

VOL. III

MARCH, 1904

No. 11

THE
NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET



GREAT EVENTS IN
NORTH CAROLINA HISTORY

THE BATTLE OF MOORE'S
CREEK BRIDGE,

BY

PROFESSOR M. C. S. NOBLE.



PRICE, 10 CENTS

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THE NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET.

GREAT EVENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA HISTORY.

VOL. IV.

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Major William A. Graham.

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"CAROLINA! CAROINA! HEAVEN'S BLESSINGS ATTEND HER!
WHILE WE LIVE WE WILL CHERISH, PROTECT AND DEFEND HER."

RALEIGH
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PREFACE.

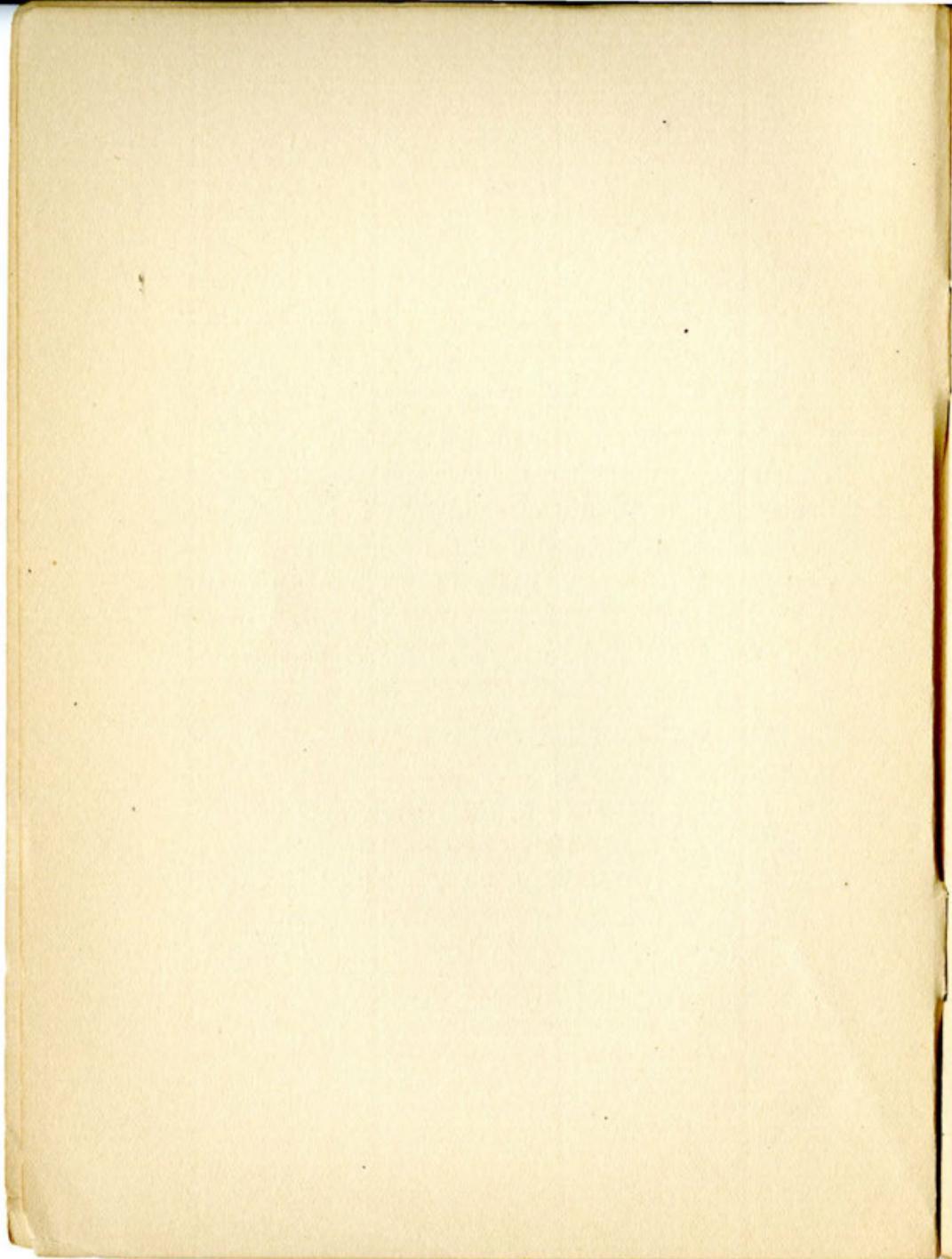
The object of the NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET is to erect a suitable memorial to the patriotic women who composed the "Edenton Tea Party."

