

CORNWALLIS IN FAIRFIELD COUNTY SOUTH CAROLINA

By

Sarah Chappell McBryde

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CORNWALLIS IN FAIRFIELD

There are several traditions concerning the origin of the name "Fairfield". Of these, the one most popular and most generally accepted attributes the name to Lord Cornwallis. The circumstances of the story are interesting and suggestive. Cornwallis had his headquarters at Winnsboro during the closing weeks of 1780 and the first fortnight of 1781. Six months before, Charleston had surrendered to the British and General Lincoln with his whole army had been taken prisoners of war. Cornwallis with 4,000 regulars had been left to subjugate the State. The King was informed that the rebellion had been crushed and that South Carolina had been brought back to its allegiance to the crown.

In August, a second continental army under General Cates had been surprised and routed at Camden. British garrisons had been stationed at strategic points with orders to enroll the Tories and to repress every sign of resistance. Many of the Whigs having lost heart took British protection.

Only a handful of undaunted irreconcilables kept up the fight under their irrepressible leaders. The entire state was overrun and the British Regulars had already marched to Charlotte, North Carolina, and were waiting there for Tory reinforcements. But Ferguson with his 1,300 Tories was defeated at King's Mountain, October 7, 1780, causing Cornwallis promptly to fall back to winnsboro. Here he looked about him and perhaps dreampt of success in 1781. He seems to have enjoyed the rolling hills and primeval forests of the district. He must have prized the fertile soil and rich resources of the region. It is here and then that he is credited with saying: "What a fair field"! The name stuck, and seventeen years later when the territory was separated from Camden, the new district was named "Fairfield".

Cornwallis was a gallant and skillful soldier, but he must have had in him something of the poet and the nature lover. His Whig enemies and conquerors have not been unwilling to preserve and hand down his appreciation of a beautiful country which he fought in vain to win and hold for his King. There were many other brave men who loved these "fair lands" between the Wateree and the Broad. White settlers had lived there only 35 years. Most of them had come from the British Isles. These people were divided about half Whigs and half Tories. One of the latter was Col. John Phillips. He had been born in Ireland, was a man of education and was a Tory from principle. He and his associates had made themselves especially obnoxious to the patriots. Though he was captured, his outraged neighbors spared his life. A few weeks later Cornwallis held a drum head court marshall to try and sentence some seventy Whigs who had violated their parole by again taking up arms. Phillips pleaded for mercy and "assured his lordship that if these men were executed a hundred of his Majestyls subjects would be hung forthwith by the indignant people in retaliation" (1). His plea was granted. Upon retirement of the British from Winnsboro, Phillips was left in command of the Tories. The next year he was taken a prisoner to Camden, tried and condemned to the gallows. The Whigs of Fairfield almost without exception united in a petition for his life and secured the commutation of his sentence to banishment.

The intercourse between Cornwallis and Colonel Phillips was entirely different from the interview between the British Commander and John Wills. This Whig gained admission to Cornwallis. "And who", said Cornwallis, "are you?"
"My Lordship", replied Mills, "do not you remember ould John Mills who keptyour

⁽¹⁾ Howe's History of Presbyterian Church, Volume I, page 502.

father's race horse in Ireland?" "Oh, is that you, John? Give us a wag of your bone, and help yourself right freely to spirits and water". John drank, but failed to grace his drink with a toast. "And have you any business with me, my old friend?" "Yes, your Lordship, I understand you have it in view to hang a good many of your dam't Whigs and I had it in mind to say til you, that that was not the way to succeed with these people. Besides, nothing is more uncertain than the fate of battle and your Lordship and your brave men may change places with the Whigs now condemned to die. My son, John, is one of the damnest Whigs in the colony and if your Lordship goes on to hang and you should fall into John's hands, he would hang up your Lordship like a dog." Johnny's speech had its possible effect, for nobody was hung, no property plundered or destroyed (1).

