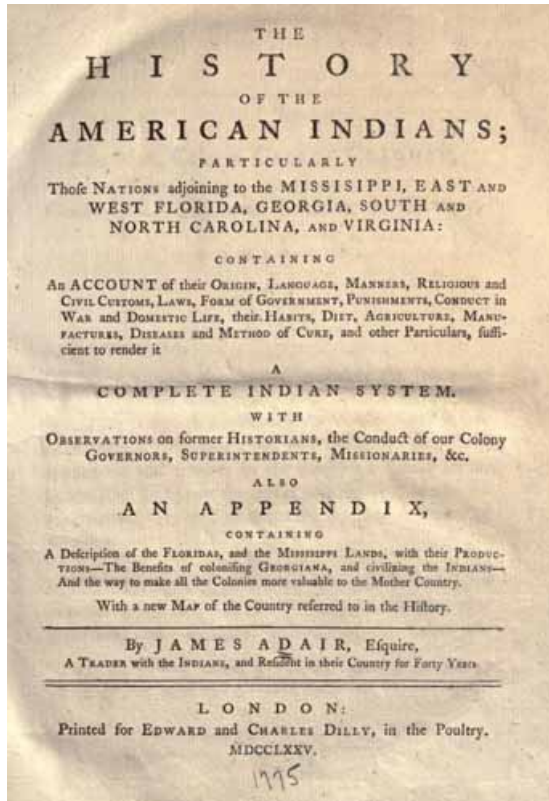


Adair, James Robert ^[1]

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by Maud Thomas Smith, 1979; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, April 2023

ca. 1709–ca. 1787



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

^[2]James Robert Adair was an author, planter, and trader who specialized in American Indian goods. He was the eldest son of Thomas Adair, 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 trader George Galphin, who also specialized in American Indian trade. In the first decade of his perilous career, he traded with the Catawba ^[3] and Cherokee ^[4] tribes and their people. In 1744 he first traded with the Chickasaw tribe; in 1747, at the behest of Governor James Glenn of South Carolina, he went on an expedition to open trade with the Choctaw tribe. Although Adair escaped from many types of imprisonment, his most difficult escape came when he was taken by the French who had controlled trade with the Choctaw tribe until Adair interfered. He was scheduled to be hanged, but managed to escape. Governor Glenn concurrently sent out an expedition to gain control of Adair's trade with the Chickasaw tribe 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 ^[5]) County in North Carolina at the invitation of Governor Dobbs ^[6], 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 October 18, 1744. They had three daughters, Saranna (who married William McTyer), Elizabeth (who married John Cade), and Agnes (who married John Gibson). Adair resumed his travels and in the 1750s was trading among some tribes of the Carolinas. In the Cherokee war of 1760, Adair received a captain's commission and led the Chickasaw tribe against the Cherokee people.

Throughout his years among the different tribes, Adair kept notes. There is no record of his education, but he practiced medicine among the different tribes. 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. Popular history claims that 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." The couple had three children (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 Chickasaw and Choctaw tribes 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 American Indian people 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^[7]) County, where he purchased a large plantation that he named Patchery. He likely served as physician with Francis Marion^[8] during the American Revolution^[9], as he lived in a Whig^[10] area where Marion often conducted military operations.

Adair was also an enslaver. His will listed the names of some of the people he enslaved. Pomp, Babby, Sam, Jack, Hannah, Nelly, and Lucy are all explicitly named by the will.

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^[11] in 1787. In it he left an inheritance to Robert Adair of County Antrim. The North Carolina Society of Colonial Dames^[12] was responsible for a granite shaft erected to honor him in August 1934 near Ashpole Presbyterian Church (Robeson County^[7]).

Additional information from NCPedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

This person enslaved and owned other people. Many Black and African people, their descendants, and some others were enslaved in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865. It was common for wealthy landowners, entrepreneurs, politicians, institutions, and others to enslave people and use enslaved labor during this period. To read more about the enslavement and transportation of African people to North Carolina, visit <https://aaahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-0>^[13]. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery>^[14]. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

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Image Credits:

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.

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1 January 1979 | Smith, Maud Thomas

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