These stout-hearted women are every way worthy of admiration. On October 25, 1774, seven months before the defiant farmers of Mecklenburg had been aroused to the point of signing their Declaration of Independence, nearly twenty months before the declaration made by the gentlemen composing the Vestry of St. Paul's Church, Edenton, nearly two years before Jefferson penned the immortal National Declaration, these daring women solemnly subscribed to a document affirming that they would use no article taxed by England. Their example fostered in the whole State a determination to die, or to be free.

In beginning this new series, the Daughters of the Revolution desire to express their most cordial thanks to the former competent and untiringly faithful Editors, and to ask for the new management the hearty support of all who are interested in the brave deeds, high thought, and lofty lives of the North Carolina of the olden days.

MRS. D. H. HILL.

5-10-71
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Jan. 1952



THE BATTLE OF MOORE'S CREEK BRIDGE,

FEBRUARY 27, 1776.

MOORE'S CREEK BATTLE-GROUND IS HALF A MILE
FROM CURRIE, PENDER COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA.

BY PROFESSOR M. C. S. NOBLE,

(University of North Carolina).

Eighteen miles northwest of Wilmington, North Carolina, on a low, sandy bluff overlooking a deep, wide creek whose sluggish waters flow into the Black River, a tributary of the Cape Fear, there stands to-day a simple brownstone monument with this inscription on its western face:

IN COMMEMORATION
OF THE BATTLE OF
MOORE'S CREEK BRIDGE,
FOUGHT HERE
27TH FEBRUARY, 1776.
THE FIRST VICTORY GAINED
BY THE AMERICAN ARMS
IN THE WAR OF THE
REVOLUTION.

The right to this direct claim to precedence in Revolutionary success and martial glory is one of North Carolina's greatest historic possessions. The events leading up to and

culminating in this battle are full of interest and reflect clearly the patriotic character of North Carolinians.

The Coercive Acts of 1774 were passed in order to punish the people of Massachusetts, and although they dealt only with that colony, it was clear that any other colony might, at any time and without warning, receive similar treatment at the hands of a British Parliament.

The news of the closing of the port of Boston made a profound impression in all of the colonies. North Carolina, in great alarm for the safety of the constitutional rights of the colonies, and in deepest sympathy for the suffering people of Boston, began to act speedily and heartily. Throughout the province there rang the cry "The cause of Boston is the cause of all."

At a meeting of the people of the Wilmington district, in July, 1774, the various counties in the province were urged to send delegates to a Provincial Congress to be held at Johnston Court House the following August for the purpose of appointing delegates to represent North Carolina in a Continental Congress to be held at Philadelphia. Among the resolutions adopted at this meeting was the following:

Resolved, That we consider the cause of the Town of Boston as the common cause of British America and as suffering in defence of the Rights of the Colonies in general; and that therefore we have in proportion to our abilities sent a supply of Provisions * * * as an earnest of our sincere Intentions to contribute by every means in our power to alleviate

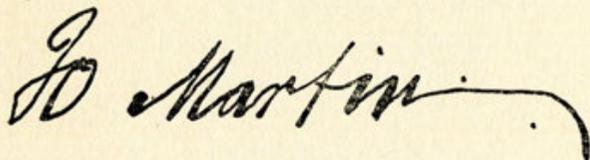
their distress and to enduce them to maintain, with Prudence and firmness the glorious cause in which they at present suffer."

In rapid succession, in fact almost instantaneously, counties in every section of the province chose delegates to the proposed Provincial Congress, adopted resolutions bold, clear-cut and denunciatory of the Coercive Acts, and expressed the greatest sympathy for the people of Boston. From Anson and Rowan in the west to New Hanover and Chowan in the east the men of the province spoke forth to the world through their "Resolutions" the characteristic North Carolina spirit of sympathy for the oppressed, and devotion to justice and liberty. Their sympathy did not stop with mere words. Contributions of money and provisions were made almost immediately—as much as \$10,000 worth being sent from the port of Wilmington alone—and we shall presently see that, in their devotion to right and freedom, ten thousand men sprang to arms when the time for action came, in the early months of 1776. The temper of the people is shown in the following extracts taken from resolutions adopted at a meeting of the citizens of Rowan, August 8, 1774:

"Resolved, That the Cause of the Town of Boston is the common Cause of the American Colonies.

"Resolved, That it is the Duty and Interest of all American Colonies, firmly to unite in an indissoluble Union and Association to oppose by every Just and proper means the Infringement of their common Rights and Privileges."