While Cornwallis had his army headquarters in Winnsboro, he was able to get a first hand knowledge of the people of Fairfield and adjoining districts. Many of these folk were Presbyterians. Some of their ministers and ruling elders were descendants of Scotch Covenanters who had come to America for conscience sake. Many of these men were well educated. They veritably incarnated the fine old Scotch principles of honesty; industry, piety, and above all, civil and religious liberty. At least one of their preachers is reputed to have carried not only his Bible but also his long barrelled rifle into his pulpit. These men had built their log churches in the backwoods, had often stood guard against the Indians while the congregation worshipped and now they were again doing the same thing against the marauding Tories. The

⁽¹⁾ Pearson's Narrative History of Fairfield County.

British are said to have considered every Presbyterian Church in the district as a center of rebellion and every Presbyterian preacher as an agent of sedition. In dealing with this situation Cornwallis one day summoned before him the Rev. William Martin, a Covenanter, who preached occasionally at the Jackson's Creek Church. "He was brought before Lord Cornwallis at Winnsboro. He stood before him erect, with his gray locks uncovered, his eyes fixed on his lordship and his countenance marked with frankness and benevolence." "You are charged", says his lordship, "with preaching rebellion from the pulpit --you, an old man, and a minister of the gospel of peace, with advocating rebellion against your lawful sovereign, King George the III! What have you to say in your defence?" Nothing daunted he is reported to have replied: "I am happy to appear before you. For many months I have been held in chains for preaching what I believe to be the truth. As to King George, I owe him nothing but good will. I am not unacquainted with his private character. I was raised in Scotland, educated in its literary and theological schools; was settled in Ireland, where I spent the prime of my days and emigrated to this country seven years ago. As a king, he was bound to protect his subjects in the enjoyment of their rights. Protection and allegiance go together, and where the one fails, the other cannot be exacted. The Declaration of Independence is but a reiteration of what our covenanting fathers have always maintained. I am thankful you have given me liberty to speak, and will abide your pleasure, whatever it may be." (1)

By many historians the victory at King's Mountain is considered the final turning point of the Revolution. Cornwallis had good reasons for his encampment in Winnsboro. The Partisans were swarming about the Red Coats like

⁽¹⁾ Howe's History Presbyterian Church, Volume I, Page 500.

angry hornets. On Jan. 17, 1781, the British met another serious defeat at Cowpens. Continental reinforcements under Green were marching from Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina toward South Carolina. Cornwallis promptly prepared to leave Winnsboro and to march to meet them. But some of the Whigs of Fairfield conceived a plan to ambush and capture him. Lord Cornwallis was accustomed to take a morning and evening ride down the road. Colonel John Winn, his son Lieutenent Minor Winn, and one other Whig concealed themselves in a thicket, rifle in hand, intending to cut him off. They were discovered and apprehended by a band of Tories, and were condemned to be hung on a certain day at 12:00 o'clock. Minor Winn took the sentence greatly to heart and sent for the minister, Mr. Martin, to pray with him. He was under guard in the woods. The British soldiers had cut down some of the trees for firewood and had piled up the brush in heaps, behind which Minor kneeled in prayer, and was joined by the minister. Their exercises continued with the gallows in full view till the fatal hour. Friends stood listening for the drum and fife as the political prisoners were to be marched to the gallows. Instead of this they were marched to Lord Cornwallis's headquarters and pardoned. Winor Winn was persuaded that this was an express answer to prayer, and was subsequently often taunted in his days of frolic, with this forced repentance. (1)

Early in January, Cornwallis broke camp in Winnsboro where he had waited since October 29th. Nine months later, on October 19, 1781, he surrendered to Washington at Yorktown. American Independence had been won in spite of the price and power of King George III.

The citizens of America can afford to be generous toward the invaders and perhaps tolerant toward the despicable and misguided Tories. But

(1) Howe's History of Presbyterian Church, Volume I, Page 501

the worthiest monument to Cornwallis in South Carolina today is in "Fairfield". His Lordship was right when he exclaimed "What a fair field". Although he was wrong in underestimating the valor and patriotism of the men and women he could not conquer.

EARLY HISTORY OF FAIRFIELD COUNTY

SOUTH CAROLINA

By

MRS. B. H. ROSSON
Shelton, South Carolina
1931

RICHARD WINN CHAPTER, D. A. R. JENKINSVILLE, S. C. MRS. B. H. ROSSON, JR.

