

Most Americans are acquainted with the main events of the American Revolution, the battles of Bunker Hill, Saratoga, Cowpens, Kings Mountain and Yorktown. Those same individuals are also familiar with their heroes, George Washington, Nathan Hale, Ethan Allen, Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, et al. But few know of the activities of the brave women who stayed at home and suffered the privations of war, while their menfolk were engaged in the romantic game of killing each other.

Folk heroes have their place in fact and legend in every land on earth, and South Carolina is no exception. Among the womenfolk of the Revolution, we can cite the activities of such women as Laodicea "Dicey" Langston, Martha Bratton, Rebecca Motte, and Eliza Wilkinson.

The area of South Carolina bordered by the Pacolet, Tyger and Enoree Rivers was the scene of many small fights and bloody deeds and violence by both the Patriots and the Loyalists. This region was one of the strongholds of Toryism, and to be a Whig, and admit it publicly, was almost like signing one's death warrant.

Laodicea "Dicey" Langston was born in the Laurens District about 1760, the daughter of Solomon Langston. Solomon was a planter, who was an old man about the time his daughter, Dicey was in her late teens. Besides his daughter, Solomon had some sons (how many is not known), and Dicey learned her lessons alongside of her brothers, and before too long became a "bold and reckless rider," as well as a good shot with the rifle. From all reports she was below medium height, was graceful, and attractive in grace and manners.

By the time the civil war began between Whig and Tory, Solomon was too old to take an active part in the fighting, but he was generous in supplying the Patriot cause with money and supplies. His sons, who were also active on the Whig side, stayed away from home, because their neighbors were Tories and they might harm Solomon and Dicey.

Dicey was well known in the area just described, and was familiar with events in Whig and in Tory camps. At the risk of her life she often supplied intelligence to the Whigs.

Few informants or spies ever remain anonymous throughout a conflict, and Dicey was no exception. After many Tory plans had been discovered, the accusing finger was pointed at Dicey by the Tories. "If you don't control your daughter," the Tories said to Solomon, "dire consequences will befall you—even though you are an old man. Your house might catch fire, the livestock killed or stolen, and even bodily injury to you and Dicey." Solomon warned his daughter and forbade her to use a horse. For a while she obeyed, but such a headstrong and strong-willed young woman could not be bridled for long.

One day Dicey heard that a bloodthirsty band of Tories were planning to raid the Little Elder (or Eden) settlement of Whigs. She decided to warn this Whig community, because one of her brothers and his friends were living there. Since she was home with her father, she had no one to turn to or confide in, so she acted as her conscience

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dictated. She set off in the dead of night to warn her brother and his friends. Having no horse, since she had been warned by her father not to carry intelligence, she set out on man's oldest transportation, her two feet. She traveled many miles, through woods, fields and small creeks, until she came to the Tyger River. Usually a mild flowing stream, the river was swollen by heavy rains, and presented a formidable obstacle to anyone on foot. Hesitating but for a moment, and putting her fear of drowning second to the fate awaiting her brother, if she did not arrive in time, she plunged into the rushing water.

Struggling to the middle of the stream, she was for the moment turned around, and was unable to get her bearing. By this time the water was up to her neck, and she needed only one false step to be swept away. She almost lost heart. It was pitch black, no one was within miles and she was completely alone. But at that moment her feet became steady; she reached shallow water, and finally the bank. Looking around her (as best as anyone could at night) she found that she was on the other side of the river. Moving on, she found her brother and his companions. She told them of the impending raid, and suggested that he send men in all directions, warning the countryside of the approaching Loyalists. But she found the men apathetic to her suggestions. "We are tired," they said, "for we have been campaigning and we are hungry." Imagine Dicey's feelings when she heard this retort. Wet to the skin, and after risking her life to save these men, to be told that they were more interested in filling their bellies than in preserving their lives.

But this brave woman was not about to give up. She hastily made a fire, and after a while, cooked a hoeecake, which she broke into pieces, and gave to the men, and then sent them on their way to warn the neighborhood. Later, when Tories arrived, there was no one to raid, for the Whigs had vanished.

