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Embracing Local History: Part 95 – REVOLUTIONARY WAR VETERAN JAMES FLETCHER



*Grave of Revolutionary War Soldier,
James Fletcher (1758-1845),
located on a remote farm in
Adair County, MO.*

*Left, Larry Evans, Historical Society Board Member,
and right, Dr. Ferrel Moots*

(<https://zeta.creativecirclecdn.com/kirksville/original/>)

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Posted Wednesday, March 20, 2024 3:57 pm

By Blytha Ellis, President Adair County Historical Society and Museum

Pvt. James Fletcher (1758-1845) is the second of two Revolutionary War soldiers to be found buried in Adair County. The first was Thomas Lay who was discussed in our previous episode.

James Fletcher was born in Culpeper County, Virginia, the son of James and Susannah Fletcher who came to the United States from Cumberland, England.

James is buried on a hill in a remote farm location in Adair County near the Chariton River. Forty-seven years after his death, great care was taken by individuals and organizations to preserve his grave. In 1892, the location of his grave was described in the "Kirksville Journal" newspaper as being on the Anspaugh Farm near the Lower Iron Bridge of the Chariton River at Yarrow, Mo. This location remains on private property but now has a different owner.

On Sunday, August 30, 1892, almost 1,000 people gathered at James Fletcher's grave to pay tribute to this old soldier who had been buried on his farm in 1845. The events that day

featured the unveiling of a monument that had been erected by the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic). It bears the inscription, "James Fletcher, A Revolutionary War Soldier, Born April 29, 1758, Died Sept. 27, 1845. Rest Soldier Rest. Thy warfare's o'er."

The festivities that day included a picnic and several speakers. The keynote address was given by Professor G. H. Laughlin. Other speakers included Judge C. P. Hess of Macon, and the following men from Kirksville: J. M. McCall, L. B. Dodson, Capt. James Berry who spoke on behalf of the Mexican War Veterans, Rev. John Lagie who represented the Union soldiers, and Prof. B. P. Gentry who spoke for the Confederates.

The honoree's grandson, Rev. William L. Fletcher (1822-1906), also spoke and provided family information.

It seems that James Fletcher's life cannot be traced with a great deal of accuracy due to the fact that at least four different men named James Fletcher served in the Revolutionary War. Family trees on Ancestry.com have conflicting information regarding wives, children, etc. as these different men with the same name have become mixed up

However, in 2016, a relative named Denise Knowles wrote the following: "I am a direct descendant of the Revolutionary War soldier, James Fletcher. According to my family records, his only wife was my 5x great-grandmother, Mary (Smoot), whose grave we have not found. Their son, Barton Fletcher, my 4x great-grandfather, married Elizabeth Logston. Barton's son, David Crocket Fletcher, married into the Locke family. Another son, William L. Fletcher, was one of the "Old Settlers" of Kirksville. He is buried at Bear Creek Cemetery in Adair County, Mo., with his two wives, one being Emily (Phipps), my 3x great grandmother." Still another son of Barton was Joseph L. Fletcher.

James Fletcher is listed on the U.S. Pension Roll of 1835 as having been a private in the Revolutionary War from Virginia. He was a resident of Fauquier County, Va., when he enlisted for three months on October 5, 1777, in the Virginia State Militia. This was the next day after the British defeated the Americans at the Battle of Germantown, Pa. Nineteen-year-old James enlisted under the command of Lt. Col. Martin Pickett. His regiment was attached to and performed the same duties as the 3rd Virginia Regiment of Regulars.

Pvt. Fletcher marched through Frederick, Maryland, and then through part of Pennsylvania. During this part of his military service, he served in no battles and was discharged on or about January 10, 1778.

James enlisted again for three months on or about October 1, 1778, under Col. Armstead Churchwell and served under Capt. John Ball. During this tour, he marched down the Potomac River to the same station where he was located during his previous enlistment. Here, he took sick and was unable to serve for a time. Again, he served in no battles and was discharged in about January 1779.

A year later, in the winter of 1779-80, James enlisted again in Fauquier County, Va., under Capt. Ricksey. With this unit, James marched down the Rappahannock River in Virginia

where the British had come upon Col. Brunt's base. No enemy was encountered. This enlistment lasted only three weeks before he was discharged. It has been reported that after his discharge, James apprehended a deserter of the regular Army and, at his own expense, delivered the prisoner seventy miles to the recruiting office at Winchester, Va.

In his pension application, James stated that after the Revolutionary War, he lived in Virginia, North Carolina and Kentucky before moving to Missouri. James' son, Elias Fletcher, was born in Virginia in 1788. His son, Barton, was born in North Carolina in 1799.

In 1820, James was in Wilkes Co., N.C., and in 1830, he was in Hart County, Ky. By 1831, James and some of his sons were in Randolph County, Mo. James is listed as having applied for a Revolutionary War Pension (based on his service with the Virginia State Troops) on March 4, 1831, in Randolph County, Mo. In 1835, he received a land grant in Randolph County. However, it should be remembered that in 1835, Randolph County extended to the Iowa border. There was no Macon nor Adair County. Macon was organized in 1837 and Adair in 1841.

In 1838, James' wife, Mary (Smoot) died in Goshen Township of Macon County, Mo. When Adair County was formed in 1841, the area known as Goshen Twp. became a part of Adair County, and this township name was eliminated.

In the 1840 census, for the only time ever, the federal census listed all surviving Revolutionary War veteran pensioners, and James was listed among these in Goshen Township of Macon County, Mo. Thus, the 1840 Macon County census would have included what is now Adair County and the area of Yarrow where James had his farm.

Some Adair County residents may remember Virgil G. Fletcher (1902-1972), prominent brick contractor in this area who lived on South First Street in Kirksville. He was a great-grandson of Revolutionary War soldier James Fletcher. Virgil's parents were Joseph L. and Sarah (Salisbury) Fletcher who are buried at Bear Creek Cemetery in Adair County. Joseph, a Civil War veteran, was the son of Barton Fletcher, one of the sons of James Fletcher.

Since Virgil Fletcher was a brick contractor, he made a large brick tombstone shaped like a fireplace for his parents at Bear Creek Cemetery. However, the ground on which this was placed was uneven, and there was not a good foundation. This tombstone has now fallen over and lies in many pieces in a ditch at Bear Creek.

William Logston Fletcher was another son of Barton Fletcher, and he will figure into a later episode of Adair County history.

(Thank you to historian Gary Lloyd for his research on the life of Pvt. Fletcher and for his permission to publish much of that information here.)

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