SOME EARLY HISTORY OF FAIRFIELD COUNTY

"What fair fields!" Lord Cornwallis is said to have exclaimed when he was making "Wynnesborough" his headquarters from October 1780 to January 1781. Hence, the origin of the name of Fairfield County, His lordship, speaking to Walter Robertson, of that day, added: "I can conceive no finer region, taking into consideration its fertile soil, its mild climate, its long drawn, beautiful valleys and glorious highlands."

Thirty-five years before Cornwallis was there, the first white settlers came to this land, then a part of Craven County, of the royal province of South Carolina. The first settlers found this territory occupied by the Catawbas, Waterees, and other small tribes of the Sioux. After the Revolution, it was a part of Camden District, and was made into Fairfield County in 1798. Its lines have remained unchanged to this day except for a small portion ceded to Richland in 1913.

Mill's Statistics says that buffalces, elks, bears, panthers and wolves abounded in the county. James Newton, living in 1824, is said to have killed the last elk. Its anthers were shipped to England. Jesse Gladden, father of General Gladden, is quoted as saying that he had seen droves of wild horses in the county.

WINNSBOROUGH IN 1826

Winnsborough is the seat of justice of this district, and

is one of the most pleasant and flourishing villages in the state. There are few, if any, more healthy places in the state. The lands around are fertile, gently undulating, and highly improved. The houses are built mostly on one street, though other streets are laid out and have been considerably improved. It has a handsome courthouse and jail, an academy (formerly a college) which is richly endowed and very flourishing; three churches, a Masonic hall, and a market-house. The number of private houses (some of which are handsome) is about fifty; there are two houses of entertainment and eight or ten stores. Two considerable saw gin factories are carried on here.

Winnsborough is remarkable for having been the headquarters of Lord Cornwallis in the Revolutionary War, after the defeat of Ferguson at Kings Mountain, when he retreated from Charlotte.

Mount Zion was established in this place before the Revolutionary War, and received an act of incorporation in 1777. It was formerly in high sepute, and conferred degrees.

There are two other villages in the district: Monticello, which contains the Jefferson Academy, to the founding of which institution the venerable patriot, in honor of whom it received its name; liberally contributed. Monticello is situated between the waters of Little River and Wilkinson's Creek. It contains a few houses, besides the academy, and is in a healthy, rich and populous neighborhood.

MOBERLEY MEETING HOUSE

Edward Moberley, with his six sons and their families, came to Fairfield County from Point Tobacco, Maryland, about 1758, and settled on what is known as Poplar Ridge, on the East side of Beaver Creek. For a long time they were fretted by the Hamptons

about their lands, and moved a few miles from the place of their first location further to the East, and built a fort, and near it erected later the Moberley Meeting House.

The Moberleys built the Meeting House as an Episcopal Church. They permitted other denominations to use it. It also became a meeting place for Whigs and Royalists in the days of the Revolution. A battle, or skirmish, took place here, and the name of the battle was that of Moberley Meeting House. Col. William Bratton, of York, and Col. McClure, of Chester, were commanders of this body of Whigs who defeated and dispersed the Tories.

It is said that the whole family of Moberley suffered from the fact of this battle through false reports, some uninformed people having stated that the Moberleys were Tories in the Revolution. This is not true. They were wealthy, self-sustaining people. people of the up country as a whole were reluctant to enter the contest against the Royal Government. They had little cause for com plaint. Indeed, they had fared well at the hands of the king. Also, they were so far away from the seat of turmoil as to be little affected by it. Therefore, they were slow in their anger against the British troops, and the English ministry. However, when Tarleton invaded the upecountry, the people could not stand the brutalities of his soldiery and camp followers. So when Cornwallis gave the order to them to take up arms for the British ministry, they refused and joined the bands of partisans like Marion, Sumter and Pickens, who showed in the darkest hour that "though the soil of South Carolina might be over run, the spirit of her people was invincible." And the South Carolina Historical Commission, in Columbia, has record of service of Edward Moberley, Sr., and ten other Moberleys and their connections. (See "The Mobleys and Their Connections.")