Resolutions similar to the above were adopted throughout the province in town and county meetings. The seriousness of those who adopted them could not be doubted. They endeavored to force the mother country to a just consideration of their complaints in a most practical manner. They declared that no friend to the rights and liberties of America ought to purchase commodities imported from Great Britain; that every kind of luxury, dissipation, and extravagance ought to be abolished; that slaves ought not to be imported, and that manufacturing in this country ought to be promoted and encouraged, for "to be cloathed in manufactures fabricated in the Colonies ought to be considered as a Badge and Distinction of Respect and true Patriotism."* From meetings breathing such a resolute spirit of patriotism as this, delegates were sent to the first Provincial Congress held at New Bern instead of at Johnston Court House.



Governor
J o s i a h
M a r t i n
forbade the
assembling

of the Congress. It assembled, however, on the appointed day, August 25, 1774, elected William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, and Richard Caswell as delegates to the Continental Congress, and unanimously adopted resolutions which were as bold, direct and patriotic as any previously adopted in the towns

*Col. Recs., Vol. IX, 1025-1026.

and counties of the province, and from which the following are extracts :

“Resolved, That the inhabitants of the Massachusetts province have distinguished themselves in a manly support of the rights of America in general and that the cause in which they suffer is the Cause of every honest American who deserves the Blessings which the Constitution holds forth. * * *

“Resolved, That we will not directly or indirectly after the first day of January 1775 import from Great Britain any East India Goods, or any merchandize whatever. * * *

“Resolved, That unless American Grievances are redressed before the first day of October, 1775, We will not after that day directly or indirectly export Tobacco, Pitch, Tar, Turpentine, or any other articles whatsoever.” * * * * *

The Congress then adjourned and its members went to their homes determined to faithfully carry out the spirit of their “Resolutions.”

The first Continental Congress met at Philadelphia during the following September and adopted the famous “Association” committing the colonies to the non-importation of British commodities, tea, and slaves. The eighth article of the “Association” read as follows :

“We will in our several stations, encourage frugality, economy, and industry * * * and will discountenance and discourage every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting,

exhibition of shows, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments."

The "Association" was in harmony with the resolutions already adopted in the province and the Committees of Safety enforced it unsparingly. The Wilmington Committee having heard (March 1, 1775) that a "Public Ball" was to be given at the house of a lady in that town, sent her the following note:

"MADAM:

"The committee appointed to see the resolves of the Continental Congress put into execution, in this town, acquaint you, that the Ball intended to be given at your house, this evening, is contrary to the said resolves; we therefore warn you to decline it, and acquaint the parties concerned, that your house cannot be at their service, consistent with the good of your country.

"By order of the Committee,

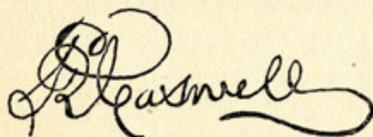
"Signed, THOS. CRAIKE."

The warning was heeded, and yet we are sure that foregoing the pleasure of the dance was no great hardship. The young people of North Carolina have ever been ready and willing to sacrifice on the altar of freedom not only pleasure but property, and even life itself whenever the public good required it.

On April 2, 1775, Governor Martin heard that another Provincial Congress was soon to meet in New Bern and appoint delegates to a second Continental Congress to be held in Philadelphia. With the approval of his Council he issued a proclamation forbidding the assembling of the Congress and

declaring that, "the meeting of such Convention and the declared purpose thereof will be highly offensive to the King and dishonourable to the General Assembly of this Province, which is appointed to sit at this time for the dispatch of public business."* But no attention was paid to his proclamation.

On April 3d the Congress met, organized, and adjourned till the next day, when the General Assembly was to meet. The next morning the Congress met, received four new members and adjourned till the following day. A few minutes after this second adjournment of the Provincial Congress the General Assembly met, and of the forty-eight members present, forty-seven were members of the Congress. The Provincial Congress thus continued to meet daily one hour before the General Assembly met. It thanked Hooper, Hewes and Caswell for their services in the First Continental Congress,



adopted resolutions approving the "Association," and then having finished its work, adjourned on April 7th, two

days *after* Martin had issued a proclamation commanding the members "on their allegiance and on pain of incurring His Majesty's highest displeasure to break up the said meeting and to desist from all such illegal, unwarrantable and dangerous proceedings."†

In his address to the General Assembly (April 4th), Governor Martin reviewed the condition of affairs in the

*Col. Recs., Vol. IX, 1177. †Col. Recs., Vol. IX, 1187.

province and plead with the members to be faithful to the royal cause, saying, among other things:

“Be it to your glory, Gentlemen, to record to latest posterity, that at a time when the monster, sedition, dared to raise his impious head in America, the people of North Carolina, inspired with a just sense of their duty to their King and Country, and animated by the example of its legislature, stood among the foremost of his Majesty’s subjects, to resist his baneful snares, and to repel the fell invader of their happiness.”

