

## Allen, Richard, Sr. <sup>[1]</sup>

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## Allen, Richard, Sr.

by Jerry L. Cross, 1979

**26 Nov. 1741–10 Oct. 1832**

Richard Allen, Sr., Revolutionary War <sup>[2]</sup> captain and public official, was born in Baltimore County; Md. At the age of twenty-one, Allen moved to Frederick County, Va., where he spent seven years before settling in Rowan County <sup>[3]</sup>, N.C., in 1770. In less than a year Surry County <sup>[4]</sup> was formed from part of Rowan, including that section in which Allen lived. Through purchases of adjoining lands, he amassed a large estate along Big Bugaboo Creek.

When fighting with England broke out, Allen volunteered for six months' service in Captain Jesse Walton's company of minutemen, the first such unit raised in Surry County. As a first sergeant he marched with his company to Salisbury and underwent sixteen days of training and exercising. Early in 1776, Allen began a long series of frustrating military campaigns.

Upon learning that Loyalists <sup>[5]</sup> under General Donald MacDonald <sup>[6]</sup> were gathering at Cross Creek for a march to the coast, Captain Walton and his company set out on 13 Feb. to offer assistance to the Whig <sup>[7]</sup> forces. They arrived at Cross Creek only to find that the Loyalists had been defeated at Moore's Creek Bridge <sup>[8]</sup> the previous day. Allen and his companions missed their first chance to do battle, but Walton's company was given the honor of returning the captured prisoners to Hillsborough. Before they reached Hillsborough, however, they were met by two companies of mounted troops under Captains Robert Mebane and Abraham Shephard, who took charge of the prisoners. Walton and his company subsequently were discharged from service. Allen returned home; a few months later his six-months' term expired.

Not long after the expiration of this first term, Allen became an ensign in a company commanded by Captair Benjamin Cleveland <sup>[9]</sup>. The company soon received orders to pursue Colonel [James?] Roberts and his Tory brigade in western North Carolina. Cleveland and his men took up the chase and followed Roberts well into Virginia but were unable to overtake the elusive Tories. After three weeks they learned to their dismay that Roberts had disbanded his forces and sent them home. Early in 1778, Cleveland was promoted to lieutenant colonel; Allen succeeded him and continued as captain of the company until the close of the war.

In late 1779, the Americans expected a British attack on Charleston, and Captain Allen's company was ordered to assist in Charleston's defense. On 13 Jan. 1780 they began their march. Upon reaching Charleston, they rendezvoused with the Third Regiment of North Carolina Militia, under the command of Colonel Andrew Hampton. Allen and his men were among the troops occupying the town for several weeks in preparation for the anticipated sea approach of the British. Clinton's assault did not come as early as expected, however, and Allen's term of service expired before the major battle began. He and his men were discharged and sent home. Returning to Wilkes County <sup>[10]</sup> (formed from Surry in 1777, effective 1778), Allen led his men in a series of campaigns against the Tories from April to September 1780. The most notable skirmishes involved the wellknown Tory leader Colonel Samuel Bryan <sup>[11]</sup>.

In September 1780, Colonel Cleveland called out all the troops in Wilkes County <sup>[10]</sup> to march against Colonel Patrick Ferguson's army of British regulars and Tories. Allen and his men quickly volunteered for service, but Allen was denied the opportunity to meet the British at Kings Mountain. Although Allen had a horse and was eager to ride with the mounted troops, Colonel Cleveland ordered him to take charge of the infantry units and bring up a rear guard. As Allen's units neared Kings Mountain, they met American soldiers returning from battle with their prisoners; once more Allen had arrived at the scene of battle too late to be a participant.

Allen's final expectation of action came in January 1781, when express brought word that Cornwallis <sup>[12]</sup> was approaching from South Carolina. After marching back and forth between Salem and Hillsborough trying to contact other American units, Allen's company finally joined General Nathanael Greene's <sup>[13]</sup> army at High Rock Ford in Guilford County <sup>[14]</sup>, where they were recuperating from the Battle at Guilford Courthouse <sup>[15]</sup>. After a few days, Allen and his men were discharged and returned to Wilkes County <sup>[10]</sup>.

Captain Allen was in almost continuous service from 1775 to 1781. He was ordered to the scene of most of the major battles in the Carolinas: Moore's Creek Bridge, Charleston, Kings Mountain, and Guilford Courthouse. Yet he took no active role in any of them. It is ironic that at a time when numbers of Americans were deserting the battlefields, a man who

wanted to meet the British in major conflict was never able to do so.

In the midst of the Revolutionary War, Richard Allen, Sr., became in 1778 the first sheriff of the newly created Wilkes County; except for two years, he held the office until 1790. While country sheriff in 1788, Allen was elected to attend the convention in Hillsborough to vote on the proposed federal Constitution. The delegation was headed by William Lenoir<sup>[16]</sup>, whose antipathy to the proposed Constitution influenced the voting pattern of his colleagues. Politics was not Allen's favorite venture, but he agreed to serve one term in the House of Commons of the 1793 General Assembly<sup>[17]</sup>. For several years afterward he enjoyed the peace and quiet of his plantation on Big Bugaboo Creek; but in 1798, at the age of fifty-seven, he was called out of retirement to resume the office of sheriff. Upon completion of this service in 1804, Allen retired permanently.

At some time after the Revolution, Allen was given the rank of colonel of the Wilkes County Militia; though he was long known as Colonel Richard Allen, Sr., the promotion may have been an honorary one.

A devoted Baptist<sup>[18]</sup>, Allen helped to establish Briar Creek Church in 1783 and was chosen as its first clerk, beginning forty-one years of faithful service to the church. By 1824 the advancing infirmities of old age reduced Allen to a virtual invalid, forcing his resignation of this office. He spent the remaining years of his life in the custody and care of his son, Richard, Jr., and his daughter-in-law, Margaret Hampton Allen. When he died at the age of ninety-one, Richard Allen, Sr., was survived by five sons and three daughters: Richard, Jr., Thomas, Jesse, James, William, Mary Kimbrough, Sarah Baugust, and Elizabeth Walsh.

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### Additional Resources:

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### Subjects:

American Revolution (1763-1789)<sup>[21]</sup>

Biography<sup>[22]</sup>

UNC Press<sup>[23]</sup>

### Authors:

Cross, Jerry L.<sup>[24]</sup>

### Origin - location:

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