

Martin, James ^[1]

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by Charles D. Rodenbough, 1991

21 May 1742 (o.s.)–30 Oct. 1834

James Martin, merchant, soldier, and legislator, was born in Lebanon Township, Hunterdon County, N.J., the second son of Hugh and Jane Hunter Martin. His father conducted an English school for a time, and all the Martin children were well educated. His brothers Alexander and Thomas were graduated from Princeton, where James may also have studied. In 1761, when Hugh Martin died, Alexander was already located in North Carolina; he returned to New Jersey to help settle the estate and see that his mother and his family were adequately situated.

James married his cousin, Ruth Rodgers, in 1763 and probably lived with his mother to help with the care of the younger members of the family. Through his brothers, James became a friend of James Madison, who visited in the Martin home during the years he was a student at [Princeton](#) ^[2]. In 1769 Mrs. Martin and her youngest children went to live with the Madison family at Montpelier, but James remained in New Jersey. In May 1774 he moved his immediate family to [Guilford County](#) ^[3], N.C., where by now his brother Alexander had located Mrs. Martin and all the other brothers and sisters. James settled on the [Haw River](#) ^[4] near the center of the county (part of present-day [Rockingham County](#) ^[5]).

On 22 Apr. 1774 Martin was appointed colonel-commandant of the Guilford militia, an assignment that may have encouraged his move to North Carolina. In late 1775 his brother Alexander, now colonel of the Second North Carolina Continental Regiment, ordered James to raise the militia and move against the Scottish Tories near [Fayetteville](#) ^[6]. In February 1776 the Guilford troops arrived at Moore's Creek after the battle and were involved only in rounding up prisoners. Later in the same year James raised a militia force of four thousand men, which joined General [Griffith Rutherford](#) ^[7] in maneuvers against the Cherokee towns. During the next four years Martin was called on several times to assemble militia forces to contend with scattered Tory forces.

In December 1780 the main focus of the war moved into the Guilford area. Martin had difficulty in raising a significant militia force and joined General Nathanael Greene in the maneuvering along the [Dan River](#) ^[8]. His troops did not play a major part in the [Battle of Guilford Court House](#) ^[9]. Although Greene had a low regard for the performance of the local militia, he does seem to have valued the service of James Martin.

During the war Martin began acquiring significant acreage in [Surry County](#) ^[10], much of it centered around Snow Creek, a tributary of the Dan River. He obtained an entry grant from Marshall Duncan for a tract on which Duncan was already burning lime for the early settlers. On 4 July 1778 Martin himself entered two claims to this tract, which he characterized as "his Lime Kiln Plantation." It was to this tract, eighteen miles from his Haw River home, that Martin moved his family in 1781. His lime kiln became a center of commerce and was much relied on by the [Moravians](#) ^[11].

In his new residence, Martin became involved in politics and in 1783, 1784, 1785, and 1786 was elected to the House of Commons from Surry County. In 1789, when Surry was divided and the eastern portion became Stokes, he was appointed one of the original justices of the peace for the new county. Subsequently, his residence became the center of one of the militia districts. In 1792 and 1793 he represented [Stokes County](#) ^[12] in the house; in the latter year he lost his bid for a seat in the U.S. Congress to his neighbor and fellow Patriot, Joseph Winston. Apparently, Martin was a Federalist and remained so most of his life.

Near the Martin home in Hunterdon County, N.J., there had been an early ironworks, known as Union Forge, where Martin may have worked as a young man. By 1786 he had established on his Snow Creek lands an ironworks and a forge, which he named the Union Iron Works. With transplanted Virginians, [Peter Hairston](#) ^[13] and Colonel Peter Perkins, Martin became heavily involved in the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the area. In 1788 North Carolina passed a bounty act that encouraged the building of forges. According to the terms of this act, Martin entered bounty claims on 3,000–5,000 acres in the county. The ironworks and lime kiln made him a wealthy man.

In 1792 he was appointed to the commission to locate a permanent capital for the state. As a member of that commission, he is reputed to have been the first to propose the name [Raleigh](#) ^[14] for the site chosen.

His first wife had died and his children were mostly grown and married when Martin, on 12 Mar. 1800, married Martha Loftin Jones, the widow of Hamilton Jones, Sr. By this second marriage he had five children.

In 1808 he was defeated by [Meshack Franklin](#) ^[15] for a seat in the U.S. Congress. He appears to have represented Stokes in the North Carolina House of Commons in 1811 and 1813, although by this time his son James had become active in politics and the references are confusing. His portrait, owned by a descendant, was painted in old age and shows a crusty old gentleman with white hair. At age ninety he rode on horseback to the courthouse at Germantown to apply for a veteran's pension and described vividly his service during the Revolutionary War. Two years later he died at his home on

Snow Creek and was buried on the plantation.

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