But the angry Governor was merely shrieking in the teeth of a rapidly rising gale of revolution, which was soon to gather force and sweep him and every other vestige of royal power from off our shores forever. The North Carolina spirit was thoroughly aroused and his high-sounding appeal met with a defiant answer. In their reply (April 7th) the Assembly boldly asserted their right of petition for a redress of grievances, and in utter disregard of his wishes they said:

“We take this opportunity Sir, the first that has been given us to express the warm attachment we have to our sister Colonies in general, and the heartfelt compassion we entertain for the deplorable state of the Town of Boston in particular, and also to declare the fixed and determined resolution of this Colony to unite with the other Colonies in every effort, to retain those just rights and liberties which as subjects to a

British King we possess and which it is our absolute and indispensable duty to hand down to posterity unimpaired."

These ringing words came from the very men at whom, as members of the Provincial Congress, he had hurled his proclamation in vain two days before, and now as members of the General Assembly, they were still bold, determined, and defiant. No wonder then that the Governor dissolved the Assembly on the following day.

This constantly growing spirit of resistance to the alleged unconstitutional acts of Parliament impressed Martin with the seriousness of the situation and he began to act accordingly.

After the battle of Alamance many of the Regulators had been placed under bond to appear at court from time to time, and they were thus kept under fearful apprehensions of the day of trial. Martin had endeavored to win their good-will by urging the home government to grant them a pardon. Others of the Regulators had taken the oath of allegiance to the British Crown. To the Regulators therefore the Governor might turn with reason for help in time of need, and so he sent his agents among them to secure their faithful service.

In the valley of the Cape Fear there were hundreds of Scotch Highlanders. Many of them had come to North Carolina since the battle of Culloden (1746) where, as defeated followers of the Pretender, scores of their comrades, like the Regulators at Alamance, had felt the keen edge of the British sword. As an act of royal favor, these followers of the Pre-

tender had been permitted to come to America and build new homes in a strange land. They had had enough of war, they had taken the oath of allegiance to the Crown, and, being royalists at heart, they had little sympathy with the political views of the Whigs in Carolina. Many of them had but recently come to North Carolina and their purses were empty. Serving as paid soldiers in a cause they believed in was far better than fighting with strangers against a government whose power they feared and whose rule they had sworn to support. They therefore gladly received the Governor's emissaries when they came among them in behalf of the royal cause.

In the meantime Martin's alarm was increasing daily. In a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, he wrote (May, 1774): "In this little Town (*i. e.*, New Bern) they are now actually endeavoring to form what they call independant Companies under my nose, & Civil Government becomes more and more prostrate every day."* He had the guns in front of the palace dismounted in order to keep them from falling into the hands of the "Committee of that Town," but when a few days thereafter the angry people led by Abner Nash demanded his reason for such action, he claimed that he had done so because he feared that the rotten gun-carriages were unable to stand the strain of discharge at the approaching celebration of the King's birthday.† This seemed to satisfy the "mob" as he called it, but, fearing further



*Col. Recs., Vol. IX, 1256.

†Col. Recs., Vol. X, 42.

violence, he sent his family to New York and then fled to Fort Johnston at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, arriving there June 2, 1775.

In a few days Martin heard that Robert Howe was then on his way to the Fort at the head of a band of patriots. He immediately dismounted the guns and took refuge on the *Cruizer* sloop of war in the river near by. Soon after arriving on the *Cruizer* he wrote to the Earl of Dartmouth, and, after referring to the King's recent proclamation proscribing John Hancock and Samuel Adams of Massachusetts, said "and seeing clearly that further proscriptions will be necessary before Government can be settled again upon sure Foundations in America, I hold it my indispensable duty to mention to your Lordship, Cornelius Harnett, John Ashe, Robert Howes, and Abner Nash * * * as proper objects for such distinction in this Colony * * * that they stand foremost among the patrons of revolt and anarchy."*

Three days afterwards, five hundred men led by Ashe and Harnett came to the Fort and burned it.

As Martin stood on the deck of the *Cruizer* that July morning and looked in helpless wrath at

the burning Fort, he must have felt more than ever that Ashe, and Harnett were indeed and in truth the "patrons of revolt

*Col. Recs., Vol. X, 98.

John Ashe

and anarchy." But he was neither an idle man nor a coward. He begged permission to be allowed to raise a battalion of Highlanders and asked that the commission of Lieutenant Colonel held by him prior to his coming to North Carolina be restored to him. The government declined to return his commission, but instructed him to organize the Highlanders and informed him that an officer would be sent to take command of them.

His activity in rallying the Highlanders and the belief that he intended to incite the slaves to revolt (which he denied except as a last resort),* led the Wilmington Safety Committee to forbid any one to communicate with him without having first obtained permission from some Safety Committee.