Later it was Solomon who incurred the wrath of the Tories because of his sons' activities. A group of Tories came to his house with one aim in mind—kill all the male members of the Langston family. But the Tories found only the old man and Dicey at home. Angered by not finding the Langston men at home, the Tory leader drew his pistol, and said that at least one Patriot male would die. At that moment, Dicey let out a yell, and

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Women in American Revolution

jumped between her father and his would-be Tory executioner. The Tory said that if Dicey didn't get out of the way, there would be two dead Whigs in the Langston home. She refused to move, and the two individuals—a Whig girl and a Tory leader—glared at each other. After what seemed an eternity, the Tory backed down and put up his pistol, "even a wild Tory heart had a spot of compassion." The Langstons were spared, and the Tory party left the house, filled with admiration at the "filial devotion" that they had witnessed.

Dicey was also ready to prevent a wrong to an enemy or to her friends. One day a group of Whigs stopped by her house to water their horses and get something to eat. While resting, they mentioned that they were on their way to seize the horses of a neighboring Tory. Solomon Langston knew that the man in question was a Tory, but he knew also, that this man was a peaceful citizen. So Tory or no, he wanted him warned. This time Dicey, with the blessings of her father, set out on horseback to warn him. She got there before the Whig raiders. Then the Tory whom she had just warned, decided to resort to raiding the raiders.

What to do? Dicey spurred her horse and came across the Whig raiding party whom she had just warned the Tory citizens against. She convinced them (without telling them of her original intent) to scatter, because a Tory group were coming their way. They took her advice, and at one bold stroke, she saved her friends' lives, as well as a Tory's property.

On another occasion, when returning from a Whig neighborhood in the Spartenburg District, she was stopped and detained by a group of Loyalists, who demanded that she tell them of the movement of the people that she had just left. Of course she refused. The Loyalist leader placed a pistol to her breast, and ordered her to talk or he would kill her. "Shoot if you dare, I will not tell you," she cried. In true cinema style, just as the Tory leader was about to pull the trigger, another Tory knocked down his leader's pistol, and saved Dicey's life.

This young South Carolinian seemed to lead a charmed life, and as is the case of folk heroes, the more the tale is told, the more exploits the heroine becomes involved in, and the more she escapes from the clutches of the enemy. On one occasion, Dicey's house was surrounded

by a Tory and his band. After seizing and dividing most of the Langston personal property, they were at a loss as to what to do with a large pewter basin. We can make it into pewter bullets to kill Whigs, they drolly remarked. Dicey watching, spat back that pewter bullets would not kill Whigs. Captain Gray (the Tory Leader) asked her, "Why not?" In the most innocent of answers, that only a woman can give, Dicey replied, "It is said, sir, that a witch can be shot only with a silver bullet; and I am sure that the Whigs are more under the protection of Providence."

One last episode will illustrate the charmed life that Dicey led. Her brother James had left in her keeping, a rifle, with instructions to keep it until he sent for it. The person or persons calling for it would give a password that Dicey and James had agreed upon. Later, her brother sent someone for the gun, and when the Whig group arrived at the Langston home, they demanded the rifle. When she was about to give them the firearm, when she suddenly realized that this group might be Tories, for they had not given the agreed countersign. When Dicey told them that she would not hand over the gun until they gave the password, one man stated that they already had the gun in their possession and there was no need for a password. But the firearm was still in the girl's hands and cocking it, she pointed it at the Whig leader and said, "If the gun is in your possession, then *take charge of her*." A look of chagrin appeared on the leader's face. He quickly gave the password, the tension eased, and the men burst into howls of laughter. Before departing, the Whig band praised Dicey's courage and her devotion to the Patriot cause.

When the American Revolution was over, Dicey married Thomas Springfield and settled in Traveler's Rest. She died in 1827, and is buried in the old Springfield family cemetery. About 1907 the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a marker at her grave.

