

## **Gillespie, James** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Richard A. Schrader, 1986; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, December 2022

**1747–11 Jan. 1805**

James Gillespie, legislator and congressman, was born in County Monaghan, Ireland, the oldest of three sons of David Gillespie. James received a classical education in Dublin, and, while still a young man, emigrated with his Scottish Presbyterian <sup>[2]</sup> family to New Bern. Before the American Revolution <sup>[3]</sup> he bought a plantation (later called Golden Grove) one mile east of Kenansville in Duplin County <sup>[4]</sup>.

With the outbreak of war, Gillespie received a captain's commission in the First Battalion of North Carolina Volunteers in November 1776. Although he performed assigned military duties and even suffered the burning of his home by Tories, his most significant contributions to the state in the war years were his political and administrative activities. In 1776, he served as a member of the North Carolina Provincial Congress <sup>[5]</sup> at Halifax <sup>[6]</sup> that drew up the state constitution, and two years later he was appointed a commissioner to consolidate the towns of Campbellton and Cross Creek (later named Fayetteville <sup>[7]</sup>). In 1779, Gillespie won election to the North Carolina House of Commons, participating in its deliberations in 1779–80 and 1782–84.

After the war his political involvement increased. He served in the state senate in 1784–86, 1789, and 1792. In 1785, he received appointments as a trustee to establish an academy in Duplin County, as secretary to the governor, and as a member of the state council, to which he was reappointed in 1789. Gillespie attended the constitutional conventions of 1788 and 1789, voting with the anti-Federalists against ratifications on both occasions; however, he later won election to the U.S. House of Representatives, serving during the years 1793–99 and 1803–5 as a Federalist from the Sixth Congressional District.

At the time of the 1790 census Gillespie owned over 2,000 acres of land and enslaved thirty people. In addition to his wife, Dorcus Mumford Gillespie of Onslow County <sup>[8]</sup>, his household consisted of seven children: Catherine, David, Lucy, Joseph, Elizabeth, Jane, and Mildred. His son David (1774–1829) attended The University of North Carolina <sup>[9]</sup> in 1795, served as a major in the War of 1812 <sup>[10]</sup>, and represented Bladen County <sup>[11]</sup> in the House of Commons; he also was a member of the council.

Gillespie died in Washington and was buried in Presbyterian Cemetery in Georgetown, D.C.; in 1891 his remains were moved to the Congressional Cemetery in Washington.

### **References:**

*Biog. Dir. Am. Cong.* (1950).

John L. Cheney, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Government, 1585–1974* (1975).

Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, vols. 12-22 (1895–1907).

Gillespie-Wright Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

### **Additional Resources:**

Gillespie and Wright Family Papers, 1735-1990, Collection Number: 00275, Documenting the American South, UNC Libraries: [http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/g/Gillespie\\_and\\_Wright\\_Family.html](http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/g/Gillespie_and_Wright_Family.html) <sup>[12]</sup>

"Gillespie, James, (ca. 1747 - 1805)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=G000196> <sup>[13]</sup> (accessed August 5, 2013).

### **Subjects:**

Biographies <sup>[14]</sup>

Public officials <sup>[15]</sup>

### **Authors:**

Schrader, Richard A. <sup>[16]</sup>

### **Origin - location:**

Duplin County <sup>[17]</sup>

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