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Kings Mountain

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Kings Mountain

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

South Carolina

by George C. Mackenzie



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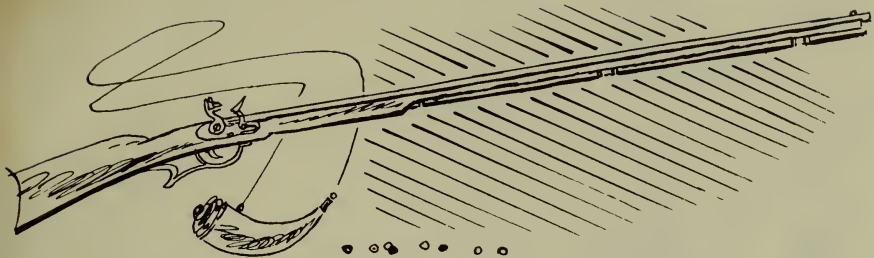


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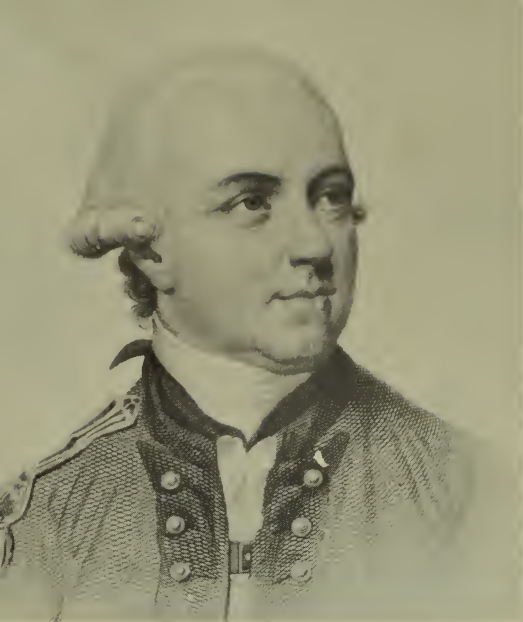


The United States Monument, erected 1909.



THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN on October 7, 1780, was an overwhelming blow struck by American patriots against British forces engaged in the relentless Southern Campaign of the American Revolution. The military importance of this sharp engagement was described in strong and realistic terms by Sir Henry Clinton, then commander in chief of the British forces in North America. He spoke of the battle as "an Event which was immediately productive of the worst Consequences to the King's affairs in South Carolina, and unhappily proved the first Link of a Chain of Evils that followed each other in regular Succession until they at last ended in the total loss of America."

Kings Mountain was a surprising action that halted the triumphant northward movement of Lord Cornwallis, British commander in the South, who had undertaken to subdue that section in a final effort to end the Revolution. Though far removed from the main course of the Revolution, the hardy southern Appalachian frontiersmen rose quickly to their own defense at Kings Mountain and brought unexpected defeat to Cornwallis' Tory invaders under Maj. Patrick Ferguson. With this great patriot victory came an immediate turn of events in the war in the South. Cornwallis abandoned his foothold in North Carolina and withdrew to a defensive position in upper South Carolina to await reinforcement. His northward march was thus delayed until January 1781, giving patriot forces an opportunity to organize a new offensive in the South. After Kings Mountain there also came a sharp upturn of patriot spirit in the Southern Piedmont which completely unnerved the Tory organization in the region. This renewed patriot resistance led eventually to the American victory at Yorktown in 1781. The engagement at Kings Mountain was not only a memorable example of the individual valor of the American frontier fighter, but also of the deadly effectiveness of his hunting rifle.



Sir Henry Clinton, commander in chief of British Forces in America during the Southern Campaign. Courtesy New York Historical Society.

The War in the South Begins

At the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1775 the struggle between the American patriots and British forces was fought mainly in the New England and Middle Atlantic colonies. The driving of the royal governors from North and South Carolina soon revealed to the British the importance of holding the southern provinces. Early in 1776 the British War Office sent a combined military and naval expedition to the coast of the Carolinas in an effort to restore the King's authority. Hopes of gaining a foothold in North Carolina were quickly shattered. Patriot militia decisively defeated loyalists of the Cape Fear area on February 27, at the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge. Sir Henry Clinton, who had landed a small force near Wilmington, withdrew from the State. Clinton, and the British fleet under Sir Peter Parker, then undertook the conquest of Charleston, S. C. The successful defense of Fort Moultrie, on Sullivan's Island, at the entrance to Charleston Harbor, closed with the brilliant American victory of June 28. Thoroughly discouraged, the British expedition left the South and the first attempt to conquer it ended in failure.

The Southern Campaign

In 1778 the British again turned to the South in their final major campaign to end the American Revolution. Military failures in the North during 1777-78 and a strong belief in southern loyalist strength en-

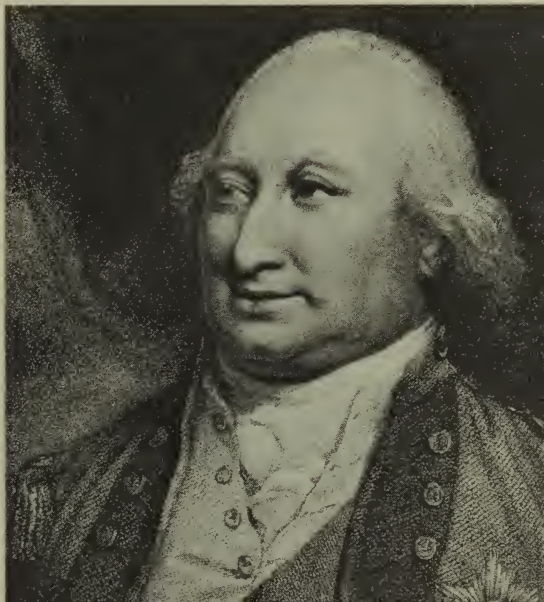
couraged the British War Office to undertake a full-scale southern invasion in the autumn of 1778. The American-French alliance following the British defeat at Saratoga and the threat of French intervention also made it urgent for the British to move southward. They hoped to obtain food and recruits in the South and an effective base from which to attack the remaining patriot armies in the East. A British military and naval expedition was also to assemble in the Chesapeake Bay area and from that point aid the British forces in the South to crush patriot resistance. This time the British were confident of success. They strongly doubted that the South, thinly populated and torn by sectional strife between patriot and loyalist groups, could unite and fight off the invader.

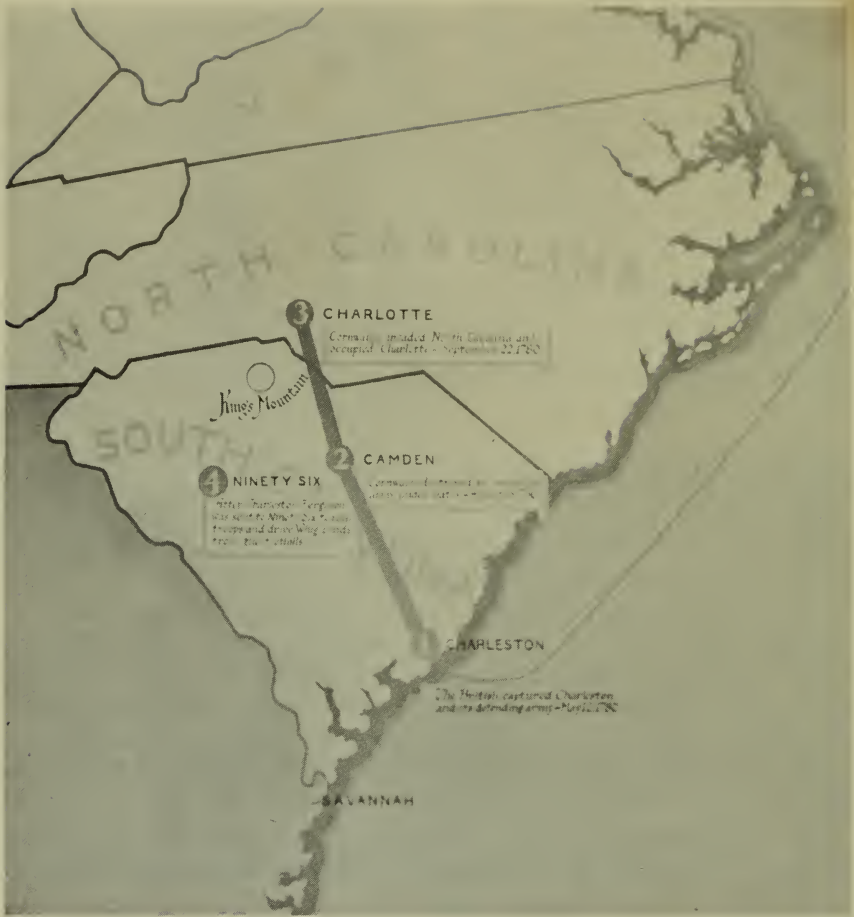
Conquest of Georgia and South Carolina

The ports of Savannah and Charleston were vitally needed to support the new invasion and the British set out first to capture them. At the direction of Sir Henry Clinton, the first British landing was made in Georgia, and Savannah fell on December 29, 1778. By February 1779, Augusta and other key points in the State were captured, and by summer the British dominated Georgia. Their first move against Charleston ended in failure in June 1779, but they successfully forestalled a combined French and American attempt to recapture Savannah in the fall of that year.

The fortunes of war turned further against the southern patriots in 1780. Returning to Charleston in the spring of 1780, Clinton besieged the city with overwhelming numbers and forced the surrender

Lt. Gen. Earl Charles Cornwallis, British commander in the South, 1780–81. Courtesy Clements Library, University of Michigan.





British campaign in the Carolinas during 1780 before the Battle of Kings Mountain.

of Gen. Benjamin Lincoln's American garrison on May 12. The loss of this large, well-equipped army was a marked disaster for the patriot cause in the South and greatly strengthened the British position in South Carolina. Soon Clinton could depart for New York by sea, leaving Lord Cornwallis in command of a large British force which in a few months quickly occupied fortified points in much of the State.

Believing South Carolina to be largely subdued, Cornwallis now began a northward march for the purpose of invading and overrunning North Carolina. His plans were upset temporarily by the advance of a new American army under the command of Gen. Horatio Gates, the patriot victor at Saratoga. Appointed by Congress to succeed General Lincoln as American commander in the South, Gates had reached North Carolina in July. Moving southward to capture



Gen. Horatio Gates, American commander in the South during most of 1780. Courtesy Emmet Collection, New York Public Library.

the important British post of Camden, S. C., he commanded an army composed of veteran Delaware and Maryland continental troops and raw Virginia and North Carolina militia. In a surprise meeting for both forces near Camden on August 16, 1780, Gates' tired and dis-

Scene at the Battle of Camden, August 16, 1780, which gave the British almost complete control of South Carolina. From a painting by Chappel. Courtesy The Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.



organized army was crushingly defeated by Cornwallis. The last large organized American army in the South had been destroyed, and the British, more than ever before, appeared to be invincible. Their triumph at Camden opened the way for the resumption of Cornwallis' triumphant march and the invasion of North Carolina in September 1780.