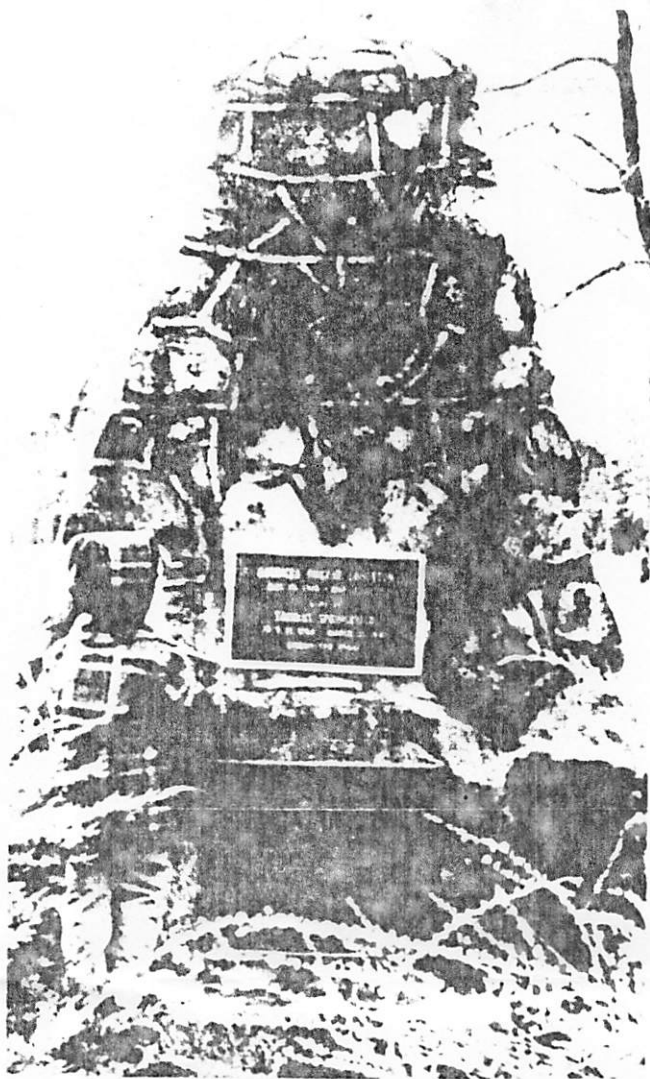
On July 12, 1839, the following toast was drunk at Brattonville, York District, South Carolina in celebration of Huck's Defeat, which had occurred 59 years before, in an engagement between some Loyalists and Patriot forces.

"The memory of Mrs. Martha Bratton—in the hands of an infuriated monster, with the instrument of death around her neck, she nobly refused to betray her husband; in the hour of victory she remembered mercy, and as a guardian angel, interposed in behalf of her inhuman enemies."

Throughout the Revolution she encouraged the Whigs to fight on to the last; to hope on to the end. Honor and gratitude to the woman and heroine who proved herself so faithful a wife—so firm a friend to liberty!

The year was 1780, and in the York District of South Carolina, many of the inhabitants had never given the British their paroles; nor had they sought the conqueror's

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The Dicey Langston marker at Traveller's Rest, South Carolina. Photo courtesy of Nat Hilborn.

protection, and many Whigs had begun to collect on the South-North Carolina border to harass the British.

Captain Huck, a British cavalry leader with 400 men and some Tories, was given the following order by the British authorities:

To Captain Huyck (the official records spell his name this way) you are hereby ordered, with the cavalry under your command, to proceed to the frontier of the province, collecting all the royal militia with you on your march, and with the said force to push the rebels as far as you may deem convenient.

Captain Huck arrived at Colonel Bratton's house at sunset. He summoned Martha Bratton and posed her a question. "Where is your husband?" "Serving with Sumter," she proudly replied, "Tell him to come over to the King's service and he will be given a royal commission." Even with a reaping hook at her throat, she refused to send the message to him, and after some other threats, she still refused to contact her husband. Huck's second in command obtained her release, but she had to feed the British who taunted her during the meal.

Colonel Bratton, along with a Captain McClure, and

fifty Whigs had left Mecklenburg County earlier and headed home. They somehow had received word that a British force was encamped near his house. With his small force, he surrounded the British camp, waited until they were asleep, then attacked and completely took the enemy by surprise. Huck and another officer were killed, and most of the British fled. The battle lasted about an hour, ending around daybreak. As the officer who was second in command of the British force was about to be hanged—the same man who had saved her life—Martha Bratton interceded, and his life was spared.