On August 8th, Martin issued his "Fiery" proclamation denouncing Ashe, Howe, Caswell, and others, the actions of the Safety Committees in the province, and the "resolves" of the people of Mecklenburg, and warned His Majesty's subjects not to send delegates to the Provincial Congress soon to meet in Hillsboro. The only notice that the Congress took of his proclamation was to denounce it as "scandalous, scurrilous, and malicious" and to order it to be "burnt by the common hangman."

Among the many acts of this Congress (which now became the legislative body in the province) was one providing for the raising of two regiments to serve in the Continental Army.

*Col. Recs., Vol. X, 138.

James Moore

James Moore of New Hanover was appointed Colonel of one of them. We shall

soon hear more of him and his Continental regiment.

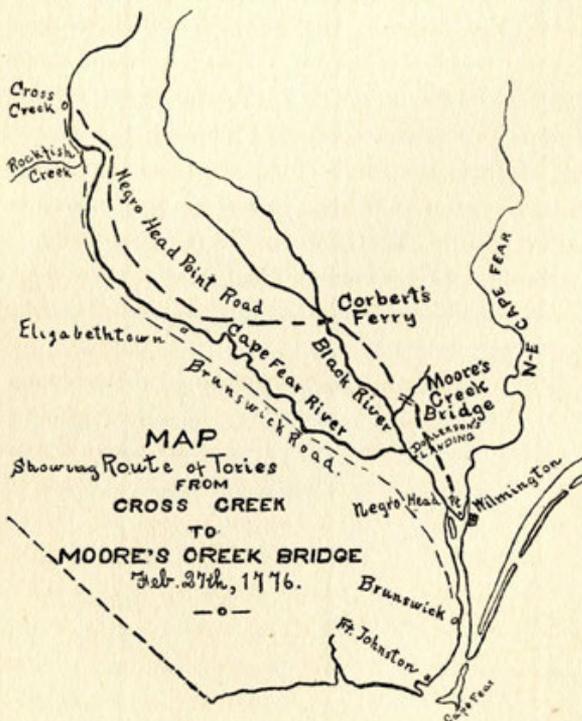
Early in 1776 Martin's heart was gladdened by the receipt of a letter telling him that Lord Cornwallis and seven regiments would soon sail to his relief on a fleet commanded by Sir Peter Parker. Additional aid was also to be brought to him from the north by Major General Clinton. The time for action was at hand. The Highlanders, Regulators, and all other loyalists must be brought down to the coast to join with the coming British soldiers and march through the province to overawe the people. All of his insults and injuries, beginning with the first Provincial Congress and ending with his virtual imprisonment on the *Cruizer*, are to be avenged at last. The rebellion will be crushed and his Majesty's lawful government restored.

He issued a proclamation declaring it to be necessary to raise the royal standard and calling on all of his Majesty's faithful servants to repair to it or be regarded as "Rebels and Traitors." He had long looked for and planned for the coming of this hour.

Donald McDonald, an old hero of Culloden and Bunker Hill, had been in the neighborhood of Cross Creek for months advocating the King's cause. Having been appointed General, he raised the royal standard and called on all to rally to it. In a few days two thousand Tories had assembled at Cross Creek and were ready to be led to Brunswick by

February 15th, according to Martin's instructions. Will the well-laid plans of the Governor succeed? We shall see.

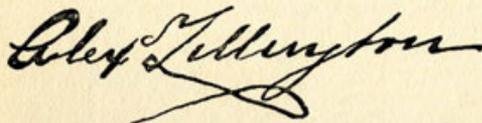
Colonel Moore now marched his Continental regiment to meet the Tories and fortified a position at Rockfish Creek, eight miles from Cross Creek,* on the road running to Brunswick along the south side of the Cape Fear.



*Now Fayetteville.

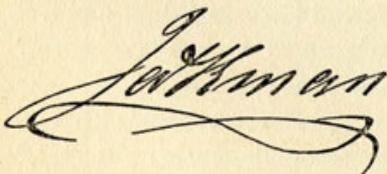
In the meantime the Committee of Safety at New Bern, hearing of the Tory uprising, had ordered Richard Caswell, Colonel of minute-men in the New Bern military district, to "march immediately with the Minute Men under his Command to join the Forces"* from the other parts of the province for the purpose of suppressing the insurrection. The militia colonels in the several counties in the district who, according to the military act adopted at Hillsboro,† were outranked by the Colonel of minute-men in the district, were ordered to take their men and "join the Minute Men under the Command of Colonel Richard Caswell."‡ While Caswell was hurrying from the east to join Moore at Rockfish, several other colonels from different parts of the province were marching rapidly to the front for the same purpose.