Whigs and Tories in 1780

The British victories at Charleston and Camden in the summer of 1780 increased the bitter strife between the loyalists (Tories) and the patriots (Whigs) in the South. Both groups had been active in partisan warfare since the invasion of Georgia in 1778. Cornwallis' march through South Carolina greatly encouraged the Tories. Many of them from the coastal and interior regions of the Carolinas now joined him as active recruits. Overawed by British force, other inhabitants of this area renewed their allegiance to the King or remained neutral to escape damage to themselves and their property. To counteract the Loyalist movement, daring partisan leaders including Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, and Andrew Pickens, now took the leadership in strengthening Whig resistance. Desperate and unexpected assaults by day and night upon the advancing British and their outposts quickly began throughout the lowlands and upcountry. While Cornwallis was gathering supporters by threats and force or by allowing only Loyalists to trade, the Whigs remained steadfast in their devotion to personal and political freedom. Soon the merciless nature of the Tory attacks upon outlying Whig settlements and Whig guerrilla fighters so disgusted the neutral citizens of the region that many of them turned to the Whig cause.

The seriousness of the day-to-day combat between Whig and Tory in the Carolinas is shown in a military report of the time:

The animosity between the Whigs and Tories of this State renders their situation truly deplorable. There is not a day passes but there are more or less who fall a sacrifice to this savage disposition. The Whigs seem determined to extirpate the Tories and the Tories the Whigs. Some thousands have fallen in this way in this quarter, and the evil rages with more violence than ever. If a stop cannot be put to these massacres, the country will be depopulated in a few months more, as neither Whig nor Tory can live.

The southern Whigs included among their numbers both rich and poor. They were people who placed principle above personal gain. They came, or were descended from people who had come, from Western Europe to America to escape religious and civil persecution and to find a new life where the dignity of the individual would be respected.

Among these immigrants were numerous Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. They had settled first in the eastern sections of Pennsylvania and Virginia. Later, they migrated in considerable numbers to the interior of the Carolinas and present-day eastern Tennessee. As they cleared new land for settlement and established their churches, they enjoyed for the first time complete religious and civil liberty. Moreover, they believed in the family as the important unit in all human life and patterned their lives accordingly. The invasion of the South now threatened to destroy their democratic society. They also feared it would lead to the loss of their hard-won individual liberty and force

Recruits for the British Army. Drawing by H. W. Bunbury, London, 1780. Courtesy New York Public Library.



them to give up their right to develop the frontier and its resources as they wished.

The British Threaten the Carolina Frontier

When Cornwallis began his march from Charleston, Maj. Patrick Ferguson had been detached to lead a smaller Loyalist force into the western section of South Carolina. Ferguson was ordered to use the settlement of Ninety-Six as a base from which to organize Tory militia, subdue rebellious Whigs, and reestablish British civil government in the upcountry. He was also to protect the western flank of Cornwallis' advancing army.

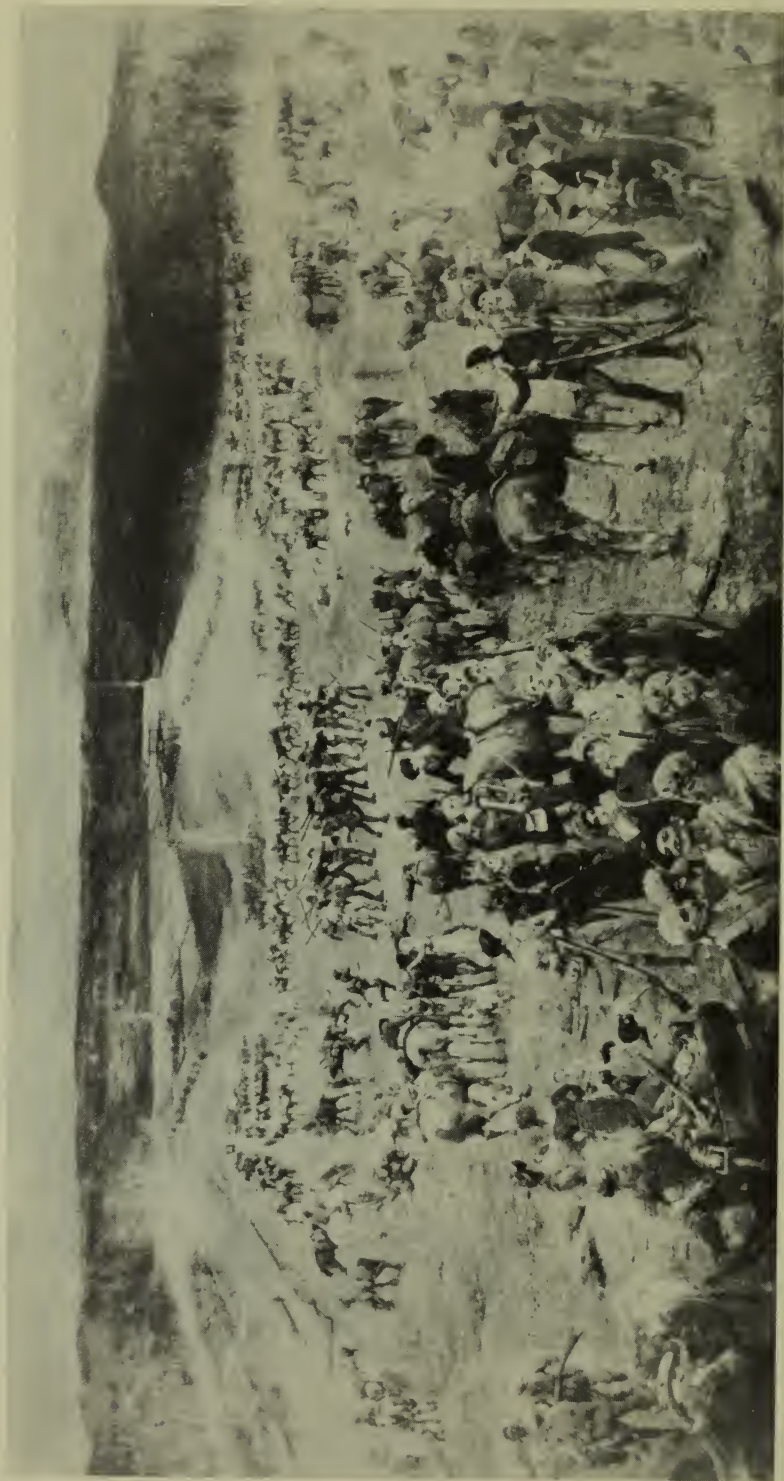
One important stronghold in the Carolinas remained undisturbed by Cornwallis' victories and the Tory raids in the summer of 1780. This was the region of the foothills and ranges of the Appalachian Mountains which stretched through northwestern South Carolina, western North Carolina, and into the present eastern Tennessee. Here, the independent mountain yeomen, largely of Scotch-Irish descent, were establishing a new frontier and protecting their crude homes from the nearer threat of the border Indians. Their free pioneer life had existed without interference from the King's officials, and they were little concerned with the main course of the war on the seaboard. Rumors of Ferguson's activities in the upcountry brought forth a few adventurous mountain men in the summer of 1780. After fighting brief actions with Tories east of the mountains, however, these frontiersmen retired. Victory by such border fighters at the Battle of Musgrove's Mill, on August 18, 1780, caused some of the mountain leaders to fear that Ferguson would soon attempt to avenge this defeat.

Ferguson did not immediately pursue the mountain men. With the news of Cornwallis' success at Camden, he had also received urgent orders to search the upcountry for the patriots under Col. Thomas Sumter. This plan was interrupted by news of Musgrove's Mill and by orders calling Ferguson to a meeting in Camden with Cornwallis. Here, he was informed of the British commander's determination to invade North Carolina at Charlotte in September. Ferguson also learned that his Provincial Corps of American Loyalists was to be detailed from the post of Ninety-Six to join his Tory militia. Finally, he was directed to move with his strengthened force through upper South Carolina and across the North Carolina border, crushing the remaining patriots and rousing the back-country Tories. His advance was intended to protect the rear and western flank of Cornwallis' army which reached Charlotte on September 26.

On September 7 Ferguson pushed across the western North Carolina border. At Gilbert Town (the present Rutherfordton), he issued his famed threat to the back country which aroused the horde of moun-



A frontier North Carolina settlement similar to those from which came the Kings Mountain patriots. Courtesy Charles Scribner's Sons.



"Gathering of the Mountain Men at Sycamore Shoals." From a painting by Lloyd Branson. Courtesy Tennessee State Museum, Nashville.

tain men who eventually brought disaster upon him at Kings Mountain. He expected at Gilbert Town to surprise some of the mountain leaders who had retired there for safety after Musgrove's Mill. In August, however, they had agreed to return to their homes across the mountains and raise a volunteer army to resist Ferguson's advance.

Remaining at Gilbert Town during most of September, Ferguson was a constant menace to the bordering region. From his headquarters, early in the month, he tried to frighten the mountain leaders into submission. To carry out this plan, Ferguson paroled Samuel Phillips, a prisoner, and sent him into the mountains with a message to Col. Isaac Shelby, who commanded the patriot militia of Sullivan County, N. C. According to a well-known account, Ferguson, in this message, solemnly warned Shelby and the other mountain people "that if they did not desist from their opposition to the British arms, he would march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword." He followed this threat with action and pursued a patriot party to the slopes of the Blue Ridge before returning on September 23 to his temporary base at Gilbert Town.

The Gathering of the Mountain Men

At the headwaters of the Watauga, the Holston, and the Nolichucky Rivers, in present-day eastern Tennessee, news of Ferguson's actions was received with growing alarm by the back-country settlers. Their freedom-loving leaders were spurred in their determination to gather a volunteer force with all possible speed for a surprise attack that would destroy the British invader. Meeting at Jonesboro, Shelby and Col. John Sevier, head of the militia in Washington County, N. C., hurriedly adopted a plan for immediate action. They sent forth a final appeal for volunteers, some of whom would remain behind to protect the settlements from the Indians while the main force marched quickly after Ferguson. Additional support was sought urgently from Col. Charles McDowell and Col. Benjamin Cleveland, who commanded other fighting men from the North Carolina border. Pleas for help were also sent to the local militia leaders of adjoining Washington County, Va. After consultation, it was agreed that Col. William Campbell would bring a strong body of Virginia militia. All volunteers were urged to gather by September 25 at Sycamore Shoals, on the banks of the Watauga, near the present site of Elizabethton, Tenn.

