

Was There a Grand Master of America?

There is no national “Grand Lodge of the United States of America,” but there was a Grand Master “of and for America.”

Who was he? Why is he important to North Carolina Masonry?

His name was Joseph Montfort. He was born in England in 1724. He was a member of Royal White Hart Lodge No. 403 (now No. 2 on the North Carolina roll of lodges) in Halifax, North Carolina. Montfort was a merchant, a colonel of provincial troops, and Treasurer for the northern half of the province of North Carolina.

Henry Somerset, fifth Duke of Beaufort, was Grand Master of the ‘Premier’ Grand Lodge of England—commonly referred to as ‘the Moderns,’ and reputedly commissioned Montfort “Provincial Grand Master of and for America.”

In this capacity, Montfort chartered somewhere between 10 and 15 new lodges in North Carolina and Virginia. However, despite his apparently commission as “Provincial Grand Master of and for American,” the records of the Grand Lodge of England reveal this title was actually a typo—an error committed on the part of the calligrapher. The record of Montfort’s commission in the minutes of the Grand Lodge of England reveal he was intended to be the Provincial Grand Master “of and for North Carolina.” However, in an era when communication was difficult, few would doubt the beautifully engraved document contained any errors. And Montfort took full advantage of the error, signing his name and “official” title on many documents. However, he rarely exercised his authority outside his jurisdiction.

When North Carolina began to defy the pronouncements of the Royal Government in 1774 and 1775, particularly following the adoption of the Halifax Resolved on April 12, 1775, Montfort joined the colonial cause for greater autonomy and, eventually, independence.

Montfort died less than two months before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence by the Continental Congress on the Fourth of July in 1776.

Provincial Grand Master Joseph Montfort is buried on the grounds of Royal White Hart Lodge, his home lodge, in Halifax, North Carolina.