

FAIRFIELD COUNTY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

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RICHARD WINN CHAPTER, D. A. R.
JENKINSVILLE, S. C.

Mrs. B. H. Rosson, Jr.

1931

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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 lay 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 strife 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, suppress 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 old 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.