On that date over 1,000 of the mountain men assembled at the designated meeting place. In appearance, it was a rough but resourceful looking gathering. Many of the fighters wore hunting shirts of buckskin, breeches and gaiters of tan home-dyed cloth, and wide-

brimmed hats covering long hair tied in a queue. Each was equipped with a knapsack, blanket, and long hunting rifle; most were mounted on horses, but some were on foot. With some had come members of their families and friends to see them off on their dangerous mission. Notable among the militia units present was that of Col. William Campbell which numbered 400 men. To reach Sycamore Shoals many of his men had traveled almost as far as they would in the final march to Kings Mountain.

The gathering was made memorable by the inspiring words of the Reverend Samuel Doak, a pioneer Scotch-Irish clergyman of the Watauga settlements. On the eve of their departure, he sought the Lord's blessing upon these brave men. To inspire and prepare them for the hardships they faced, he retold vividly the biblical story of the rise of Gideon's people against Midianites and of the defeat of those oppressors. At the close of his stirring sermon he urged the mountain men to take as their battle cry: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"

The March From Sycamore Shoals

On the following day, September 26, the great adventure of the mountain men began, and they left Sycamore Shoals on their march over the mountains. Five days later, after covering about 90 miles, they arrived at Quaker Meadows, on the Catawba River. The first part of their route followed old hunting and Indian trails, difficult at times for passage by either man or beast, and this proved to be the most rugged portion of their march to Kings Mountain.

Nearing the crest of the mountains on September 27 in snow that stood above their bootstraps, members of the expedition were alarmed by the desertion of James Crawford and Samuel Chambers. Not only were the patriots afraid that the deserters would warn Ferguson's camp, but also that the traitors would alert the Tories of the region. Despite fears of a possible ambush, the patriots crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains safely on September 29. The two units, into which the volunteer army was divided, passed, respectively, through Gillespie Gap and what is believed to have been McKinney's Gap. Shortly afterwards, they were reunited at Col. Charles McDowell's plantation, at Quaker Meadows, near the present site of Morganton, N. C. Here they rested during the evening of September 30.

In the meantime, Col. Charles McDowell rejoined the patriots on September 28. Before the expedition left Sycamore Shoals, he had undertaken to secure the support of North Carolina patriots living east of the mountains. He brought cheering news on his return. He reported to his colleagues, that, according to his latest information,

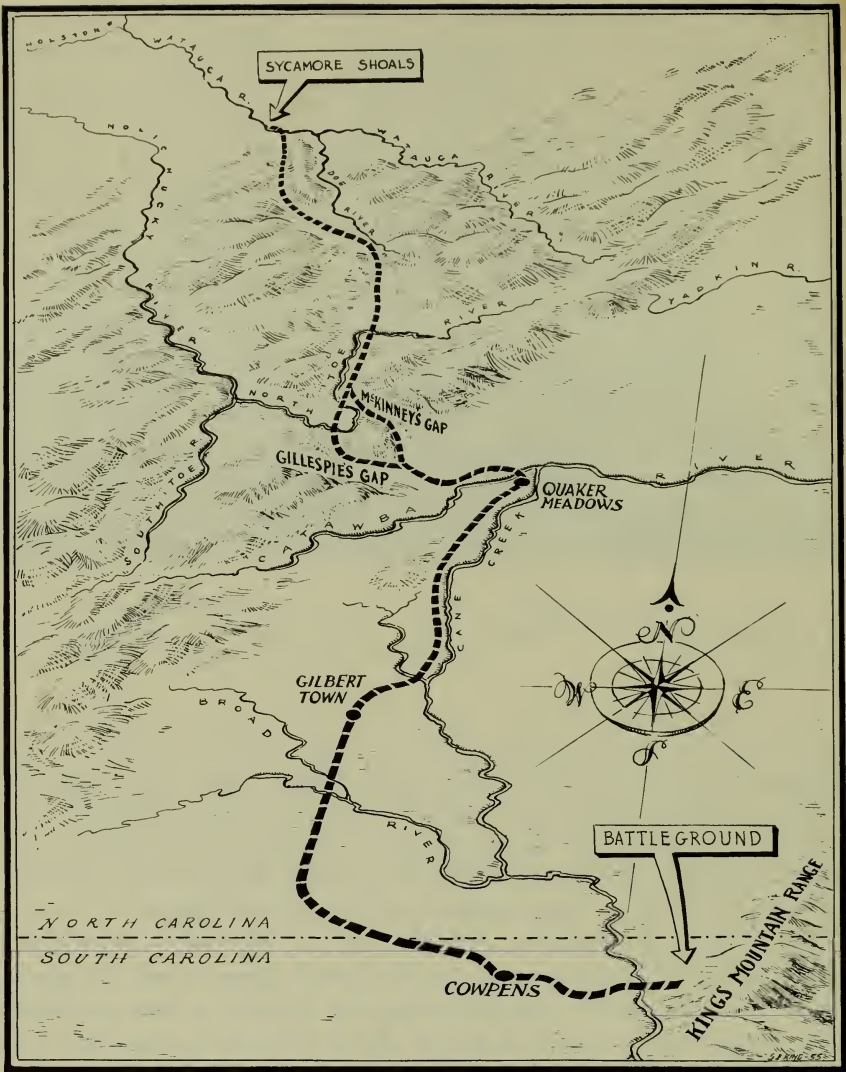


The Council Oak, near Morganton, N. C., under which the patriot leaders decided to continue the pursuit of Ferguson. (This is a view about 1895; the tree was later destroyed in a storm.)

Ferguson was still at Gilbert Town. Of immediate interest was his news that Col. Benjamin Cleveland and Maj. Joseph Winston were rapidly approaching with 350 North Carolinians from Wilkes and Surry Counties. He also reported rumors that South Carolina patriots were gathering under the command of Col. James Williams.

The arrival of Cleveland and Winston on September 30 and the night of pleasant relaxation at the McDowell home raised the spirits of the mountain men. The following day, October 1, they continued their southward march to a gap of South Mountain near the headwaters of Cane Creek. Here they camped during inclement weather through October 2.

While the men rested, the leaders of the expedition met in an evening council to review the progress of the march. First, measures were adopted to correct disorders in the columns resulting from the weariness of the march. More important, however, was the election of Col. William Campbell to serve as temporary commander of the combined volunteer units. In recognition of Col. Charles McDowell's seniority, he was entrusted on October 1 with a mission to General Gates' headquarters to request a permanent commander. He was instructed to ask for the assignment of either Gen. Daniel Morgan or Gen. William Davidson of the American Continental Army. McDowell's regiment was turned over to his brother, Maj. Joseph McDowell.



ROUTE OF MOUNTAIN MEN

Unknown to the patriot expedition, Major Ferguson's army in the meantime had hurriedly left Gilbert Town. Two messages that he received made this withdrawal advisable. In the first, received September 25, Lt. Col. J. H. Cruger, commander of the British post at Ninety-Six, requested Ferguson to intercept a band of Georgia patriots under Col. Elijah Clarke. This group was reported to be moving northward to join the main body of mountain men. In the second message, English agents in the Watauga settlements furnished Fergu-

son with the first warning of the rising of his formidable back-country enemy.

Ferguson immediately sent couriers in all directions to enlist the support of the Tories within the nearby region. Others were sent to call back all Tories who had been temporarily furloughed. On September 27 he headed south in the direction of Ninety-Six, reaching the Green River on September 30. There he received further information concerning the movements of the mountain men from Chambers and Crawford who had several days before deserted the patriot army.

From this point Ferguson sent an urgent message to Cornwallis at Charlotte calling for reinforcements. Ferguson also informed Cornwallis of his intention to hasten toward Charlotte with the hope that his pursuers would be deceived into the belief that Ninety-Six was the destination of his retreat. This communication was received by Cornwallis after the battle, too late to be of any help. A second message sent to Colonel Cruger requesting 100 men, brought no better results—only the terse reply that his garrison totaled but half that number.

The following morning Ferguson left the vicinity of the mountains and marched his corps 12 miles to Denard's Ford of the Broad River. Moving at 4 p. m. on October 2, Ferguson crossed the river, marched 4 miles, and lay all night in an armed camp. On October 3, he hastened his march eastward toward Charlotte along a route to the north of the main Broad River. Near Buffalo Creek, he camped at the plantation of a loyalist named Tate. Here he rested his men and awaited expected reinforcements and further information concerning the movements of the patriots.

Ferguson was now becoming anxious about the safety of his army. In another message to Cornwallis on October 5 from Tate's plantation, which was 50 miles from Charlotte, he advised his commander:

I am on my march towards you, by a road leading from Cherokee Ford, north of Kings Mountain. Three or four hundred good soldiers, part dragoons, would finish the business. [Something] must be done soon. This is their last push in this quarter and they are extremely desolate and |c|owed.

The Pursuit to Kings Mountain

The American patriot force meanwhile had moved cautiously southward down Cane Creek toward Gilbert Town on October 3. The following day, they learned that Ferguson had withdrawn from the town. At the time, he was miles away, camping at Tate's plantation. Although the mountain men were disappointed that they could not engage Ferguson at Gilbert Town, they did not permit this to dampen

their hopes. They now took up a relentless pursuit of his retreating army.

By the evening of October 4 they had pushed farther southward and camped near Denard's Ford on the Broad River. At this point they temporarily lost Ferguson's trail. Continuing southward, however, on October 5 they completed a march of 12 miles and rested that night at Alexander's Ford on the Green River. On October 6 they pressed forward another 21 miles to reach the Cowpens. This point in South Carolina was so named because of the extensive cattle enclosures owned there by Hiram Saunders, a wealthy Tory. Ferguson's hope that the mountain men would be misled and continue southward toward Ninety-Six was a false one. From the Cowpens, the route of the frontier army was to be generally southeastward toward the Broad River and then north and east to Kings Mountain.

Along their route to the Cowpens, the mountain men were favored by good fortune. They received accurate information from patriot supporters in the region regarding the country through which Ferguson's corps had passed in its retreat toward Kings Mountain and Charlotte. Their spirits were also spurred by Col. Edward Lacey, of South Carolina, who visited the patriot camp on the Green River to report that a large body of North and South Carolina militia was ready to join the expedition at the Cowpens.

As early as September 23, Col. James Williams, of South Carolina, with the permission of North Carolina patriot authorities, had issued a call for patriot recruits from the border of both States. His appeal was headed: "A call to arms: Beef, bread, and potatoes," and resulted in the assembling of 400 men. Included were the forces under local militia leaders, such as William Hill, Edward Lacey, James Hawthorne, Frederick Hambright, William Chronicle, and William Graham. When on the afternoon of October 6, these forces were united with Colonel Campbell's command at the Cowpens, the combined volunteer army numbered approximately 1,790 men.

At the Cowpens the report of a patriot spy named Joseph Kerr that Ferguson was only a few miles ahead in the vicinity of Kings Mountain, confirmed earlier rumors of the British force's position. To overtake Ferguson without delay, the leaders of the patriot expedition chose from their various commands a select group of stalwart fighting men, all mounted, who immediately rode ahead during the night of October 6 towards Kings Mountain. The exact strength of this advance party is not known, but it is certain to have exceeded 900 men.

