

1949-11-16

1949, November 16

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Recommended Citation

Jones, M. (1949, November 16). Cleveland County Early Days, The Daily Star. Fay Webb Gardner Collection, Gardner-Webb University Archives, John R. Dover Memorial Library, Boiling Springs, NC.

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Nov 16 - 1949

In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

HISTORICAL SETTING OF BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN

One hundred and sixty-nine years ago, on October 7, 1780, an event occurred which changed the course of world history. This was the day that a band of angry, wet, hungry, Whig patriots caught up with Major Patrick Ferguson's British army—more than half of whom were Tories—which had encamped on King's Mountain, just 15 miles from Shelby, in what was then Lincoln (later Cleveland) county, and defeated them in battle.

If the American eagle were to roost where he obtained his freedom, it would not be over the old Liberty Hall in Philadelphia. He would spread his mighty pinions over the little mountain called King's situated just across the line in South Carolina.

Such a little battle as battles go! It lasted but an hour. It is said that no other such battle is recorded in the annals of American history; none so decisive; none showing such bravery and daring by untrained soldiers; and none so far reaching in its contribution to American independence.

Thomas Jefferson declared that King's Mountain was the turning point of the war for Independence. **TORY RESISTANCE BROKEN**

This victory at Kings Mountain broke the back of Tory resistance; put new hope in the patriot cause; and made possible the victory at Cowpens in January; the victory at Guilford Courthouse in March, and subsequent victories ultimately resulting in the surrender at Yorktown a year later on October 19th, 1781, when General Cornwallis surrendered, as a re-

sult of which on September 3rd, 1783, a treaty of peace was signed in Paris, and England acknowledged American independence.

In 1780 it looked as though the Colonists' cause in the South was hopelessly lost, and the Continental Congress seriously considered suing for peace on terms of independence for the northern colonies and leaving the South a British possession.

Even Washington said, "I had ceased to hope."

At this time General Cornwallis sent Major Patrick Ferguson into the western section of the State for the purpose of enlisting the Tories in western North Carolina. Ferguson and his force of 1,100 regulars and Tories were

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quartered at Gilberttown, then the capital of Rutherford county.

THREATENED PATRIOTS WITH HANGING AND FIRE

Maj. Ferguson sent word by a paroled prisoner to the officers and men of the Watauga settlement in the extreme northwestern section of the state that, "If they did not desist from their opposition to British arms, he would march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders and lay the country to waste with fire and sword." This message was delivered to Col. Shelby and others, and accomplished more than Ferguson anticipated.

Shelby got in touch with Sevier, McDowell, Hampton, Col. Cleveland joined them. About the 25th of September the gathering of the clans began, mostly Scotch-Irish Presbyterians furious at Ferguson's threat of halter and torch!

ANGRY FARMERS REVOLT

These men were not fighting about taxation. They were indignant because their homes and lives were threatened. There was no organized army. Just little groups of untrained men enlisting under certain commissioned officers, men with no training except in the ways of Indian fighting; men who new the woods like deer, and were expert shots. They came from eastern Tennessee; from Washington county, Virginia, from Wilkes and Surry, from Rutherford, Burke and Lincoln counties, from York and Chester counties in South Carolina. Some just left their work in the field, got a gun and joined the crowd. Other officers were Williams, Lacy, Hill, Winston, Chronicle, and Hambright.

NO MONEY FOR EQUIPMENT

There was no money to fit out any sort of expedition to fight Ferguson. Col. Sevier went to Adair, the entry-taker for Sullivan County, who had just received money for certain North Carolina lands, and asked him to let him have these state funds.

Said Adair: "I have no authority to let you have this \$12,000.00. It belongs to the impoverished treasury of North Carolina; but if the country is overrun by the British our liberty is gone! Let the money go too!"

With this money guns and ammunition were bought. Each man was armed with a Deckard rifle. The men furnished their own horses and took some food with them, including parched meal and maple sugar. Other equipment included a blanket, a drinking cup (or gourd), and maybe an iron skillet to heat water or cook a rabbit.

