

## Adair, James Robert <sup>[1]</sup>

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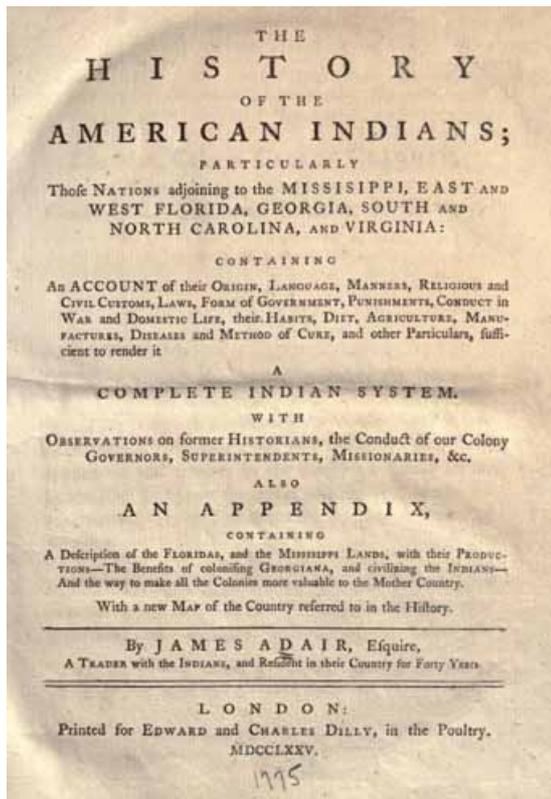


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## Adair, James Robert

by Maud Thomas Smith, 1979

ca. 1709–ca. 1787



"The history of the American Indians..." by James Adair, 1775. Image courtesy of the Internet Archive.

<sup>[2]</sup>James Robert Adair, author, planter, and Indian trader, eldest son of Thomas Adair, was born in County Antrim, Ireland. With his father and three brothers he came to the colonies in 1730, settling first in Pennsylvania near the present town of Chester. In Charleston, S.C., five years later, he became a partner to Indian trader George Galphin. In the first decade of his perilous career, he traded with the Catawbas <sup>[3]</sup> and Cherokees <sup>[4]</sup>. In 1744 he first traded with the Chickasaws; in 1747, at the behest of Governor James Glenn of South Carolina, he went on an expedition to open trade with the Choctaws. Although Adair escaped from many types of imprisonment, his most difficult escape came when he was taken by the French who had controlled Choctaw trade until Adair interfered. He was scheduled to be hanged, but managed an escape, the details of which are not known. Governor Glenn, meantime, sent out an expedition to gain control of Adair's Chickasaw trade and then refused to pay the £2,200 Adair had spent on his expedition to the Choctaw country. Adair never forgave Glenn.

After Adair broke with Glenn in 1750, he moved to Johnston (later Dobbs, now Greene <sup>[5]</sup>) County in North Carolina at the invitation of Governor Dobbs <sup>[6]</sup>, his personal friend. He settled at Fairfields, a plantation home on Great Contentnea Creek named for Fairfield, Connecticut, the birthplace of his first wife, Ann McCarty, whom he had married on 18 Oct. 1744. They had three daughters, Saranna (m. William McTyer), Elizabeth (m. John Cade), and Agnes (m. John Gibson). Adair resumed his travels and in the 1750s was trading among the Indians of the Carolinas. In the Cherokee war of 1760, Adair received a captain's commission and led the Chickasaws against the Cherokees.

Throughout his years among the Indians, Adair kept notes. There is no record of his education, but he practiced medicine among the Indians. He wrote that he was "well acquainted with near 2,000 miles of the American continent," mostly in what is now the southern and southeastern United States. He was Dr. James Adair but, informally, "Robert" or "Robin."

In 1763 he went back to England. Legend has it that through his gallantry he became acquainted with a wealthy lady in whose London home he met Lady Caroline Keppel, daughter of the Earl of Albemarle. They fell in love, and her family, although objecting to the marriage, permitted the wedding in 1759 after a separation proved to affect Lady Caroline's health. During this separation from him she wrote the ballad, "Robin Adair." Three children were born to the couple (one son named Robert became a member of Parliament), and George III gave Adair an appointment in the field of medicine. Although Adair returned to America, he supposedly made trips back to England. Lady Caroline died in 1769 at the age of thirty-two.

For two or three years after 1765 Adair was in America trading with the Chickasaws and Choctaws out of Mobile. Late in 1768, he was in New York trying unsuccessfully to find a publisher for his book, *History of American Indians*, in which he tried to prove his theory that the Indians were the lost tribes of Israel; the book was published in London in 1775. In 1770 Adair removed his family from Dobbs to Bladen (now [Robeson](#) <sup>[7]</sup>) County, where he purchased a large plantation that he named Patcherly. Tradition has it that he served as physician with [Francis Marion](#) <sup>[8]</sup> during the [American Revolution](#) <sup>[9]</sup>; he lived in a [Whig](#) <sup>[10]</sup> area where Marion often conducted military operations.

The most notable Whig of south Robeson, Archibald McKissack, witnessed Adair's will. Although by some reports Adair was buried in England in 1790, his will was probated in [Bladen County](#) <sup>[11]</sup> in 1787. In it he left an inheritance to Robert Adair of County Antrim. The [North Carolina Society of Colonial Dames](#) <sup>[12]</sup> was responsible for a granite shaft erected to honor him in August 1934 near Ashpole Presbyterian Church ([Robeson County](#) <sup>[7]</sup>).

## References:

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Arthur Collins, *Peerage of England* (1812), vol. 3.

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## Additional Resources:

Adair, James, trader with the Indians. *The history of the American Indians; particularly those nations adjoining to the Mississippi [!] East and West Florida, Georgia, South and North Carolina, and Virginia: containing an account of their origin, language, manners, religious and civil customs, laws, form of government, punishments, conduct in war and domestic life, their habits, diet, agriculture, manufactures, diseases and method of cure... With observations on former historians, the conduct of our colony governors, superintendents, missionaries, & c. Also an appendix, containing a description of the Floridas, and the Mississippi [!] lands, with their productions--the benefits of colonizing Georgiana, and civilizing the Indians--and the way to make all the colonies more valuable to the mother country..* London, E. and C. Dilly. 1775. <https://archive.org/details/historyofamerica00adairich> <sup>[2]</sup> (accessed January 17, 2013).

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Cherokee Planning Board. *Comprehensive plan, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, volume I: Population and economy study*. [Cherokee, N.C.? [N.C.]: The Band?, 1974-1977]. 1974. <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p249901coll22/id/440157/rec/2> <sup>[14]</sup> (accessed April 24, 2014).

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