By this time, Ferguson's army was already encamped upon the top of King's Mountain. From Tate's plantation, his route on October 6 for 16 miles followed the old Cherokee Ferry Road between Buffalo and Kings Creek. He crossed a branch of Kings Creek near Whisnant's mill site and continued along the old Ridge Road to the



The Kings Mountain Battleground, showing the north slope of the ridge, on the left, and the original Chronicle marker in the background. Sketched by Benson J. Lossing during his visit to the area on January 8, 1849.

main branch of Kings Creek. Forging this creek, Ferguson bore off in a northeastward direction toward what is known today as Ham-bright's Gap. Later in the day, he led his force through this gap toward the vital ridge of Kings Mountain, about three-quarters of a mile beyond.

The decision to post his army on the top of this ridge represented a change of his plan to push forward and join Cornwallis at Charlotte. It was a decision hard to understand when it is realized how close he was to the security of the main British army. It is generally believed, however, that Ferguson made the decision deliberately and with the definite intention of meeting the patriots in battle. That he felt secure in this position is shown from his letter of October 6 to Cornwallis, which stated: "I arrived to day at Kings Mountain & have taken a post where I do not think I can be forced by a stronger enemy than that against us." Ferguson was also known to be a vain man. Operating with the largest independent command of his military career, it is probable that he could not resist the temptation to seek for himself the glory of still another victory.

Meanwhile, the picked group of mountain men rode through the night toward their objective under the cover of a drizzling rain. To

keep the flint locks of their weapons dry, bags, blankets, or even hunting shirts were wrapped around them. To add to their difficulties, a number of Campbell's men lost their way in the darkness. By the morning of October 7 they were rounded up and the progress of the march was delayed very little.

The Americans approached the scene of the battle with great caution. Their path was along the same route as that followed by Ferguson on the preceding day. They passed near his campsite at Tate's plantation where they expected to find a covering force on the east bank of the Broad River. To avoid possible discovery at this point, they crossed the river at Cherokee Ford, 2½ miles below. By the forenoon of October 7 the men and their horses showed the effects of the tiring overland march from the Cowpens. Despite the suggestion by a number of the leaders that a halt be called, Colonel Shelby is reported to have replied: "I will not stop until night, if I follow Ferguson into Cornwallis' lines."

It was not long before the patriots learned definitely that Ferguson was but a few miles ahead, posted on Kings Mountain. Constantly on the alert for Tories who could be expected to warn him of their approach, they followed the Ridge Road past present-day Antioch

"The Battle of Kings Mountain." From a painting by F. C. Yohn.



Church. From this point they proceeded in a northerly direction to an old colonial road leading from North Carolina to what is now York, S. C. This road, which ran in a southeastward direction, led them over Ponder's Branch and a tributary of Kings Creek to Hambright's Gap, not far from the site of the coming battle.

Kings Mountain ridge, upon which the encounter soon occurred, extends 600 yards in a northeasterly direction and forms but a small part of the 16-mile Kings Mountain range. The summit of the ridge, which was stony, stood about 60 feet above the surrounding country and was 60 to 120 feet wide. One of its main disadvantages was that the tree line stood almost to its top. This enabled an expert rifleman to fire effectively from ample cover on either side of the ridge upon individuals on its crest.

About a mile from the ridge the patriot leaders called a halt, the horses were hitched, and final battle instructions given the men. They were formed into 2 lines, each consisting of 2 columns, and were ordered to proceed on foot. Each detachment was to take a preassigned position at the base of the ridge to complete the encirclement of Ferguson's corps. The right flank column was composed of detachments under Major Winston, Colonel Sevier, and Major McDowell, with Winston's force at the head of the column. The right and left center columns were commanded respectively by Colonels Campbell and Shelby. The left flank column included the forces of Major Chronicle, Colonel Cleveland, and Colonel Williams, with Chronicle's force at the head of the column. As the march on the ridge began, Major Winston was detached with a number of men from Wilkes and Surry Counties to make a long detour to the right. It is believed that the purpose of Winston's assignment was to close quickly Ferguson's most logical line of retreat from the ridge.

Facing the advancing frontiersmen, Ferguson had a force of 1,104 men. These included, in his Provincial Corps, some 100 Rangers who had been selected from the King's American Rangers, the New Jersey Volunteers, and the Loyal American Regiment. The remainder of his force consisted of about 1,000 Tory militia. His officers included Capt. Abraham de Peyster, second in command, and Lt. Anthony Allaire, adjutant, both from New York. Dr. Uzal Johnson, of New Jersey, was surgeon for the British force.

The Battle of Kings Mountain

After passing through Hambright's Gap, the frontier detachments moved rapidly into their preassigned positions around the ridge. Seeking cover in the wooded ravines, the patriots advanced, and Campbell and McDowell hurriedly passed through the gap at the south-

western end of the ridge. They took positions respectively on the southeastern and eastern slopes. Sevier formed along the western slope, while Shelby took position on the northwestern slope. Meanwhile, the other patriot detachments were forming along the bottom of the ravine leading around the northern and northeastern base of the ridge.

Ferguson's main camp was near the northeastern end of the ridge, but his picket line extended along the crest nearly to its southwestern end. About 3 p. m., as the patriots began to encircle the ridge, Ferguson's pickets sounded the alarm and engaged the advancing mountaineers in a brief skirmish. Then, as they reached their positions, Campbell and Shelby almost simultaneously opened the main attack. From the crest the Tories and Provincials replied with a burst of trained volley firing. But Campbell's and Shelby's men moved steadily up the slope Indian fashion, from tree to rock. For 10 to 15 minutes they maintained their attack, while the other patriot detachments moved into position around the ridge.

While the trained Tory force "depended on their discipline, their manhood, and the bayonet," the mountain men relied upon their skill as marksmen. According to an eyewitness account of this phase of the battle "the mountain appeared volcanic; there flashed along its summit and around its base, and up its sides, one long sulphurous blaze." Ferguson believed steadfastly in the effectiveness of the bayonet charge, but the terrain at Kings Mountain proved "more assailable by the rifle than defensible with the bayonet."

As the two patriot commands neared Ferguson's lines, the Tories charged and drove them down the slope at the point of the bayonet. Though they had no bayonets, the patriots rallied at the foot, and the unerring marksmanship of their deadly Kentucky rifles forced their pursuers to retire. Slowly following the retreating Tories and Provincials, Campbell's and Shelby's men were again driven down the rugged incline by the Tory bayonets. Taking cover behind trees and rocks, the two patriot commands again forced the Tories to retreat toward the crest.

Much of the volley firing of the Provincials and Tories, with their muskets and a possible scattering of Ferguson breech-loading rifles, was aimed too high. It passed harmlessly over the heads of the two patriot detachments, which now pushed even higher toward the crest. As the Tories began their third bayonet charge upon Campbell and Shelby, they were suddenly attacked along the northern and eastern slopes by the other patriot detachments. Moving to meet the patriot attack from these quarters, the Tories allowed Campbell and Shelby to gain and hold the southwestern summit.

Now completely surrounded, Ferguson's disorganized and rapidly decreasing force was gradually pushed toward its campsite on the



Capt. Abraham de Peyster, second in command to Ferguson at Kings Mountain. Courtesy New York Historical Society.

northeastern end of the ridge. In this desperate situation, with attacks and counterattacks raging on all sides, the piercing note of Ferguson's silver whistle urging his forces on continued to be heard above the shooting and shrill whoops of the mountaineers. Suddenly, Ferguson attempted to cut through Cleveland's lines near the northeastern crest, but was struck from his horse by at least eight balls fired by the mountain sharpshooters. He died a few minutes later.

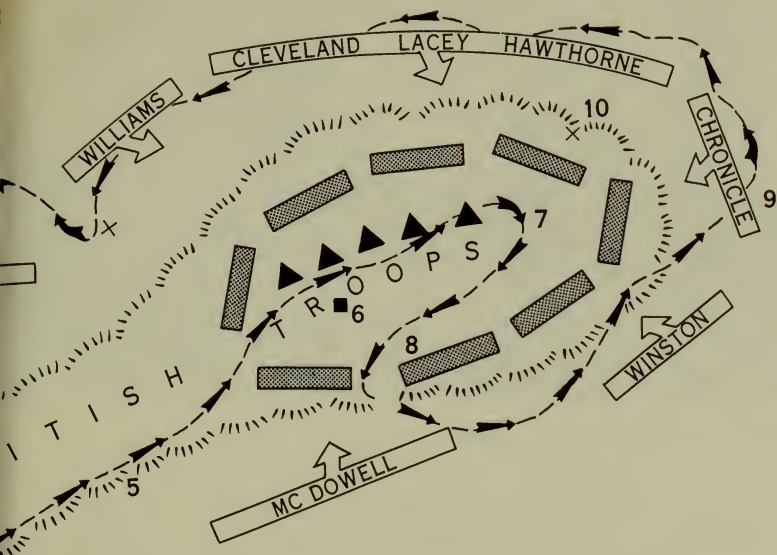
Captain de Peyster assumed command and attempted to rally the confused surviving Tories and Provincials, but his efforts were useless and he ordered a surrender. During the bloody 1-hour engagement that raged along the heavily wooded and rocky slopes, the mountaineers gained a complete victory. They were veterans of countless frontier clashes, even though untrained in formal warfare and, with a slight loss of 28 killed and 62 wounded, had killed, wounded or captured Ferguson's entire force.

Order and quiet were not immediately restored to the rugged battlefield. A number of patriots continued to fire into the group of defenseless Tories, because it was not known that a surrender had begun. Others fired upon the Tories to avenge the merciless slaughter of Col. Abraham Buford's patriot force by Col. Banastre Tarleton's British raiders at the Waxhaws in South Carolina, on May 29, 1780.

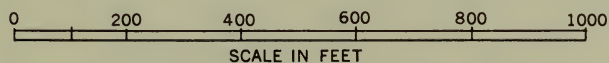
While Dr. Uzal Johnson of Ferguson's corps tended the wounds of patriots and Tories alike, others buried Ferguson's body and those of the Tory dead on the battlefield. Of the patriots killed in the engagement, only four—Maj. William Chronicle, Capt. John Mattocks, William Rabb, and John Boyd—are buried there. They share a common grave at the site of the Chronicle markers.

TROOP POSITIONS THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN KINGS MOUNTAIN NATIONAL MILITARY SOUTH CAROLINA





- Self Guiding Walking Tour
- ⋯ Crest of Mountain
- American Troops
- ▨ American Position at Time of Surrender
- ▲ British Camp and Position at Time of Surrender
- × Spring



MARCH 1955 NMP-KM-7004



Gen. Nathanael Greene, American Commander in the South, 1780–81.
Courtesy Emmet Collection, New York Public Library.