FORT WAGNER

When the Moberleys came from Maryland, between the years 1758 and 1760, on the route, on the banks of the Yadkin River in North Carolina, they admitted into the caravan of travelers a Hollander, Jans Wagner. Jans Wagner's family at that time consisted of himself and a number of daughters. He joined the Moberleys to immigrate to South Carolina for the better security of his family of daughters.

Soon after their arrival, Jans Wagner and the Moberleys participated in the troubles and war with the Cherokee Indians. The Indians went on the war path, scalped some white settlers, burned their homes, and took Fort Loudon. Wagner and the Moberleys with the riflemen and British troops, went on long marches, engaged the Indians in battle, and put them to flight to a large Indian town.

The first settlers built their log cabins near the margins of creeks or rivers. The Moberleys, as stated above, settled on Poplar Ridge, on the East side of Beaver Creek. Jans Wagner and his family of girls settled near Reedy Branch. Past the meridian of life, he was so solicitous of their welfare that he constructed a strong fort of white oak logs, hewn twelve inches square, for their protection, and when there was danger from the Indians, the neighbors would gather at this neighborhood blockhouse to defend themselves with Janss Wagner and his girls. Jans Wagner stood his ground against whatever potent influence the Hamptons had brought to bear on the Moberleys, and with his girls held the fort until he got his grant confirmed.

Tradition says that Jans Wagner furnished two bales of that historic shipment of six bales of cotton to England, where the authorities questioned whether the colonies could produce that much. MILL'S STATISTICS SAY:

Fort Wagner was built in the Cherokee War (1760).

The first settlers on the headwaters of Beaver Creek were under the necessity of confining themselves to Fort Wagner for protection from the Indians. A young man by the name of James Phillips went out with a hunting party, and on his return, near the fort, he shottagrattlesnake, which, on examination, was found to have a fawn in its stomach. This circumstance (observed D. R. Coleman, Esq.) has been related to me by Phillips himself, and by a member of others who saw the snake when brought into the fort and the fawn taken out of it. From the good character these men had among their neighbors as men of veracity, and my own long acquaintance with Phillips, I have no doubt but that he killed the snake and that it had the fawn in its stomach. (Albert Beam, witness) (page 554).

Fort Waggoner was erected on Beaver Creek, 6 miles above its mouth, and into this the poor scattered inhabitants flocked and received its protection until the end of the Cherokee War, and their meat was obtained by hunting, and their bread was brought on pack mules from the Congaree.

FAIRFIELD COUNTY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

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FAIRFIELD COUNTY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Prior to and during the Revolutionary War Fairfield
County was a part of Craven County, of the royal province of South
Carolina. Winnsboro was the headquarters of Lord Cornwallis from
October 1780 to January 1781, after the defeat of Ferguson at Kings
Mountain, when he retreated from Charlotte. The British General
was so delighted with the country around Winnsboro that he exclaimed,
"What fair fields!" After the Revolution it became part of Camden
District, and in 1798 was made into the present county of Fairfield,
receiving its name because of the words of Lord Cornwallis.

Two battles, or skirmishes, of the Revolutionary War took place in Fairfield County, namely, those of Moberley Meeting House and Dutchman's Creek.

The first was that of Moberley Meeting House, in the year 1780. This year was a dark period for the patriots of Carolina. Charleston surrendered on the 12th of May, and General Lincoln and the American army became prisoners of war. This success was followed up by vigorous movements. One expedition secured the important post of Ninety Six, another scoured the country bordering on the Savannah, and Lord Cornwallis passed the Santee and took Georgetown.

The British line ran thru the present counties of Chesterfield, Kershaw, Fairfield, Newberry and Abbeville. They held quiet possession of all the state to the south and east of that line.

The Provincial Congress had determined to organize a military force of 3 regiments. The province was then divided into 12 military districts, one of which was Camden, embracing the country between Lynch's Creek and the Congaree, the present Counties of Richland, Kershaw, Sumter, Fairfield and Chester. Armed garrisons were posted throughout the State, which law at the mercy of the conquerors, to over-awe the inhabitants and secure a return to their allegiance.