By the middle of February Moore had with him at Rockfish a force consisting of his own Continentals, Alexander



Lillington, Colonel of minute-men of the Wilmington district, with one hundred and

fifty men, Colonel John Ashe, of New Hanover, with one hundred volunteers, and Colonel James Kenan with the Duplin



militia. Colonel Thackston of the Hillsboro district and Colonel Martin of the Salisbury district were in striking distance of Cross Creek. In a

*Col. Recs., Vol. X, 444.

†Col. Recs., Vol. X, 199.

‡Col. Recs., Vol. X, 444.

few days McDonald marched to within four miles of Moore's position and sent him the following letter:

"HEADQUARTERS, February 19, 1776.

"SIR:—I herewith send the bearer Donald Morrison * * * to propose terms to you as friends and countrymen. I must suppose you unacquainted with the Governor's Proclamation, commanding all his majesty's loyal subjects to repair to the King's royal standard, else I should have imagined you would, ere this, have joined the King's army, now engaged in his Majesty's service. I have therefore thought it proper to intimate to you, that, in case you do not, by twelve o'clock tomorrow, join the royal standard, I must consider you as enemies, and take the necessary steps for the support of legal authority. I again beg of you to accept the proffered clemency. * * *

"I have the honor to be, in behalf of the Army, sir,

"Your most humble servant,

"DONALD McDONALD.

"P. S.—His excellency's Proclamation is herewith enclosed."

Moore had had practically no military training, and yet he was a born strategist, as is shown by his management of the troops under his command in this campaign. To make sure of his game he "plays for time" until Thackston and Martin may be near enough to cut off the enemy's retreat,*

* Moore's Letter to Harnett, Rev. Hist. of N. C., Hawkes, Swain, Graham, 218.

and hence his method of reply in the first of the following letters:

“CAMP AT ROCKFISH, February 19.

“SIR:—Yours of this date I have received; in answer to which I must inform you, that the terms which you are pleased to say * * * are offered to us as friends and countrymen, are such as neither my duty or inclinations will permit me to accept, and which I must presume you too much of an officer to expect of me. You were right when you supposed me unacquainted with the Governor's Proclamation; but as the terms therein proposed are such as I hold incompatible with the freedom of Americans, it can be no rule of conduct for me. However, should I not hear further from you before twelve o'clock to-morrow, by which time I shall have an opportunity of consulting my officers here, and perhaps Colonel Martin, who is in the neighborhood of Cross-Creek, you may expect a more particular answer; * * *

“I am, sir, your most obedient and humble servant,

“JAMES MOORE.”

“CAMP AT ROCKFISH, February 20, 1776.

“SIR:—Agreeable to my promise of yesterday, I have consulted the officers under my command, respecting your letter, and am happy in finding them unanimous in opinion with me. We consider ourselves engaged in a cause the most glorious and honorable in the world, the defence of the liberties of mankind, in the support of which we are determined to hazard every thing dear and valuable; and in tenderness

to the deluded people under your command, permit me, sir, through you, to inform them, before it is too late, of the dangerous and destructive precipice on which they stand, and to remind them of the ungrateful return they are about to make for their favorable reception in this country. If this is not sufficient to recall them to the duty they owe to themselves and their posterity, inform them that they are engaged in a cause in which they cannot succeed, as not only the whole force of this country, but that of our neighboring Provinces, is exerting and now actually in motion to suppress them, and which must end in their utter destruction. Desirous, however, of avoiding the effusion of human blood, I have thought proper to send you a copy of the Test recommended by the Continental Congress, which, if they will yet subscribe and lay down their arms by twelve o'clock to-morrow, we are willing to receive them as friends and countrymen. Should this offer be rejected, I shall consider them as enemies to the Constitutional liberties of America, and treat them accordingly. I cannot conclude without reminding you, sir, of the oath which you and some of your officers took at New Bern, on your arrival to this country, which I imagine you will find difficult to reconcile to your present conduct. * * * *

"I am, sir, your most obedient and humble servant,

"J. MOORE."

"HEAD-QUARTERS, February 20, 1776.

"SIR:—I received your favor * * * and observed the declared sentiments of revolt, hostility, and rebellion to

the King, and to what I understand to be the Constitution of this country. If I am mistaken, future consequences must determine; but while I continue in my present sentiments, I shall consider myself embarked in a cause which must * * * extricate this country from anarchy and licentiousness. I cannot conceive that the Scots emigrants, to whom I imagine you allude, can be under greater obligations to this country than to the King under whose gracious and merciful Government they alone could have been enabled to visit this Western region: and I trust, sir, it is in the womb of time to say, that they are not that deluded and ungrateful people which you would represent them to be. As a soldier in his Majesty's service, I must inform you, if you are yet to learn, that it is my duty to conquer, if I cannot reclaim, all those who may be hardy enough to take up arms against the best of masters, as of Kings.