The patriots rested on the battleground overnight. On Sunday morning, October 8, they started the homeward march. One week later they reached Bickerstaff's plantation near Gilbert Town with their prisoners. The frontiersmen had not dared delay their march, for

General Greene (left) meets General Gates at Charlotte, N. C., to assume command of the Southern Department of the Continental Army in December 1780.





"The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, 19 October 1781."
From a painting by John Trumbull. Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery.

they feared Cornwallis would send Colonel Tarleton in pursuit to avenge Ferguson's defeat. At Bickerstaff's, a court martial was held and 30 Tories were condemned to death; of these, 9 were hanged and the remainder spared. Since an investigation showed that these 9 Tories had robbed, pillaged, and committed more serious crimes, the patriots believed they were justified in this action. They also wished to retaliate for similar types of rude justice rendered so often in the past by the British.

The patriot detachments reached Quaker Meadows on October 15 with the prisoners. From this point they were marched northward toward Virginia; this was in accordance with the instructions of October 12 from General Gates, the American commander in the South. On October 26, Colonel Campbell entrusted Colonel Cleveland with the safekeeping of the prisoners and, with Colonel Shelby, called upon General Gates to determine the fate of the remaining Tories.

Meanwhile, the volunteer army melted away. Most of its members lost no time in returning to their home settlements. As the number of troops guarding the prisoners declined, escape became easy. After a long period of indecision, the remaining Tory prisoners were finally moved to Hillsboro, N. C., and exchanged. The mighty army of mountain men, whose very existence confounded Ferguson, now vanished as quietly as it had gathered.

The Meaning of the Victory

The lifting of the spirits of the patriots in the Carolinas and the renewal of their will to resist the British invader were important and immediate effects of Ferguson's defeat at Kings Mountain. News of this decisive victory spread rapidly through the region, bringing out stronger patriot militia forces in North Carolina and from nearby Virginia. It also revived patriot guerrilla warfare in South Carolina. Tories in the Carolinas became greatly discouraged and disorganized. The British did not immediately sense the importance of this sharp improvement in patriot morale and were inclined to discount the loss of the relatively small Tory force under Ferguson. At the headquarters of the British forces in New York it was even denied that the battle had taken place.

The unexpected success of the patriots at Kings Mountain caused a delay of almost 3 months in Cornwallis' northward advance. This was a serious loss of time which had a far-reaching effect upon his campaign in 1781. The immediate turn of events in the war in the South that came with the victory at Kings Mountain forced Cornwallis to abandon his foothold at Charlotte, in the unfriendly territory of North Carolina. Fearful that the patriots would try to regain control of key posts in South Carolina, he retreated to Winnsboro, in the upper part of that State. Here he took up a defensive position during the first part of the winter of 1780-81 to await reinforcements sent south by General Clinton. Although ill during most of this period, Cornwallis attempted to regain the support of his former Tory allies in the region and to plan a second invasion of North Carolina.

Patriot leaders took advantage of his enforced halt at Winnsboro and organized a new offensive in the South. At Charlotte, early in December 1780, Gen. Nathanael Greene replaced General Gates as American commander in the South, with the resolve to "recover this country or die in the attempt." Greene divided his small, ill-equipped army into two partisan forces and directed them to distract Cornwallis by threatening Camden on his right and Ninety-six on his left. This daring plan gave Greene the military initiative in the Carolinas during 1781.

It led to the notable patriot victory at the Cowpens, on January 17, and was followed by the strategic American withdrawal across North Carolina, which dissipated Cornwallis' strength and strained his supply line. On March 15 Cornwallis overtook Greene and forced him from the field at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, but British losses were so serious that Cornwallis retired to Wilmington, N. C., for rest and new supplies. All of these actions were important links in the chain of events after Kings Mountain which led Cornwallis along the road to Yorktown. From Wilmington, Cornwallis undertook his dramatic



Maj. Joseph McDowell, commanding patriots from Burke County, N. C.

campaign in Virginia which ended with his surrender on October 19 to General Washington's victorious American and French forces at the siege of Yorktown. The 6 years of war in the American Revolution were over and American independence was assured.

The Kings Mountain expedition and engagement illustrate the characteristic vigor of the untrained American colonial frontiersman in rising to the threat of border invasion. These events are memorable as examples of the personal valor and resourcefulness of the American frontier fighter, particularly the Scotch-Irish, during the Revolution. The battle is a stirring record of the mountain man's unerring marksmanship. It was truly a hunting-rifle victory.

Patriot Commanders at Kings Mountain

The patriot leaders at the Battle of Kings Mountain were of Irish, Scotch, Welsh, English, French, and German ancestry. Six militia colonels and two militia majors, who were in command of the eight detachments which surrounded the battle ridge, are selected for particular mention. The list includes Isaac Shelby, John Sevier, and William Campbell, without whom there would have been no expedition to Kings Mountain. Others of importance in the list are

Benjamin Cleveland, Frederick Hambright, James Williams, Joseph McDowell, and Joseph Winston.

Col. Benjamin Cleveland was born May 26, 1738, near Bull Run (later of Civil War fame), in Prince William County, Va. As he grew to manhood, he received little if any education beyond the lessons that a hazardous life on the frontier could teach. Later, when he settled in Wilkes County, N. C., he is reputed to have been the equal, if not the superior, of Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone as both hunter and Indian fighter.

His life was filled with adventures all of which added to the respect and admiration in which he was held by his friends. He despised the Tories and often showed his ruthlessness toward them. At Bickerstaff's plantation, he is believed to have been most responsible for the hanging of 9 Tories after the Battle of Kings Mountain, and on other occasions he also displayed his familiarity with the use of the rope.

In later life, he served as a justice of Pendleton County Court, in the region of the Tugaloo River, near the western border of South Carolina. It has been reported by his associates, among them Gen. Andrew Pickens, that he frequently dozed on the bench and it often was necessary to awaken him when his snoring interfered with the court proceedings.

With the passage of years, Cleveland is said to have attained the impressive weight of 450 pounds. It was always a question, when he came as an overnight guest, whether this would prove too much for any bed in the house. His excessive weight became a source of considerable embarrassment and was partly the cause of his developing a case of dropsy, with which he suffered for a number of years before his death.

In October 1806, when he was in his 69th year, Cleveland died at the breakfast table. He was outlived by his wife, son, and two daughters. They buried him in the family burial ground on his old plantation, in the forks of the Tugaloo and Chauga Rivers.

Lt. Col. Frederick Hambright, who came with his parents from Germany to America at the age of 11, lived from 1727 to 1817. He is believed to have received a sound education that fitted him well for his activities in later life. About 1755 he moved from Lancaster County, Pa., to Virginia where he married Sarah Hardin. In 1760, he settled near the South Fork of the Catawba River in North Carolina.

As Hambright became immersed in the "American melting pot," he took part in battles against the Indians and the British. He served also in the provincial congress of the State of North Carolina. The value of his services was recognized by promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel of militia.

This was the rank he held in 1780 when he received such a severe



Maj. Joseph Winston, commanding patriots from Surry County, N. C.

thigh wound in the action at Kings Mountain that he was forced to resign his commission. Finally, on March 9, 1817, at the age of 90, Hambright died on property he had purchased in later life in the vicinity of Kings Mountain. He is buried in the old Shiloh Presbyterian Church cemetery, not far from the present park boundary.

Col. James Williams was born in the late 1730's at the family home in Hanover County, Va. Upon the death of both his parents, when he was still quite young, he moved to Granville County, N. C., to live with his brother John. The latter was an able jurist and helped James to gain a little education.

In his thirties, James Williams moved to Laurens County, S. C., where he worked as a farmer, miller, and merchant. Here he was chosen a delegate to the provincial congress of South Carolina and later made a member of the local Committee of Safety just before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. As he pursued his several vocations, he made a good living for his wife and eight children.

After the outbreak of war with England, Williams served ably in many actions, including Brier Creek, Stone Ferry, Savannah, and Musgrove's Mill. Williams has been compared, in soldierly qualities, to "Stonewall" Jackson. He was the only one of the colonels in the Battle of Kings Mountain who died from a wound received in that action. He was in his early forties. An eminent American historian

paid him this tribute: "A man of exalted character, of a career brief but glorious."

The McDowell brothers, Charles and Joseph, were representative of the landed gentry of the piedmont section of North Carolina. Maj. Joseph McDowell (February 15, 1756, to August 11, 1801) commanded the troops of his brother at Kings Mountain. Joseph McDowell had the further distinction of being among the men of Kings Mountain who later helped win the brilliant American victory at the Cowpens.

Joseph McDowell's home was at the family plantation known as "Quaker Meadows." He grew up there and later served in many Revolutionary War battles under the watchful eye of his older brother Charles. After peace was made, he engaged actively in politics on local and national levels.

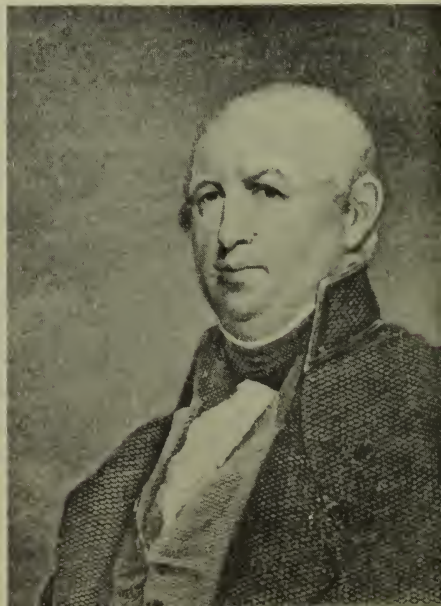
While serving as a member of the North Carolina Conventions of 1788 and 1789, he opposed ratification of the proposed State constitution, because it did not include a bill of rights. A few years later (1797-99), as a member of Congress, he opposed passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts. Because of his stand on these issues and others he came to be recognized as one of the leaders of the Democratic Republican Party in western North Carolina. "Throughout his life," according to a local historian, "he was the idol of the western people of North Carolina."

Maj. Joseph Winston was from a distinguished family of Yorkshire, England, a branch of which settled first in Wales. Later, this family group migrated to Virginia. Joseph was born on June 17, 1746, one of

Col. John Sevier, commanding patriots from Washington County, N. C. (now eastern Tennessee).



Col. Isaac Shelby, commanding patriots from Sullivan County, N. C. (now eastern Tennessee).



seven sons, all of whom served in the Revolutionary War. He received a fair education for that day, which prepared him not only for years of successful military service, but also for a postwar career in the State Legislature and in Congress.

At the age of 17, he joined a company of rangers and took part in an expedition against the Indians on the frontier. This was the beginning of his military service which ended after the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. In that engagement he answered Gen. Nathanael Greene's call for troops by coming to his assistance with 100 riflemen.

Winston represented his district, first Surry County and then Stokes County which was formed from it, in the State Senate for eight different terms. On the national scene, he served in Congress from 1792 to 1793 and 1803 to 1807. As a presidential elector, he voted for Thomas Jefferson in 1800 and James Madison in 1812.