For several weeks all military opposition ceased, and it was the boast of Sir Henry Clinton that here, at least, the American Revolution was ended. It was his plan after conquering the South to carry his campaign to the North. A proclamation was issued, denouncing vengeance on all who should dare appear in arms, save under the royal authority, and offering pardon with few exceptions to those who would acknowledge it and accept British protection. The great majority of the people, believing resistance unavailing and hopeless, took the offered protection, while those who refused absolute submission were exiled or imprisoned.

That there were great differences of sentiment in regard to the Revolution, even among the people of the Low Country of South Carolina, has abundantly appeared in the pages of history. Friends and families were divided in opinion as to its cause, and still more so in regard to the course of events which had followed, resulting in the Declaration of Independence. But these differences in the Low Country had caused little bloodshed by native Carolinians at the hands of each other. Few of the Tories in that section took up arms against their fellow countrymen. In the new field of war, alas, the people who had not been interested in the questions which brought on the trouble were to fight everyone against his brother, and everyone against his neighbor, and the most dreadful internecine strate was

To crush this bold and determined spirit, British officers and troops were dispatched in marauding parties, to every nook and corner of South Carolina, authorized to punish every Whig with utmost vigor, and to call upon Loyalists to aid in the work of carnage. The Tories in this section began to gather and organize. On May 26, 1780, that is, three days before the massacre in the Waxhaws, a party of these marauders assembled at Mobley's Meeting House, several miles west of Winnsboro, in the present County of Fairfield. This meeting house had been built by Edward Moberley, Senior, and his sons, as an Episcopal Church. They permitted other denominations to use it, and at this time it had become a meeting place for Whigs and Tories. Colonel William Bratton, of York, Capt. John McClure, of Chester, and Major Winn gathered the Whigs and defeated and dispersed the Tories, who fled at the first crack of the rifle. There is no account of the casualties on either side.

The condition of affairs in South Carolina was without parallel in the history of the Revolution. No other state was so completely overrun by British forces, no other state so divided upon the questions at issue, and in none other did the men of both sides so generally participate in the struggle. In none other were Tory organizations from other states so much used in connection with Royal troops to subdue American Whigs, thus attempting to carry out the British ministerial plan of overcoming Americans by Americans. While South Carolina received but little assistance from the North, her territory was garrisoned by Americans serving in the British Army, enlisted from Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and from Pennsylvania. Northern States furnished also several excellent Tory officers who operated with the British Army in South Carolina.

Pennsylvania furnished the notorious Huck. When the report of the disaster at Moberley Meeting House was conveyed to Rocky Mount, in Chester District, Colonel Turnbull, the Commander of a strong detachment of British troops at that point, determined on summary vengeance, and for that purpose sent the Tory, Captain Huck, at the head of 400 cavalry, and a considerable body of Tories, all well mounted, with the following order:

"To Capt. Huck - 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 said force to push the rebels as far as you may deem convenient."

However, Huck's career was soon ended by Samuel McConnell, of Fairfield County, who shot him from his horse.

DUTCHMAN'S CREEK

In 1781 General Andrew Pickens commanded a small party.

From the time this officer had joined General Morgan, he had not rested a day. Some of the officers and men under him had been engaged in the most active service ever since the fall of Charleston. The rest had abandoned their homes with Pickens himself, and had taken to the field when, in violation of their paroles, they had been called upon to serve in the British Army. They had received neither clothing nor pay, and came into the service mounted at their own expense. They were not of that class of men who can minister to their own by invading the comforts of others; most, if not all, were men of respectable connections and comfortable property. But their condition now was scarcely to be borne; they had not the

clothing necessary to common decency. Yet no one deserted, no one murmured, but, foregoing the privileges of volunteers, they resisted the example of hundreds who daily came and went as they pleased, and never shrank from their duty in the midst of retreat, privation and suffering ----- But, besides their own increasing necessities, affairs in their own state were now demanding their return. In addition to the large British force retained in South Carolina, appearances on the frontier threatened a serious invasion from the Indians. Not only their own apprehensions, but those of General Greene himself were seriously awakened for the fate of their families, and connections; and General Pickens was ordered to repair to the back parts of South Carolina to protect the Whigs, supress the Loyalists, and co-operate with Gen. Sumter in the active enterprises in which that patriot was then engaged.

