jack. His parents lived along the Conococheague River southwest of Chambersburg, Pa. His grandfather may have been the Reverend William Jack of Laggan Presbytery in Northern Ireland who was removed from his benefice by Charles II for nonconformity to the Church of England ^[2].

The French and Indian War ^[3] caused Patrick Jack to leave Pennsylvania and move to North Carolina. By 1760 the family was living to the west of Salisbury in Thyatira, one of the first Presbyterian ^[4] communities to be established west of the Yadkin River. On 20 Nov. 1766 James Jack married Margaret Houston and in 1772 moved to Charlotte ^[5], where the previous year his father had bought lots on the south side of West Trade Street. There Jack and his elderly parents built a house in which they operated a tavern. In the years that followed Jack became prosperous enough to speculate in Charlotte real estate and was appointed a tax collector and an overseer of the poor in the county of Mecklenburg.

Meanwhile, hostility was growing to the acts of Parliament. When news arrived of the outbreak of fighting at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts, the Mecklenburg Resolves ^[6] of May 1775 were drawn up declaring British laws and authority to be null and void. Whether a "Declaration of Independence ^[7]" was also issued has long been disputed. Jack and his father were active supporters of the patriot cause, and it seems likely that many of the Committee of Safety meetings were held at their tavern. Jack recalled that "for some time previous to, and at the time of those resolutions [of May 1775] were agreed to, I . . . was privileged to a number of meetings of some of the . . . leading characters of that county on the subject before the final adoption of the resolutions." James Jack was dispatched to carry the Resolves to Congress. He set out on his ride in June and upon arriving in Salisbury had the document read publicly in the district court then in session. On reaching Philadelphia he found that the North Carolina delegates, still hoping for a reconciliation with England, considered the action premature. Apparently, they never informed the other delegates of the Mecklenburg action. Moravian records tell of Jack's return through Salem on 7 July. The forty-three-year-old patriot, averaging around 30 miles of hard riding each day, completed his 1,100-mile trip in about thirty-eight days.

Jack stated that he served "in the Revolutionary War ^[8] from the commencement to the close." A captain in the Mecklenburg militia, he is said to have been so popular that his company urged him not to accept promotions. When Lord Cornwallis occupied Charlotte in September 1780, British troops dragged Jack's ailing father from his bed and he died not long afterwards; the home was burned to the ground. Though the tavern was rebuilt (a new license was granted in October 1781), the expense of this and the failure to receive reimbursement of his wartime expenditures of £7,646 left Jack financially impoverished. His claim, audited by Colonel Matthew Locke ^[9], was paid to a friend who died before delivering the money to Jack.

At the end of the war, Jack moved across the mountains into present Tennessee. In 1784 he was one of the signers of a petition to the North Carolina Assembly urging that the area be created into a separate state ^[10]. This was not done until 1796, however, and by then Jack had moved to Wilkes County, Ga., where he engaged in farming. About 1814 he and his wife moved to neighboring Elbert County to spend their last years in the home of their son, William Houston. They had three other sons—Patrick, who became a colonel in the U.S. Army and served in the Mexican War ^[11]; Archibald; and James, Jr.—and one daughter, Cynthia, who married A. S. Cosby and settled in Mississippi. An obituary in the *Raleigh Register* of 17 Jan. 1823 gave Jack's age as eighty-four, but he, himself, had written on 7 Dec. 1819 that he was then eighty-eight which agrees with other accounts stating that he was ninety-one at his death.

While the story of Jack's ride to Philadelphia to deliver the Resolves is an exciting story, it still remains mostly legend that has not been supported by documentary evidence.

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Additional Resources:

"Captain Jack." Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation.

<http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/ParkandRec/TrailOfHistory/Pages/CaptainJack.aspx> ^[12] (accessed May 14, 2014).

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