Joseph Winston died on April 21, 1815. He was survived by his wife and a number of children. Among them were triplet boys who lived to become a major general, a judge, and a lieutenant governor.

Col. Isaac Shelby was born December 11, 1750, near North Mountain, Md. He was the son of Evan Shelby, who emigrated from Wales to America in 1735. In 1771 the Shelby family moved to the Holston country in Virginia. Here young Shelby acquired the elements of a plain English education and spent much of his time fighting the Indians and the British. Between 1775 and 1780, with rank first of captain and then of major, he explored the wilds of Kentucky.

Shelby is said to have had a sturdy, well-proportioned build with strongly-marked features, and to have been of florid complexion. He had a good constitution that withstood the rigors of frontier life where fatigue and privation were every-day occurrences. His bearing was impressive, and, although he maintained a dignified reserve, he was affable and possessed of a pleasing personality.

He married Susannah Hart on April 19, 1783, at Boonesborough, Ky. The young couple settled on land Shelby had staked out for himself in 1782, when he was a commissioner to adjust pre-emption claims on the Cumberland River. Eleven children were born of their marriage.

Shelby devoted tireless energy to the creation of the New State of Kentucky. With the adoption in 1792 of a State constitution by the convention of which he was a member, his efforts were rewarded. Shortly after, he became the first governor of Kentucky.

After Shelby left the governor's mansion, he performed several other public services. Among the most important of these was his command of 4,000 Kentucky volunteers in the American army of Gen. William Henry Harrison, during the Canadian campaign in 1813. He was stricken with paralysis in 1820 and died of apoplexy 6 years later.

Shelby's friend and associate *John Sevier* (whose name was anglicized from Xavier), likewise was well suited to frontier life. Sevier,

born to Valentine and Joana Goode Sevier on September 23, 1745, was of Huguenot ancestry. The Sevier family lived in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia where they farmed and traded with the Indians.

Sevier received a haphazard education, but this was in keeping with the times. It included schooling at Fredericksburg Academy and the Staunton School. At 16 he left school to marry Sarah Hawkins. About 7 months after her death in 1780, he married Catherine Sherrill, the "Bonny Kate" in song and story of the Tennessee frontier.

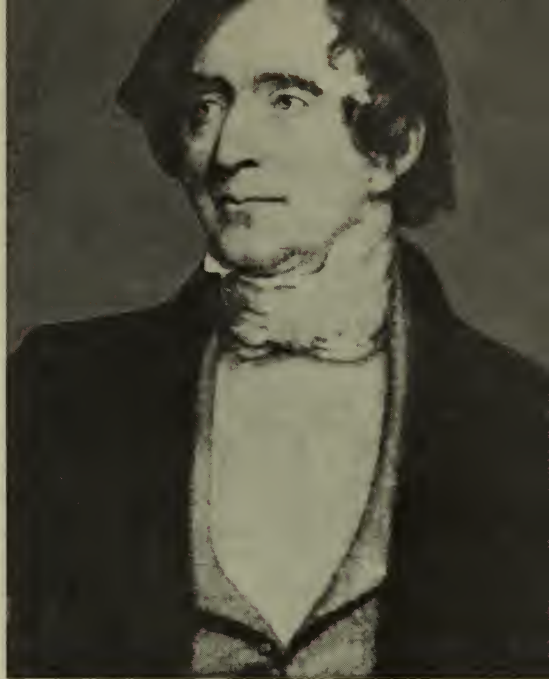
Wherever this leader of varied training, great courage, and personal magnetism went, he brought change. Moreover, from the day he founded the town of New Market, Va., where he engaged in trade as a merchant, innkeeper, and farmer, until his death September 24, 1815, his actions stirred controversy.

In December 1773, he moved with his family to the Holston River settlements. Here he helped to create the short-lived "State of Franklin" of which he became governor. After the "state" was dissolved and the area fully reincorporated into North Carolina, his enemies circulated an unfounded report that he had used it to further his own fortunes. The report gained such wide acceptance that he felt impelled to move far out on the frontier. His was a reputation that was made and then damaged, but his fall from grace was only temporary. He later took advantage of the movement to form the State of Tennessee and, regaining his political influence, became its first governor in 1796.

Among the more unhappy experiences of Sevier's later life was a feud that developed between him and an ambitious young judge, Andrew Jackson. Although Jackson brought charges of land frauds against Sevier, the political career of the Kings Mountain hero, which included three more terms as governor between 1803 and 1807, was not damaged. These two strong men with conflicting ambitions never reconciled their grievances. In the eyes of the electorate, Sevier's record of 33 victories in 35 battles was deserving of high regard and he was duly rewarded at the polls.

Sevier lived to be 70 years old and came to be known as "Nolichucky Jack." His adventurous spirit characterized him to the end. Even as late as 1812, following the outbreak of America's second war with England, he advocated bringing "fire and sword" to the Creek Indian Country.

Colorful as were the other patriot leaders, *William Campbell* of Virginia, who has been described as a man of commanding appearance, was an equally imposing figure. He was born in 1745 in Augusta County, Va., to Charles Campbell and the daughter of John Buchanan, Sr., who fought in the Wars of Scotland. As William Campbell reached maturity, he stood 6½ feet tall, was amiable when not enraged, and devoted to the cause of liberty.



William Campbell Preston, who is said to have closely resembled his grandfather, Col. William Campbell, patriot commander at Kings Mountain, of whom no likeness can be found. From a portrait by John Wesley Jarvis. Courtesy The South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

William was an only son and received a good education from competent teachers. When 22 years old, he moved with his mother and four younger sisters to Fincastle County, Va. The family settled on the fringe of the Holston country on land that had been purchased before the death of his father. This family plantation came to be known as "Aspenvale" and was near the present town of Abingdon, Va.

Like Shelby and Sevier, Campbell was interested in both the military and civil affairs of his community. Upon the outbreak of the War for American Independence, he raised the first militia company in southwestern Virginia to support this cause. In September 1775, Capt. William Campbell and his company of frontiersmen marched to Williamsburg and joined the Virginia regiment commanded by Patrick Henry.

When Campbell realized the British were trying to persuade the Cherokee Indians to attack the frontier settlements, he feared for the safety of his mother and sisters. Disappointed in his hope of resigning his commission and returning home for their protection, he did find happiness at the time by winning Elizabeth Henry, a sister of Patrick Henry, for his wife.

In 1777, Washington County was formed from Fincastle and Campbell made lieutenant colonel of militia. He was promoted to the full rank of colonel in April 1780; this was the rank he held at the

Battle of Kings Mountain. For his services there he received praise from Gates, Washington, the Virginia Legislature, and the Continental Congress. Virginia presented him with a horse, saddle, and sword at public expense. Lord Cornwallis, with oblique recognition of Campbell's prowess as a foe, threatened him with instant death should he be captured by the British.

Before Campbell finally resigned his commission, on March 20, 1781, he and his command, a small force of riflemen, fought well at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. He then enjoyed a brief term of office as a member of the House of Delegates from Washington County. Within a short time, however, he was recalled to duty, this time to serve under General Lafayette in Virginia. His military services were considered indispensable and the war was not yet won.

William Campbell's final service to his country was brief for, on August 22, 1781, while on active duty, he died after a short illness. He was buried at Rocky Mills, Hanover County, Va. There his body remained until 1823, when it was removed to "Aspenvale" for interment in the family burial ground. He was survived by a daughter and his wife, who remarried and lived until 1825.

Such were some of the leaders in the drama—successful and honored in peace as in war. It is doubtful that any of them, however, reached greater heights than during that action, one October day, on the slopes of Kings Mountain.

Maj. Patrick Ferguson

On June 4, 1744, Patrick Ferguson was born to Judge and Ann E. Murray Ferguson at Pitfour, the family estate in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Patrick was one of a family of six children in which he had an older and younger brother and three sisters. Ferguson's father, Lord Pitfour, the Second Laird, had restored the family fortune lost by the First Laird of Pitfour as a result of unfortunate speculation in the South Sea Company. His children did not lack for the comforts normally enjoyed by the offspring of gentry. They were fortunately endowed also with a family background of learning and culture.

With this background, it is not surprising that young Patrick's education was started at an early age. Any hopes or expectations that his parents may have had, however, of developing him as a scholar were short lived. After finishing the little schooling he received at a military academy in London, Ferguson decided to use his ability as a horseman and hunter and to become a soldier.

At the age of 15 a commission was purchased for him, and he entered upon active service on July 12, 1759, as a cornet in the Royal North British Dragoons. With a slight frame, Ferguson was not an indi-

vidual of commanding appearance, and it might have been thought that he was poorly suited to military service. This shortcoming was made up in soldierly determination, and he was also blessed by inheritance with a serious disposition, unusual ability, sound judgment, and energy in ample measure.

From the plains of Flanders and Germany to the spur of the Kings Mountain range, where he was killed, Ferguson demonstrated his soldiery qualities. For example, on June 30, 1760, he displayed his characteristic contempt for danger at the Battle of Minden. In this action he returned in the face of enemy hussars to retrieve a pistol which dropped from his holster as his horse jumped a ditch. Such an action was to be expected of him, if he was to be worthy of his name, which was derived from the Gaelic "Feargachus," meaning one of a bold, haughty, and fiery disposition.

It was difficult for his mother to watch Ferguson embark on a military career at such an early age. On August 14, 1762, her brother, Maj. Gen. James Murray, wrote her from Quebec: "You must no longer look upon him as your son. He is the son of Mars and will be unworthy of his father if he does not give proofs of contempt of pain and danger."

Sickness interrupted Ferguson's service in the field from 1762 to 1768. He was not idle during the period of his recovery in Scotland and entered actively into public discussion of the extension of the militia laws of England to Scotland. This activity gave him some early insight into the problem and prepared him for the role he later



Bust of Maj. Patrick Ferguson, British commander at Kings Mountain. Courtesy John Wilson Smith, Peterhead, Scotland.

played in the Carolinas as Inspector of Militia. He enjoyed a second leave of absence from military service just prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. In this period he pursued an intensive study of military science and tactics and developed the Ferguson rifle.

In 1777 Ferguson was sent to America with the reputation of being one of the best, if not the best, marksmen in the British army. At the time he held a captaincy, which was attained on September 1, 1768. He was in command of a corps of at least 100 riflemen, whom he had personally trained in the use of his new breechloading rifle. During the earlier years of his service in America, Ferguson participated in numerous actions in the North. Among these was the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777, in which he was so severely wounded in the right arm that its usefulness was impaired during the remainder of his life.

Ferguson was inured by years of service to such hardships. His loyalty was rewarded on October 25, 1779, when he was promoted to the rank of major. A few months later, at the start of the British expedition against Charleston, he was given the temporary rank of lieutenant colonel. His ability and personal magnetism enabled him to win the respect of all his associates, and his success as an officer was as notable in the South as it had previously been in the North.

