

Jesse Walton, the Founder of Jonesborough

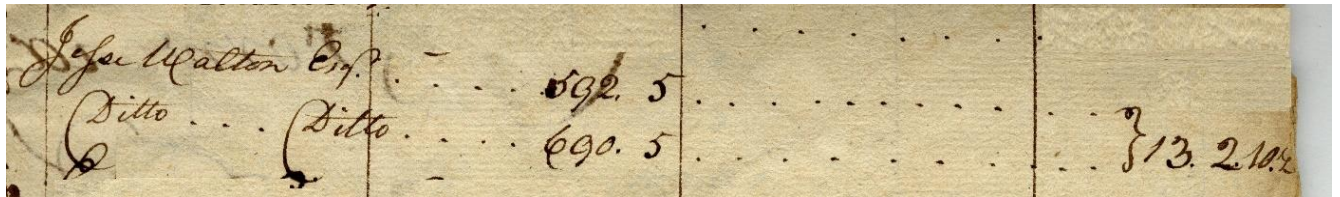
I remember many years ago, when I began to earnestly attempt to learn more about local history, I heard the name, "Jesse Walton," and wondered who he was. Even today, he slips off my radar, and I decided that America's 250th would be the occasion that we tell you about this important, unsung hero.

Jesse Walton was born in Virginia to parents, William Walton and Emmeline Cobbin in Goochland County, Virginia in 1740. By the start of the Revolutionary War, Walton had moved his family south into North Carolina, living just north of Winston-Salem. It was there that Jesse enlisted in the patriot army.

It is believed that Jesse married Mary Walker around 1775, likely in Surry County, North Carolina. They were the parents of William Walker Walton, George Walton, Robert Walton, Rachel Walton, Killis Walton and Mary Carter Walton.

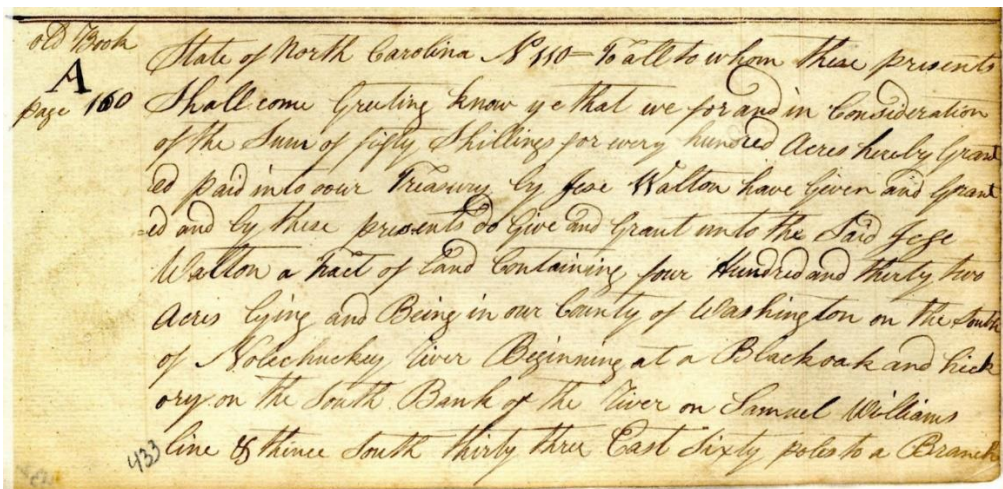
The local Native Americans attacked Fort Watauga, Long Island, Nolichucky, and other areas in 1776. It was at that time that 2nd Major Jesse Walton was sent to Northeast Tennessee to battle the Overhill Cherokee towns along the Little Tennessee River. He became a part of the garrison forces at Fort Williams, near the Jacob Brown Settlement on the Nolichucky River. He must have liked what he saw in this area, as he set up residence here.

In 1778, Jesse Walton was elected to the House of Commons, as a representative of the Washington District, and was made a justice of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions.



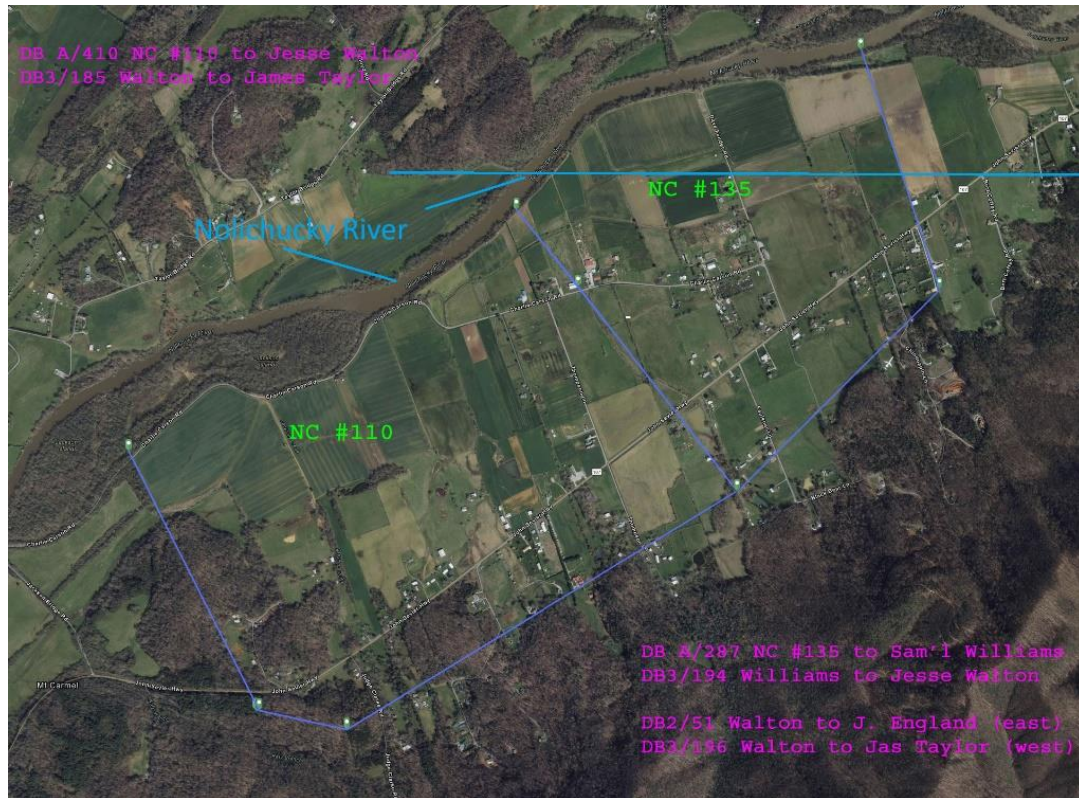
1778 "Sheriff's Report to Court" entry for Jesse Walton.

