

Holland, James ^[1]

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1754–19 May 1823

James Holland, Revolutionary ^[2] officer, legislator, and congressman, was born in either Pennsylvania or present-day Anson County ^[3], N.C., to which his parents moved about the time of his birth. He was the son of Mary Harrison and William Holland, an English immigrant. Although apprenticed to a carpenter at age fifteen, Holland acquired an adequate education, read law, and developed a successful business as a contractor. At twenty-three he became sheriff of Tryon County ^[4], N.C., and served until July 1778.

During the Revolutionary War, he held a commission as second lieutenant in Colonel Francis Locke's ^[5] regiment of North Carolina militia, seeing action at Ramsour's Mill ^[6], Cowpens ^[7], and Guilford Court House ^[8]. In 1782 he became superintending commissioner of specific supplies in the District of Morgan. Promoted to the rank of first major of the Morganton District militia in 1787, he used the title "major" until his death.

Following the creation of Rutherford County ^[9] in 1779, Holland was named county commissioner and trustee, and he constructed the county courthouse on his property at Gilberttown. He entered the state senate in 1783 and returned in 1797. Between his two terms in the senate, he served in the house in 1786 and 1789. In the General Assembly ^[10] he won attention for his ability in finance and for his judgment and impartiality on numerous committees of inquiry.

As a delegate to the second constitutional convention in 1789 ^[11], Holland favored ratification of the federal constitution. The same year he was appointed to the North Carolina Council of State as well as becoming one of the original members of the board of trustees of The University of North Carolina ^[12], a post he held until 1795.

In 1794, Holland announced his candidacy for Congress and handily defeated his opponent, Colonel Joseph McDowell ^[13]. His first term (March 1795–March 1797) was marked by his energetic, determined opposition to the Jay Treaty and his open hostility to enlargement of the U.S. Navy ^[14]. Declining to stand for election to the Fifth Congress, Holland instead expanded his law practice into Buncombe County ^[15] and reentered the North Carolina Senate. He ran for election to Congress again in 1798, but in the Federalist ^[16] sweep lost to Joseph Dickson ^[17]. In 1800, however, he won an easy victory and would continue to win with comfortable margins until he declined to seek reelection in 1810.

An orthodox Jeffersonian Republican, Holland followed the party line with few deviations. He led the Republican ^[18] resistance to the military establishment until the shocking events of 1807 (the Aaron Burr conspiracy occurred, the British stopped American ships, and Congress passed a nonimportation act) and the contagiousness of Henry Clay's leadership led to a reversal of sentiment. Even in 1810, Holland advocated a large militia force, preferring that as a natural American institution to a standing army.

He stoutly defended the embargo that halted U.S. trade with foreign nations, displaying a sectional bias against New England commerce. Always a partisan for agriculture and free land, he also advocated on numerous occasions a balanced economy through the encouragement of domestic manufacturing. He early promoted the direct election of the president and vice-president, and proposed that continuation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade after its discontinuation be considered a capital offense. A defender of General James Wilkinson, he maintained an embarrassed quiet during the Aaron Burr and Salmon P. Chase impeachment discussions.

In 1811, Holland followed his sons who had preceded him to a new home on the Duck River in middle Tennessee. There he became a large, wealthy landowner and participated in local affairs, serving as justice of the peace from 1812 to 1818. "Big Jim" Holland stood for election to Congress once more in 1822, but he lacked the popularity in Tennessee he had enjoyed in North Carolina and was defeated. He died and was buried at his home in Maury County, Tenn.

In January 1780 Holland married Sarah Gilbert, the daughter of a conspicuous Rutherford County ^[9] citizen, William Gilbert ^[19]. Children surviving him were Cynthia (Mrs. Tyree Rodes and later Mrs. Peter R. Booker of Pulaski, Tenn.), Sophia Salina (Mrs. Harden Perkins of Tuscaloosa, Ala.), and James, Jr. (married Winifred Sanford, daughter of Tennessee Congressman James Turner Sanford), who lived in Maury County.

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