"I have the honor to be, in behalf of the Army under my command, sir, your most obedient servant,

"DONALD McDONALD.

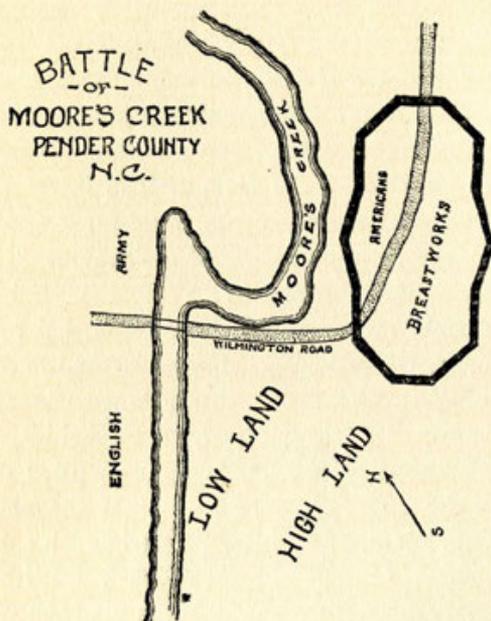
"To JAMES MOORE, Esq."

The next day Moore was informed that the enemy had crossed the Cape Fear the night before near Cross Creek and was then on the way to Wilmington. He knew the country perfectly and formed his plans immediately. Thackston and Martin were ordered to take possession of Cross Creek so as to prevent the enemy's return to that place, a special courier ordered Caswell to take possession of Corbert's Ferry over

Black River, while Lillington and Ashe were sent to re-inforce Caswell, if possible, but if not, to take possession of Moore's Creek Bridge, which, like Corbert's Ferry, was on the road the Tories were traveling to Wilmington. And now with every avenue of escape closely guarded, Moore and his Continentals, accompanied by Kenan and the Duplin militia, rushed down to Elizabethtown, hoping to cross the river there in time to meet McDonald on his way to Corbert's Ferry or to "fall in their rear and surround them there." Every order of Moore, the Commanding Colonel, was obeyed to the letter. Thackston and Martin took possession of Cross Creek, Caswell went to Corbert's Ferry, and Lillington and Ashe took their stand at Moore's Creek Bridge. Soon Caswell informed Moore that the Tories had raised a flat, sunk in the Black River, five miles above him, and by erecting a bridge, had crossed it with their whole army.* Moore immediately hurried on towards Moore's Creek and ordered Caswell to do the same. In faithful obedience to the orders of his superior officer, Caswell, who had been joined by Colonel John Hinton, of Wake county, marched to Moore's Creek Bridge, arriving there at night,† February 26th, where he found Lillington and Ashe in an entrenched position on a sandy elevation, about one hundred yards from the bridge. The flooring of the bridge was taken up, the pine pole girders thoroughly greased

*Moore's Letter to Harnett, Rev. Hist. of N. C., Hawkes, Swain, Graham, 219.

†Caswell's Letter to Harnett, Col. Recs., Vol. X, 482.



with tallow, over which quantities of soft soap were poured to make crossing the more difficult, and then the patriots resolutely awaited the coming of the Tories.

We are now on the eve of a decisive battle which is to determine North Carolina's stand in the long struggle for American independence. From across the ocean

Cornwallis and his regiments are coming to help establish forever the rule of Great Britain in North Carolina, Clinton and his army are on their way down the coast to join Lord Cornwallis at the mouth of the Cape Fear, and Governor Martin, eager to welcome the coming of the Highlanders and Regulars, has moved up the river near to Wilmington, where, under the pretext of demanding supplies from its citizens, he stands on the deck of the *Cruizer* sloop of war anxiously awaiting to catch sight of the advancing loyal clans and hear the tri-

umphant sound of the Scotchmen's bagpipes. But whether North Carolina is to be saved to the British Crown or not, depends not so much on the coming of Cornwallis and Clinton, as on McDonald's leading his army safely over the bridge and on through the patriots' lines of defence. Far out there in the piney woods of North Carolina, away from British interference, the Tories and the patriots are soon to settle forever, at the point of the sword, the political future of the province.