While General Pickens was on his march to South Carolina, a party of New York Volunteers under the command of Capt. Grey was detached by Lord Rawdon from Camden to disperse a body of militia who were gathering on Dutchman's Creek, in what is now Fairfield County. This the New York Volunteers succeeded in doing, killing two captains, sixteen privates, and taking eighteen prisoners, without the loss of a man on their party.

This was one of twenty-three affairs in which the South Carolina volunteer partisan bands had fought the British forces during Gen. Green's absence, and although this was a victory for the British, it was indeed a glorious struggle which had thus been maintained by her own people in South Carolina while the Continental Army was absent from the State.

Fairfield's population during the Revolution was about equally divided between the Whigs and Tories. She contributed many

brave men to the regiment of Rangers (Col. Thomson's, Capt. Woodward's) and afterwards to Sumter's and sometimes to Marion. She sustained the great cause with noble spirit.

When Washington's corps, on a march through the uplands, halted at Ingleman's Mill, on Wilkin's Creek, they were wholly out of money and supplies. The Commissary, Mr. Hutchinson, was sent to Mr. Philip Pearson's, nearby, to try to secure meat and bread for his men, and food for his horses. For one week the horses and men were abundantly furnished from Mr. Pearson's farm, and Mr. Pearson waived all compensation. Likewise, Mr. Reuben Harrison furnished Gen. Greene and his men with bread, vegetables, cattle and sheep, and Mr. Gen. Green was leaving, he tendered a certificate for the supplies furnished, and Mr. Harrison said: "No, we are all engaged in the same great cause . . . Your success will be my pay."

Andrew Feaster, of Fairfield, in addition to serving as a soldier, furnished a field of grain and a horse without remuneration.

There are probably many others who did as much, of whom we do not have record, for these men had much to fight and give for. They had sacrificed much, leaving homes, loved ones, and friends in the old country, daring the wilderness, savages, discomforts, of the new country. Now these things were threatened by the same power from which they had fled the old country. Were they to sit idly by and lose all for which they had risked so much?

It is said that John Mills, of Chester, gained admission to Lord Cornwallis, while in headquarters at Wynnsborough. "And who asked Cornwallis, "are you?" "My Lordship, do you not remember ould John Mills, who kept your father's race horse in Ireland?"

"Oh, is that you, John? Give us a wag of your bone, and help yourself right freely to spirits and water." John drank. "Have you any business with me, my old friend?"

"Yes, your Lordship. I understand you have it in view to hang a good many of your dam't Whigs, and I had it in mind to say til you that that is not the way to succeed with these people. Besides, nothing is more uncertain than the fate of battle, and your Lordship and your brave men may change places with the Whigs now condemned to die. My son John is one of the damnst Whigs in the Colony, and if your Lordship goes on to hang, and you should afterwards fall into John's hands, he would hang up your Lordship like a dog." Johnny's speech had its possible effect, for nobody was hung, no property plundered or destroyed.

Another interesting incident was after the defeat of the British at Blackstocks, when the British troops dropped down to Fairfield County, to the home of Mrs. Martha Dansby. The widow with her children was ordered out of the dwelling. She refused to go. Force was threatened. She bid defiance to force. "I will not say what I am, but you say I am a British subject, and if so, I have the rights of a British subject until I am legally divested by the verdict of a jury. If you must need have shelter, go take the kitchen and make the best of it." They took her at her word, and British officers, richly clad, and trimmed off with laces and decorated with gold epaulets, were glad to find asylum in poor Martha Dansby's kitchen. Many of the British officers and soldiers wounded at Blackstock died there.

In conclusion we will quote the tribute of the great American historian, Bancroft, to the conduct of the people of

South Carolina when practically abandoned by Congress and its army, being a tribute to Fairfield County as well:

"Left mainly to her, own resources, it was through the depths of wretchedness that her sons were to bring her back to her place in the republic, after suffering more, and daring more, and achieving more than the men of any other State."

REFERENCES:

DUTCHMAN'S CREEK

South Carolina in the Revolution (1780-1783) page 126.

MOBERLEY'S MEETING HOUSE

South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780, page 587. Ellet's "Women of the Revolution," Vol. 1, p. 238-241.