When Maj. Ferguson's spies told him that the backwater men were coming after him, he moved quickly in an effort to get to Cornwallis at Charlotte.

When the Mountain Men reached Gilberttown and found that Ferguson with his 1,100 Regulars and Tories had gone, they followed in haste. Some of them spent the night in the neighborhood of Patterson Springs. All the pursuing patriots met at Cowpens, South Carolina, on the night of October 6th, 1780. There were more than a thousand of them.

900 PICKED MEN

Next morning 900 men—with the best horses—were chosen to go with pursuers, leaving the others to follow later. Each of the 900 men was pledged to fight the enemy to a finish; neither to ask nor to give quarter.

I have read that more than a dozen of the Whig gentlemen brought their Negro body servants with them. These Negroes took part in the fighting, and acquitted themselves creditably.

PRAYER FOR VICTORY

During a s. o. p for rest that rainy morning, a Presbyterian minister who was a member of the band, offered a prayer for victory. Later, while the fighting was in progress, he, with a good Baptist preacher named Logan, prayed (behind the lines) for the success of the patriots.

SURPRISE ATTACK

It was on a Saturday afternoon about two o'clock when this company of angry, determined patriots came upon Maj. Ferguson and his British army who had made camp on Kings Mountain, and took them completely by surprise. Some of the men were getting a bath; others were shaving.

When Ferguson encamped on this mountain he is said to have declared, "This is Kings Mountain. I take this mountain in the name of the King. All the devils of hell, and even God Almighty himself shall not drive me from it." And God didn't! Patrick Ferguson's bones lie there to this day!

The patriots were led by Col. Campbell. There was fierce fighting on both sides. The men obeyed orders of their leaders and yelled like Indians and fought like demons.

Col. Frederick Hambright, whose home was near Grover, led a band of men. During the fighting he was seriously wounded in the hip; but he refused to retire, and continued directing his "brave boys" in a mixture of German and English.

BRITISH ARMY SURRENDERS

After an hour's fighting Maj. Ferguson fell with seven bullets in his body. When he died the British army surrendered. Of the 1,100 men 400 were killed or died from wounds. The remainder were made prison-

ers. Some days later nine of the captured Tory leaders were hanged at Gilberttown.

The Colonists' loss was 28 killed and 62 wounded.

The loss of Maj. Ferguson and his Regulars forced Cornwallis to retire from North Carolina and Virginia. He withdrew into South Carolina. Instead of a campaign of conquest he inaugurated a campaign of defense.

NEW HOPE INSPIRED

The result of the battle electrified the patriots of the South, and the tide of war turned immediately. Kings Mountain Victory brought renewed hope to the Southern patriots and caused a general uprising of patriotic armies to drive the invaders from their borders. A new spirit of victory and independence thrilled them—especially in North Carolina.

There is small doubt but that for Kings Mountain victory, the South—if not all the colonies—would have remained under British rule.

DIVIDING LINE CONTROVERSY

At the time of this battle the site of the battleground was considered North Carolina territory, and the reports of the battle were made to Lincoln county authorities.

But ever since 1695 there had been a bitter controversy between North Carolina and South Carolina as to the location of the dividing line between the states.

Many years ago a compromise line was agreed on, to begin at sea 30 miles west of the Cape Fear River at Goat Island, and to run northwest to the thirty-fifth degree of latitude.

Had this true 35th degree been located and followed west, as agreed on, York, S. C., would be sitting astride the line and the historic battleground of King's Mountain would be in North Carolina.

There are numerous legends why the 35th degree was not properly located. One is the surveyors' instruments were not true. Another is, that about the time they reached the vicinity of York and the battlefield there was so much good apple brandy and corn liquor that the surveyors could not see straight and went around in circles.

In 1928 the line was again surveyed and marked. The Courts ruled that the site of the battle was legally in South Carolina.

In Moultrie's Memoirs the statement is made that the Mountain range took its name from the owner named King. He lived at the foot of the mountain. King's creek got its name from the same source.

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