This document is a type of listing of the residents of "Washington County, North Carolina," and is housed in the Washington County Archives, RG5, tax lists.



North Carolina Land Grant #110 to Jesse Walton

In 1782, Walton obtained a North Carolina land grant (#110) for 432 acres. Recorded in Deed Book A, page 410, and dated Oct 7, 1782. The property was on the Nolichucky River, bordering Samuel Williams' line. It is believed that he entered this property in 1778. The 1778 tax list confirms, as Walton is on the "Sheriff's Report to Court" for that year. The list shows two pieces of property, for a total of 1283 acres. The second piece of property on the image below was originally North Carolina land grant #135, granted to Samuel Williams, and later sold to Jesse Walton.

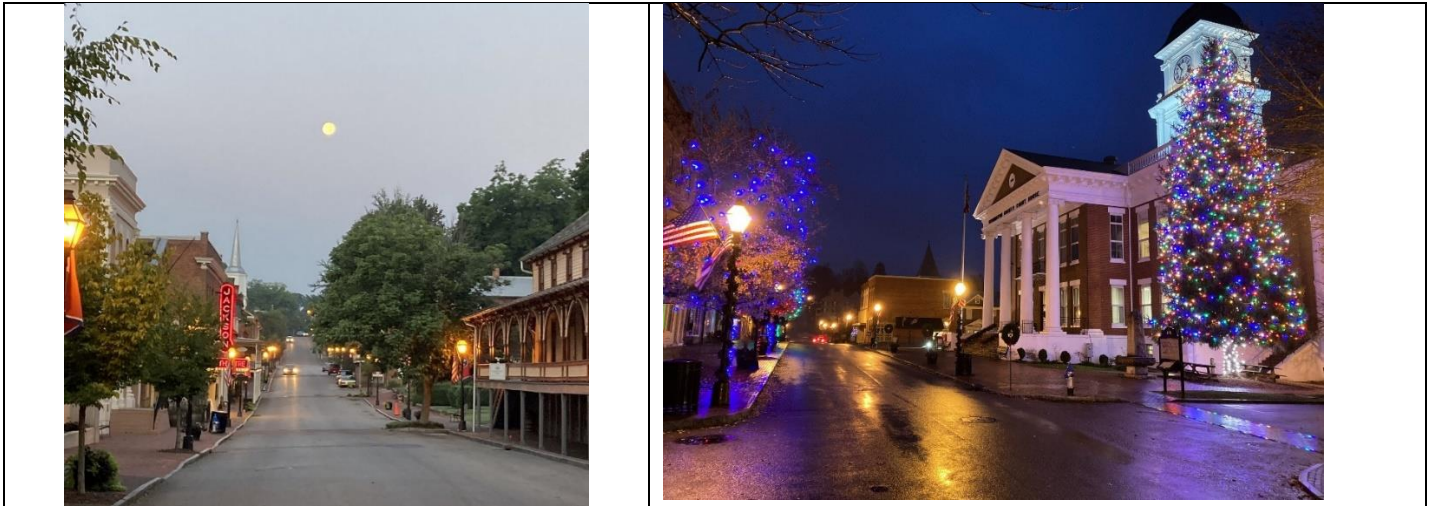


If you're still wondering why he was so important to our area, here's the answer:

In January 1779, as a member of the North Carolina Legislature at Halifax, Walton introduced a bill to lay out a town in Washington County to be called Jonesborough in honor of Willie Jones, a North Carolinian who had promoted the interests of the settlers who had ventured into the area across the mountains. The bill named Jesse Walton, John Woods, George Russell, James Stuart, and Benjamin Clark as commissioners to lay out the town and direct building, to number lots, take subscriptions for them, and provide for a fair drawing for the lots purchased. Jesse Walton also purchased nine of the original town lots.

"Thus was launched the first town established in the Tennessee County; and Jesse Walton well deserves the title of founder, though the people of Jonesborough of our day are unaware of the part he played in the location and founding of the town..."

Samuel Cole Williams, author of "The Founder of Tennessee's First Town—Major Jesse Walton."



Jonesborough, photographs by Donna Briggs

Sometime around 1781 and 1782, Walton sold his property here and moved to Georgia. Ironically, after spending so much time defending the settlers and forts, he was killed in battle by the Cherokees on August 10, 1789, in Heard County, Georgia. His grave is not marked.

“He left the record of a man of elemental force and dignity, a record of essential honor and true worth that should not be permitted to slip into oblivion by the Westerners whom he served in the stressful days of 1777-84.”

Samuel Cole Williams, author of “The Founder of Tennessee’s First Town—Major Jesse Walton.”

The Archive has only one document bearing his signature.

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