

Life and Times – John Orr – 29 Mar 2014

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John Orr is believed to be the first of his name in this country; he was a Scotchman, a younger son of Reverend Alexander Orr, whose family base was in Muirkirk, in West Scotland, where John was born in 1728. His mother was Agnes Dalrymple, from Waterside, in mid-south Scotland. The surname, Orr, was taken from a small river of that name on which the family had settled in Scotland and he would later name his homestead in Northern Virginia 'Waterside'.

John had been a merchant in Whitehaven, England, and he recounted in a deposition taken 5 August 1782 in Loudoun County that he came to Virginia in May of 1753 at age 26. He settled in Leedstown on

the Northern Neck of Virginia, in an area lying between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. In 1761 he married Susannah Grayson, who was 16 at the time and was the daughter of Susannah Monroe and Captain Benjamin Grayson. Of interesting historical note, Susannah Monroe was a great aunt of President James Monroe.

His patriotic service started well before 1775. He was one of the signers of the Leedstown Resolutions – a courageous protest against the Stamp Act, executed on 27 February 1766 by the citizens of Westmoreland County, Virginia.

As a merchant, John Orr became wealthy but seems to have had trouble during the period of time leading up to the revolution collecting debts owed to him. In 1769, he lost his land in the Northern Neck and moved to “Waterside” which was located along the west banks of Cub Run in an area which today lies between Lee Highway and Interstate 66. There he and Susannah raised their four sons and four daughters.



During the Revolutionary War, Virginia Publick Claims show that John Orr provided 800 pounds of beef “for public use” in 1780.



On 20 July 1795 in what was described as a cloudburst, John Orr was drowned as he attempted to ford Cub Run on his horse and he was buried on his property. In the mid 1970s, family members were instrumental in effecting the removal of John Orr’s gravestone and that of his daughter Jane Maria to the cemetery at Saint John’s Episcopal Church where they stand today.