This was his last campaign, and, in its course, he demonstrated a sense of fairness and a degree of humanity that earned him the respect of many of the people of the South. As the opportunity permitted, he attempted to persuade many of these Americans to renew their oath of allegiance to the King of England. His success won the admiration of his associates, among whom was General Stuart of Garth, who wrote upon the demise of this soldier: "By zeal, animation, and a liberal spirit, he gained the confidence of the mass of people . . ."

Even more revealing of his character are the following lines written from America by Ferguson to his mother to calm her fears for his safety: "The length of our lives is not at our command, however much the manner of them may be. If our Creator enable us to act the part of honour, and to conduct ourselves with spirit, probity, and humanity, the change to another world whether now or fifty years hence, will not be for the worse."

The Ferguson Rifle

Great as Maj. Patrick Ferguson's success was as a soldier, probably his most outstanding achievement was the development of the first breech-loading rifle to be used by troops in battle. This arm, which is known as the Ferguson rifle, was expected by its inventor to bring revolutionary changes to gunnery practices. In the patent, which was granted

by the British Patent Office on December 2, 1776, Ferguson describes it as “. . . an arm which unites expedition, safety, and facility in using with the greatest certainty in execution, the two great desiderata [sic] of gunnery never before united.”

This rifle corrected many inadequacies of earlier breechloaders. Its center of interest was the screw-plug attached to the trigger guard which passed directly through the breech of the barrel from the bottom to the top. This plug had from 12 to 14 rapid twist threads so that with one turn of the trigger guard the loading aperture in the top of the barrel could be opened or closed. The single-screw thread on breech plugs of earlier breechloaders made it necessary to rotate the trigger guard three or four times to open or close the breech. The Ferguson screw-plug had the further advantage of being so designed that it never came completely out of its socket.

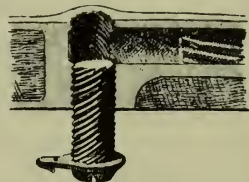
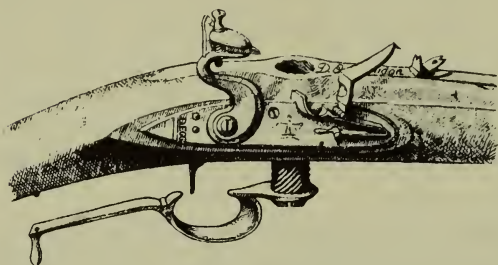
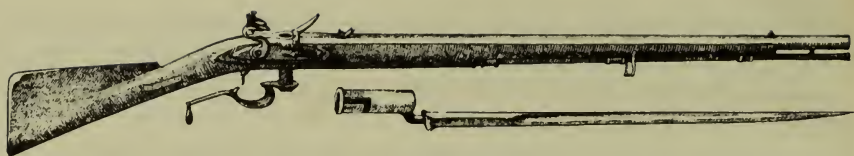
For years prior to its invention, gunsmiths had given thought to the development of a rapid-firing rifle. Patrick Ferguson believed he had invented such an arm; he hoped it would prove its effectiveness when tried under battle conditions in the War for American Independence.

Firing tests of the new weapon were conducted in the summer of 1776 at the Blackheath and Woolwich Arsenals, in England. Because of its remarkable performance, it was also demonstrated before the King at Windsor. In the course of a series of tests, and with a high degree of accuracy, Ferguson fired 6 shots per minute at a target 200 yards distant from a stationary position and 4 shots when advancing at a 4-mile-an-hour pace. He then wet the inside of the barrel, and fired effectively after a minute to prove the worthiness of this weapon in inclement weather.

Ferguson missed the target only three times during these tests, which impressed most favorably the high army officers who witnessed them. The tests proved that the Ferguson rifle was a weapon of infinitely greater accuracy and rapidity of fire than the “Brown Bess,” the regulation musket of the British army.

After Ferguson was granted the patent on his rifle, arrangements were made for the manufacture of a limited number, probably 200 in all. The names of all the gunsmiths who produced this arm in the last years of Ferguson's lifetime and for a short time thereafter are not known with certainty. They were made, however, by Durs Egg, Barbar of Newark, Barker of Birmingham, Innes of Edinburgh, Newton, and Wilson of the Minories. In all likelihood, Durs Egg completed the greater part of Ferguson's order for the new military weapon with which to arm his rifle corps.

Three distinct types of rifle, depending upon the use intended for the weapon, were made—those with the proportions of a musket for the foot soldier, lighter models for the officers, and sporting arms. There was a variation of 48 to 60 inches in the length of these weapons;



These views of the Ferguson rifle show the unique features of its breech mechanism.

and a corresponding variation in the length of the barrels, which were either octagonal or round in shape. Their bores ranged in size from five-eighths to three-quarters of an inch and were slightly larger than the usual bore of the long American rifle. Their rifling consisted of 6 or 8 grooves. These were equally spaced and completed at least three-quarters of a turn in the length of the barrel.

The earliest use of the Ferguson rifle was on American soil by riflemen whom Major Ferguson had personally trained. It was used at the Battle of Brandywine and is said to have been used later, with possibly a few having been in action at Kings Mountain. The successful use of this rifle in battle is sufficient proof that its inventor had made a notable contribution to military technology and developed a most effective arm. Unfortunately, it was at least 90 years ahead of its time.

What happened to these Ferguson rifles continues to be a matter of conjecture. While Ferguson convalesced after the Battle of Brandywine, his rifle corps was disbanded and his rifles put in storage by Sir William Howe. Later, an undetermined number were withdrawn from storage for further service. Though it can be assumed a number were destroyed in action and others carried off for use as new hunting rifles, a large number still remain unaccounted for.

Today there are only a few known specimens of this arm. Although those still in existence are largely in private ownership, there are several on public display in America. Two such arms are in the National Museum in Washington, one of which was originally

given by Ferguson to Frederick de Peyster, the most important example in this country. The Rudolph J. Nunnemacher Arms Collection at Milwaukee, Wis., also has one of these weapons, as does the museum at the United States Military Academy, West Point, N. Y.

The National Park Service is fortunate in owning two Ferguson rifles. One of these, perhaps the second most important example in the United States, is in the museum at Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N. J. It is marked with the initials P. F., indicating it was very probably inspected personally by Patrick Ferguson. The other is in the Kings Mountain National Military Park Museum. Though one occasionally hears of a Ferguson rifle for sale, their acquisition is a collector's dream.

Your Guide to the Area

The battlefield ridge is the most outstanding feature of the park. Beginning at the Administration and Museum Building, numbered markers have been placed at the principal points of interest along the trail. These markers correspond with the numbered paragraphs below and with the numbers on the guide map. For the best story on the ground, it is suggested that you follow them in the order given.

1. THE ADMINISTRATION AND MUSEUM BUILDING. Before you set out on the self-guiding, walking tour of the battlefield ridge, you will enjoy a visit to the park museum in this building. Colorful displays and exhibits explain simply and clearly the causes and results of the Battle of Kings Mountain and the turn of events that followed it in the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution. A series of exhibits trace the origin of the mountain men, tell the story of their uprising, and show their route of march to Kings Mountain. Other displays explain the progress of the British invasion of the South and the movement of Ferguson's corps before the battle.

Among the featured exhibits are the battlefield diorama, typical arms of the mountain men, an electric map showing routes of the forces engaged in the battle, and examples of the Kentucky and Ferguson rifles. The diorama is a three-dimensional reenactment in miniature of a typical Kings Mountain battle scene. The original Ferguson rifle came from Scotland and is one of the park's prized possessions.

2. THE FIRST SHOT. Close to this location Tory soldiers fired upon the advancing frontiersmen. This was the first warning to Ferguson that he was about to be engaged in battle. Shortly before, other patriot units passed here toward assigned positions on the southwest

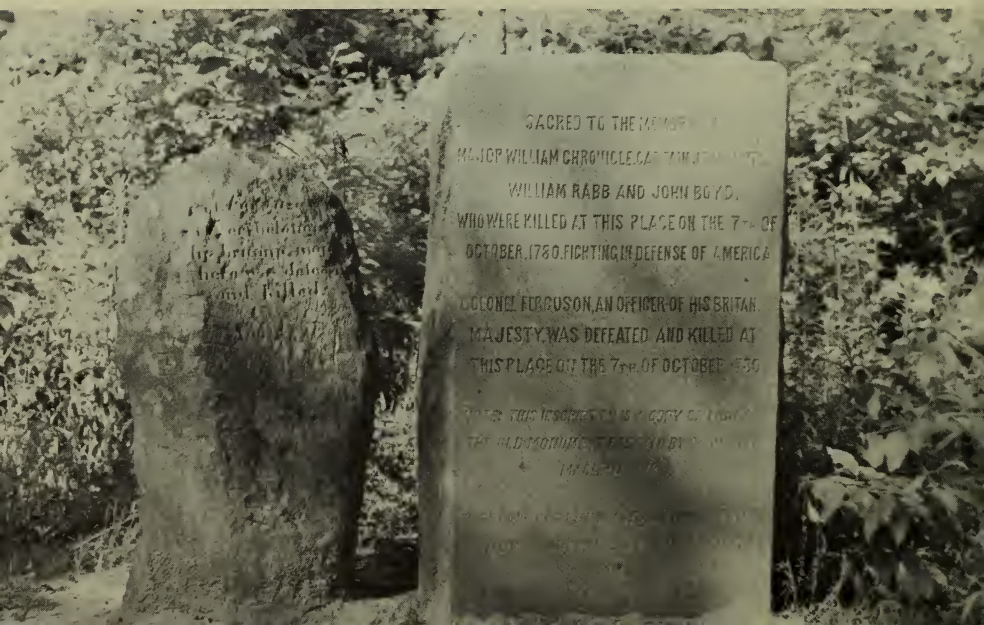
and southeast slopes of the ridge. They followed an Indian trail closely paralleled by the route of the main park drive.

3. **THE BATTLE BEGINS.** The first shot of the battle was the signal for all the patriot units that were in position around the base of the ridge to commence their attack. Here Sevier and Campbell merged their forces as they engaged Ferguson's Provincial troops in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. They gained ground, only to lose it again, as they were repulsed by repeated bayonet charges. But by their heroic action near this spot, patriot troops on the northeast end of the ridge were enabled to complete the encirclement of Ferguson's position.

4. **HIGHEST PEAK OF THE BATTLE RIDGE.** This spot marks the southwestern end of Ferguson's battle position, which extended the entire length of the ridge. The Centennial Monument erected in 1880 to commemorate the American patriots who defeated Ferguson is also located at this point. It is placed upon ground that was overrun by the men of Shelby, Sevier, and Campbell who, by their gallantry, forced Ferguson's troops to retire toward the British campsite.