In another incident, Martha was put in charge of some powder while her husband was away. The Tories in the neighborhood heard about it. Knowing she couldn't keep it, if the Tories came searching, she decided to destroy it. She laid a trail of the powder from its place of concealment to where she was standing. When the British force rode into her yard she set fire to the trail of powder and blew it up.

Martha Bratton was a native of Rowan County, North Carolina, and her husband took part in the battles of Rocky Mount, Hanging Rock and Guilford Courthouse.

Martha Bratton never complained about her husband's absences, but strove to devote herself to the care of her family and to aid and encourage her Whig neighbors.

In 1903 a large granite rock with the corners squared was erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution in memory of Martha Bratton. On the front side is the following inscription:

Field of Huck's Defeat
Where 75 Whigs, led by Col. Wm. Bratton
Defeated a British and Tory
Force of 500 Men
July 12, 1780

Erected by the
King's Mountain Chapter Daughters
of the American Revolution
Yorkville, S.C.
1903

The other side contains the following inscription:

To the Memory of
MARTHA BRATTON
wife of Col. Wm. Bratton
Loyal in the face of Death
Brave in the hour of Danger
Merciful in the Moment of Victory

Few women in South Carolina history have exceeded the courage of Rebecca Motte, when she allowed American soldiers to set fire to her home in order to dislodge the British from her mansion.

After Camden was occupied by the American Patriots in the spring of 1781, the British commander-in-chief, Lord Francis Rawdon was anxious to maintain what was left of his posts in South Carolina: especially "Buckhead," now known as Fort Motte. This particular fortification stood on the south side of the Congaree River, and commanded a clear view for several miles in every

direction. The site was the principal depot for convoys from Charles Town to the Up Country, and the British hoped to maintain a hold on it.

The fort, originally a mansion, was the summer home for the Jacob Motte family of Charles Town. The British had occupied the house and garrisoned it with 168 men under the command of Captain McPherson. His small force was later increased by a detachment of dragoons from Charles Town. The British had armed the Motte house well; they surrounded it with a deep trench reinforced by a strong and lofty breastwork. Opposite the mansion (now called Fort Motte) to the north and on another hill was the overseer's house, which Mrs. Motte had moved to when the British took over her home. But the British were surrounded by the forces of General Francis Marion and Lieutenant-Colonel Henry "Light horse" Harry Lee. The Americans had dug a trench towards the British stronghold, which brought them within four hundred yards of the fort. Captain McPherson had no artillery, but he was expecting some help from Lord Rawdon, who was known to be in the vicinity. The only artillery that the Americans had was a small six-pounder.

It was common knowledge that if Rawdon arrived before the Americans captured Fort Motte, they would be forced to abandon their siege. So they determined to burn the fort, and force the British to surrender. So Colonel Lee approached Mrs. Motte with the grave news; he must ask her to give him permission to burn her house

(it is probable that the Americans would have burnt it with or without Mrs. Motte's permission).

When Colonel Lee informed her of the decision to burn her house, she is supposed to have replied that "she was gratified with the opportunity of contributing to the good of her country, and should view the approaching (fire) with delight." Before firing the house, the Americans gave Captain McPherson one last chance to surrender. But he replied that he would fight to the last, hoping that Lord Rawdon and his artillery would arrive in time and save him.

Who fired the house and how, is a matter of speculation. It is reported that when Rebecca saw the bow and arrows that were to be used to set fire to the roof, she is supposed to have given her own bow and arrows for the task. This was a special bow and quiver of arrows that came from India and happened to have been given to her brother by a captain of an East India Company ship. Another source reported that the arrows were fired from a musket, while William Gillmore Simms, claimed in his history that Private Nathan Savage of Marion's Brigade actually fired the arrows. Whoever fired the arrows did the job well. The arrows had been treated with "balls of blazing rosin and brimstone." On May 10, 1781 at noon, three arrows were fired at the roof; the British garrison tried to put the fire out, but were kept away from the roof by sharpshooters from the American lines. Having two choices, of either being roasted to death or surrendering,

Rebecca Mott giving bow and arrow to set her house on fire.

