

Turner, Jacob ^[1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1996

ca. 1745–4 Oct. 1777

Jacob Turner, *Revolutionary* ^[2] hero, was probably born in Southampton County, Va., before his father Thomas moved to *Warren County* ^[3] (then *Bute* ^[4]), N.C. Turner first appears in the records in January 1775, when he was appointed captain in Alston's company. On 23 June of the same year he was elected to the Bute County *Committee of Safety* ^[5]. When the Third North Carolina Battalion was created by the *Provincial Congress* ^[6] at Halifax on 11 Apr. 1776, Turner was appointed fifth captain in the regiment. The following year, in response to urgent pressure from the Continental army in the North, the North Carolina Continentals were ordered to rendezvous at Halifax. The Third Regiment was the first to arrive. The officers met at Martin's Tavern, where several disputes over rank took place. One argument was settled by recognizing Turner as first captain of the regiment.

On 1 Sept. 1777 General *Jethro Sumner* ^[7], in camp at Wilmington, Del., wrote to General George Washington for the



Photograph of a silk silhouette of Governor James Turner, brother of Jacob Turner.
From the collections of the North Carolina

commission Museum of History.

^[8]in of major for Jacob Turner, in the room of Major Samuel Lockhart. Before this request could be acted on, the Third North Carolina Regiment, on 11 September, went into action at Brandywine, where the Continental army unsuccessfully attempted to thwart Sir William Howe's march on Philadelphia. Turner distinguished himself by his gallantry in the early stage of this battle. When the British occupied Philadelphia, the greater part of their army encamped at Germantown, then a small village northwest of the city. Washington decided to attack the camp on 4 Oct. 1777. During this engagement Captain Turner was felled by musket fire. He was buried in the Upper Burying Ground in Germantown in a common grave with Colonel *Henry Irwin* ^[9], Adjutant Lucas, and six privates, all killed on the same day. Many years later, a monument was erected over the graves through the efforts of *John Fanning Watson* ^[10], author of the *Annals of Philadelphia* ^[11], himself then a resident of Germantown.

Turner died unmarried. In the fall of 1777 the *Assembly of North Carolina* ^[12] granted Thomas Turner £170 for the losses incurred by his son, Captain Jacob Turner, deceased. At a commission to settle army accounts for the North Carolina Continental Line held in Warrenton in 1786, further payment was made to Thomas Turner on behalf of the captain. His younger brother, *James Turner* ^[13], later governor of the state, was granted Captain Jacob Turner's bounty land warrant for 3,840 acres of Tennessee land. Judge *Walter Clark* ^[14] published the diary of one Captain Turner from 19 Aug. 1777 to 27 Aug. 1778 in the *State Records of North Carolina*, printing it "because of the light it throws upon the condition and management of our troops." Clark was in error in attributing this to Captain Jacob Turner; indeed, nothing in the diary indicates that this Turner was a native of North Carolina. John H. Wheeler in his *History of North Carolina* incorrectly placed Captain Jacob Turner in *Bertie County* ^[15].

References:

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Subjects:

[American Revolution \(1763-1789\)](#) [20]

[Biographies](#) [21]

[Military personnel](#) [22]

[Politics and government](#) [23]

Authors:

[Smith, Claiborne T., Jr.](#) [24]

Origin - location:

[Warren County](#) [25]

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1 January 1996 | Smith, Claiborne T., Jr.

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[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/turner-jacob> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/american-revolution> [3] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/warren> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/bute-county> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/committees-safety> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/provincial-congresses> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/sumner-jethro> [8] <http://collections.ncdcr.gov/RediscoveryProficioPublicSearch/ShowItem.aspx?24564+> [9] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/irwin-henry> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/watson-john-fanning> [11] <https://archive.org/details/annalsofphiladel1884wats> [12] <https://ncpedia.org/general-assembly> [13] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/turner-james> [14] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/clark-walter-mckenzie> [15] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/bertie> [16] <https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/4508898> [17] <https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/133728> [18] <https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/4888768> [19] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr01-es02> [20] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/us-revolution> [21] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [22] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/soldiers> [23] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/politics-and-gove> [24] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/smith-claiborne-t-> [25] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-2> [26] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>