5. **PATRIOT ADVANCE CONTINUES.** Bitterly fighting all the while, Tory forces were gradually pushed back along the top of the ridge in this area. Here Ferguson had hoped to establish a position from which he could better withstand the relentless attack of the mountain men.

The Chronicle Markers. On the left is the original stone, erected 1815, which was replaced with the newer marker in 1914. These stones mark the graves of Maj. William Chronicle, Capt. John Mattocks, William Rabb, and John Boyd; patriots killed in the battle.



6. SITE OF THE SURRENDER. After constant attack from all sides for nearly an hour, Ferguson's troops were forced into the clearing at this point which has changed little since 1780. At this time Ferguson was killed and the command passed to Capt. Abraham de Peyster, who very shortly realized that further resistance was useless and in this area surrendered the remaining Tory troops.

The impressive monument or obelisk at this location was erected in 1909 by the United States Government to memorialize the significant American victory at Kings Mountain.

7. TRADITIONAL SPOT WHERE FERGUSON WAS WOUNDED. Near this spot and in the late stages of the engagement, Ferguson, riddled with at least eight balls, fell from his white charger. One battle account states that one of these balls was fired by Robert Young, who is reported to have said in referring to his rifle, as he took aim and fired at Ferguson: "I'll try and see what Sweet-Lips can do." The small marker stands where the British commander is believed to have been mortally wounded.

8. FERGUSON'S GRAVE. This was first marked by the granite block to the northeast of the pile of stones. The tablet on the opposite side was dedicated October 7, 1930, by President Hoover on the occasion of



The Centennial Monument, erected in 1880 through public and private subscription.

the Sesquicentennial Celebration. The rock pile originates from the Scottish tradition of placing a cairn over the grave of a fallen chieftain.

9. THE CHRONICLE MARKERS. On July 4, 1815, Dr. William McLean visited the battlefield and dedicated the gray soft stone on your left. It stands at the grave of his friend, Maj. William Chronicle, who is buried here with Capt. John Mattocks, William Rabb, and John Boyd. It is one of the oldest battlefield markers in the country. One hundred years later, in 1914, the Kings Mountain Association of Yorkville (now York), S. C., erected the newer marker to preserve the time-and-weather-worn inscription on the original.

10. SPRING. One of the principal advantages of Ferguson's campsite was its water supply which continues to originate from several sources. This is one of two springs to which the wounded of both sides are believed to have made their way for water. About 200 yards ahead, where the trail makes a hairpin turn to the right, you will pass a second spring on your left which was probably also used during the battle.

11. POSITIONS OF SHELBY AND SEVIER. As you move up the trail to the upper parking area, you pass through the lines of Shelby and Sevier, coorganizers of the patriot march to Kings Mountain. Along the way are points where they began their attacks which were timed with the movements of Campbell's men on the opposite slope of the ridge.

Establishment of the Park

Kings Mountain National Military Park was established by act of Congress on March 3, 1931. This was the climax of years of effort by individuals and patriotic organizations to win national recognition for the area.

A series of dedicatory celebrations had previously focused public attention upon it. The first of these celebrations, in 1815, was primarily local in nature. It did, however, mark the date when the first memorial stone was placed on the battlefield. This was in memory of Major Chronicle and three other South Fork boys, who were buried in a common grave. It was also the forerunner of the more elaborate celebrations held in 1855, 1880, 1909, and 1930. Despite inadequate means of travel and few access roads, they were all well attended.

The centennial observance of 1880 is of particular interest. To insure a successful celebration, the Kings Mountain Centennial Association was formed in 1879, composed largely of men from the

towns of Kings Mountain and York. These citizens sponsored the purchase of 40 acres of the battleground and the erection of an appropriate monument. Generous contributions were received from individuals and the State Legislatures of North and South Carolina, resulting in the acquisition of most of the battlefield ridge and the construction of the Centennial Monument.

Soon after the celebration, the Kings Mountain Centennial Association was disbanded. Ownership of the battleground was transferred to the Kings Mountain Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, with headquarters in York, S. C. These patriotic ladies used their influence to win the support of the Congress of the United States for the idea of establishing a national historical shrine at the battleground. They were encouraged also by increased public support for their project. When the Congress appropriated \$30,000 on June 16, 1906, for the erection of a new monument, the reaching of their goal was not too far away. The monument was completed in time for the celebration of 1909 and was dedicated before dignitaries from Tennessee, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. It is an 83-foot obelisk of white marble and stands as a symbol of the recognition by the Federal Government of the significance of the Battle of Kings Mountain.

The celebration of October 7, 1930, provided the final impetus to the movement for the establishment of a national military park at

Marker at the grave of Maj. Patrick Ferguson. The mound of stones follows a Scottish custom of placing rock cairns over graves.



Kings Mountain. One year ahead of the celebration, President Hoover was invited to be the guest of honor. His address at the celebration was heard by an estimated 80,000 people and wide press coverage of the speech brought nationwide attention to Kings Mountain. His presence also gave the prestige of his office to the long-standing proposal that the area was deserving of greater national recognition.

Although Kings Mountain National Military Park was finally established 151 years after the battle it commemorates, the Federal Government did not at first own any of the land included in the park. In 1933, responsibility for the development of the site was transferred by Presidential executive order from the War Department to the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior.

On September 24, 1935, the Kings Mountain chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, located in York, S. C., donated the 40 acres of the battleground to which the chapter held title. This was the nucleus of the park, and additional lands acquired between 1936 and 1940 raised the total holdings within the area to the present 4,012 acres.

How to Reach the Park

The park is best approached over North Carolina Route 216 from U. S. 29, which is 4 miles to the north, and is equidistant from Charlotte, N. C., and Spartanburg, S. C. It is also accessible over South Carolina Route 161 from York, S. C.

About Your Visit

You may obtain further information about this and other areas of the National Park System at the Administration and Museum Building near the main parking area. With the exception of Christmas and New Year's Day, this building is open daily, with museum hours from 8:30 a. m. to 5 p. m. on weekdays and from 9:30 a. m. to 6 p. m. on Sundays. Park personnel is available at this building to assist individuals and organized groups of visitors. To assure such assistance to large groups, it is advisable that arrangements be made in advance with the superintendent of the park.

A beautiful amphitheater is situated a short distance east of the battlefield ridge, near the main park road. An outdoor historical drama on the Battle of Kings Mountain has been presented here in late summer during recent years. Adjoining the park on the east is Kings Mountain State Park where you may picnic and swim in season.



Museum and Administration Building, Kings Mountain National Military Park.

Related Areas

Three other areas administered by the National Park Service are related to this park as a result of the sequence of events set in motion by the Battle of Kings Mountain. They are Cowpens National Battlefield Site, near Gaffney, S. C., Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, near Greensboro, N. C., and Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, Va.

To the west, the Blue Ridge Parkway, also administered by the National Park Service, runs through a part of the country which many of the mountain men crossed en route to the engagement at Kings Mountain.

Administration

Kings Mountain National Military Park is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P. O. Box 31, Kings Mountain, N. C., is in immediate charge.

Suggested Readings

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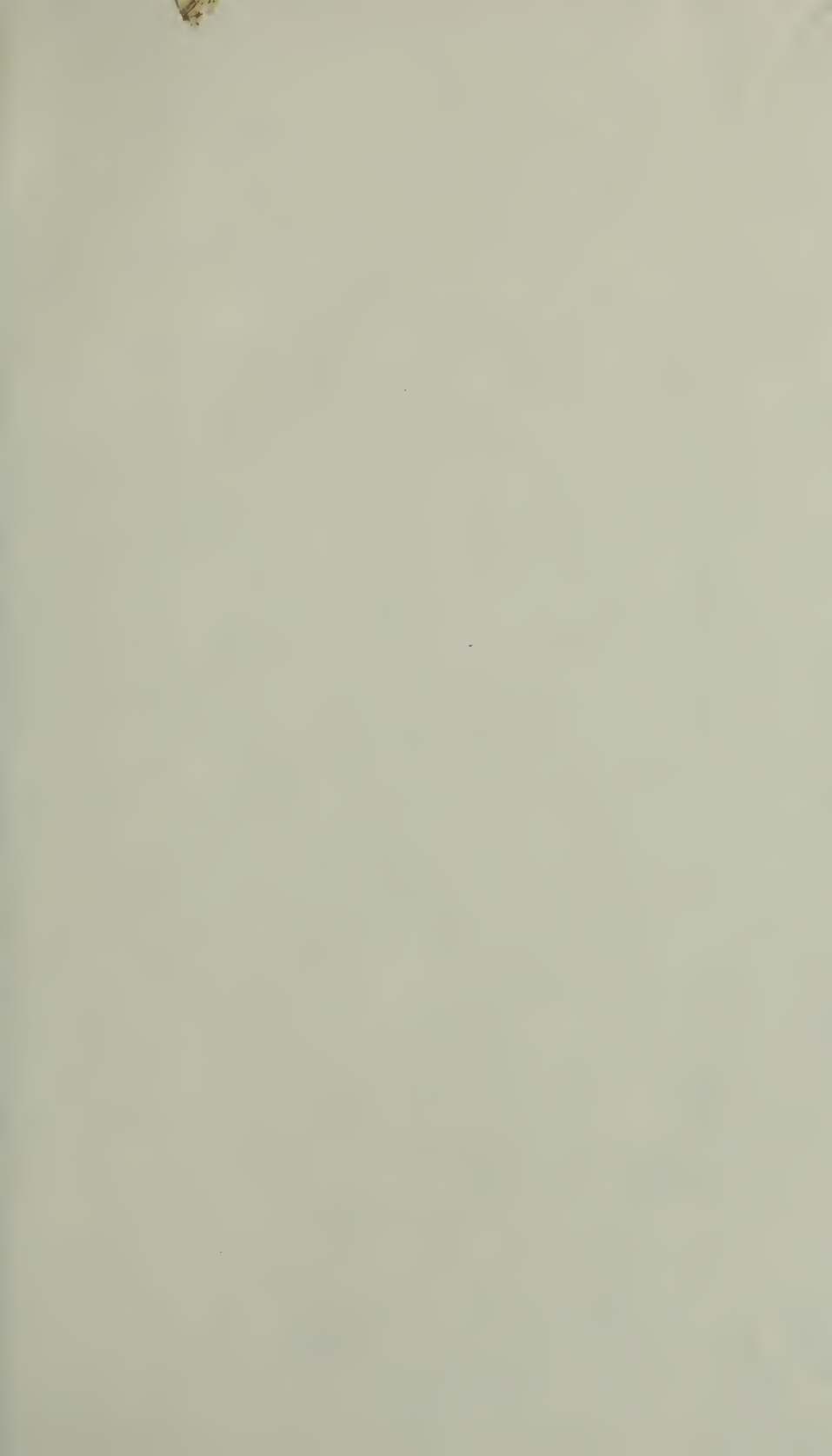
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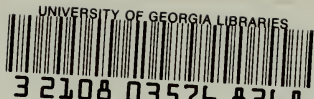
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