

Carter, John ^[1]

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by G. Melvin Herndon, 1979

1737–81

John Carter, frontiersman, merchant, surveyor ^[2], land speculator, colonel of the militia, and legislator, was born in Cumberland County, Va. There is no known evidence that he was a relative of the famous Robert ("King") Carter. He married Elizabeth Taylor in 1758 and remained unknown until he, his wife, and their only child, Landon ^[3], emigrated to Western North Carolina (now Tennessee) in 1769 or 1770, settling in a valley, which came to bear his name, just west of the Holston River and a short distance below Long Island. In 1770 he formed a partnership with William Parker and opened a store to trade with the whites and Indians about a mile west of the present Church Hill community in Hawkins County.

When the Lochaber treaty line was completed in 1772, it was discovered that only one of the four settlements in present-day eastern Tennessee was within the area granted to England by the Cherokees ^[4] (North-of-Holston). Instead of moving into the region opened by the Treaty of Lochaber, the settlers of Carter's Valley and Nolichucky hastened to the Watauga settlement ^[5]. The Carters apparently moved to Watauga at this time also. Carter has been credited with the idea of forming an independent government for the community; he was one of the key figures in the 1772 formation of the Watauga Association, the first organized government west of the Alleghenies. He was a member of the five-man court created in 1772 and of the Committee of Thirteen established in 1775–76. He was also chairman of the group that petitioned the North Carolina legislature to annex the area in 1776. The district of Washington, which included the settlements along the Watauga, Holston, and Nolichucky rivers, was created in 1776. Carter was selected one of three delegates from the new district to serve in the North Carolina legislature, which in turn named him colonel of the militia and provided supplies to establish at his home a public magazine of military stores for defense of the area. When Washington County ^[6] was created out of the Washington District in 1777, he was elected to the state senate. He was sent to the legislature a second time in 1781.

Carter was active throughout the Revolution ^[7] defending the frontier against the Indians. In addition, he served as justice of the peace, surveyor and entry taker of lands. He was a partner of John Sevier ^[8] and Richard Henderson ^[9] in land speculation and at the time of his death was one of the largest landholders west of the Allegheny Mountains. He died as a colonel at the age of forty-four and was buried at his home just out of Elizabethton.

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