

Beaufort County 250 Committee
Revolutionary War Biographies

James Black
Beaufort District
Shipwright

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SC250
ANNIVERSARY
American Revolution

BEAUFORT COUNTY
SOUTH CAROLINA

James Black - Beaufort District Shipwright

James Black, shipwright of Beaufort, South Carolina, was possibly born in Scotland as suggested in family traditions or possibly in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania as suggested by a baptism record from the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. The earliest confirmed evidence for him is his 1762 marriage in Philadelphia to Rachel Adams, daughter of William and Rachel (Townsend) Adams of Philadelphia. The compelling evidence that he and Rachel moved from Philadelphia to Beaufort is a 1785 Power of Attorney that Rachel executed during the probate of her father's estate in Philadelphia.

James and Rachel probably moved to South Carolina between 1762 and 1764, as the *South Carolina Gazette* of 3 Dec 1764 announced "a new ship, built by Mr. Black (one of the builders lately come from the Northward) for Captain Clement Lempriere, was launched at Hobcaw" - Hobcaw Creek is in present-day Mt Pleasant, SC. At the time Black was working in the Pritchard Shipyard. He and Rachel likely moved to the Beaufort area the following year, as the 28 Sep 1765 edition of the *South Carolina Gazette* commented that shipbuilding was being "carried on with great spirit at Beaufort, Port-Royal" and that "a pink-stern Ship, built by Mr. Black, will be ready to launch there next Monday."

James made four known purchases of property in the Beaufort area. In 1772, he purchased 50 acres on the eastern bounds of the town of Beaufort where Col. Thomas Middleton had operated a shipyard; over time, the land became known as Black's Point. His other three purchases were made during the Revolutionary War. In 1777, he purchased a house and town lot in Beaufort adjacent to Black's Point along with 500 acres on the southern tip of Daufuskie Island. The following year, he also purchased 400 acres known as Cat Island on the Beaufort River. All four properties were bequeathed to his children in his will, recorded in 1780.

James served with the militias of Beaufort District on at least three occasions during the Revolutionary War, and he also provided ship-building services to the fledgling Navy of South Carolina. His name is associated with the capture of the British ship *Phillipa* near Savannah, Georgia in July 1775 and with the defense of Savannah during the Battle of the Rice Boats in March 1776, when he helped to disable merchant vessels that the British had seized.

In May 1779, Black was severely wounded during a British night-time attack at Mathews Plantation on Johns Island, SC while Captain John Leaycraft of Hilton Head was in command during Colonel Edward Barnwell's absence. He died the following year while the Revolution was still ongoing and a month after the birth of his youngest child Mary and is believed to be buried in St Helena Parish Churchyard, though official church registers do not confirm it.