In the early morning of February 27, 1776, the Highlanders began their march. They moved bravely on, led by their gallant commander, Colonel McLeod, who crossed over on the poles, and seeing an abandoned entrenchment "next



MOORE'S CREEK BRIDGE, 1904.

the bridge," supposed that the patriots had fled. With a glad shout he called to his followers that the day was won, but just then the alarm gun sounded, volley after volley was poured upon the advancing columns,

the little cannon on the breastworks swept the bridge, McLeod fell riddled with bullets, and the Tories, stunned by the destructive and unexpected resistance, fled in confusion before the now advancing patriots, who quickly replaced the flooring of the bridge and rushed on in pursuit of their enemies. In the meantime a detachment of patriots had crossed the creek above the bridge and added to the defeat of the Highlanders by a flank attack.

Thus in a few minutes sixteen hundred* Tories had been put to flight by one thousand patriots, who had only one killed and one wounded. "The number (of Tories) killed and mortally wounded * * * was about thirty; most of them were shot on passing the bridge. Several had fallen into the water, some of whom, I am pretty certain, had not risen yesterday evening (February 28th) when I left the camp. Such prisoners as we have made, say there were at least fifty of their men missing."†

General McDonald, who had been too unwell to command the Tories during the battle, was captured the next day at a house a few miles from Moore's Creek Bridge. Together with Allan McDonald and many other prisoners he was sent to Halifax for confinement and afterwards to Philadelphia.

A few hours after the engagement Colonel Moore arrived on the ground, and, although he was too late to take active part in the battle, he could but rejoice in the successful

*Caswell's Letter to Harnett, Col. Recs., Vol. X, 482.

†Gen. McDonald's estimate, Col. Recs., Vol. X, 482.

execution of his well-laid plans by his subordinate officers, whose every movement had been in strict accord with his direct orders.

The results of the victory were most important. The patriots roamed over the country in pursuit of the Highlanders and Regulators, disarming them wherever found. Among the trophies were "350 guns and shot-bags; 150 swords and dirks; 1,500 excellent rifles; two medicine chests, fresh from England, one of them valued at 300 pounds sterling; a box containing half Johanesses and Guineas, secreted in a stable at Cross Creek, discovered by a negro, and reported to be worth 15,000 pounds sterling; thirteen wagons, with complete sets of horses, and 850 common soldiers," who were disarmed and then discharged.

This brilliant victory saved North Carolina to the cause of American independence; it showed that North Carolina was able to hold in check the Tories within her borders; it won over to the cause of freedom many who had hitherto held back for fear of England's power, and it so thoroughly broke the spirit of Regulators and Highlanders that they never again rallied to the support of the royal cause,—no, not even when in 1781, Cornwallis marched among them on his way from Guilford Court House to Wilmington. And the fact that ten thousand men, during this month of February, 1776, had taken up arms in defence of liberty, showed that North Carolina's opposition to wrong and oppression had reached

the fighting point of seriousness, thus teaching England what to expect from all of her southern Colonies.

Soon after the battle, Cornwallis and Clinton reached the Cape Fear, learned of the defeat of the Tories and sailed away to South Carolina, taking with them Josiah Martin, the last of North Carolina's royal Governors. Space will not permit our following him further at this time.

Unfortunately there is a dispute as to whether Lillington or Caswell commanded the American forces at the battle of Moore's Creek Bridge.

According to an act of the Provincial Congress, passed at Hillsboro, September 7, 1775, a colonel of minute-men in a military district ranked the militia colonels in that district, but was himself ranked by a colonel in the regular army. In case two colonels of minute-men should hold commissions of the same date, the Provincial Council was to determine the relative rank of each. Lillington and Caswell were made colonels on the same day, and there has not yet been found any record of the Provincial Council determining their relative rank.

The spirit of the military legislation of the times was that a resident colonel or general of one district ranked an officer of the same grade coming from another district.*

The battle was fought in Lillington's district, and according to Caswell's own statement he found upon his arrival at

* Col. Recs., Vol. X, 530.



LILLINGTON'S CRESCENT.†

Moore's Creek Bridge, the night before the battle, a detachment of the Wilmington Battalion of minute-men already on the ground "under the command of Colonel Lillington."* Certainly Lillington, who had come to Moore's Creek in obedience to Colonel Moore's orders, and had thrown up defences,‡ and taken his position behind them ready to receive the coming foe, would have hardly given up the post of honor to Caswell, who had been ordered to Moore's Creek Bridge by Colonel Moore, simply because the Tories had crossed the river five miles above his (Caswell's) position, and had again begun their march towards Wilmington. No doubt a glad shout greeted "Caswell and the brave officers and soldiers under his command" as they marched over the bridge that February night and took their position in the rear where they might support those already posted on the fighting line. A visit to the locality and a careful study of the battle-field and the old breastworks, yet to be seen, will, I think, convince one that this would be the natural arrangement of troops arriving there at different times. The only man killed was John Grady, of Duplin. We are told that he belonged to the company of Captain Love, who lived in New Hanover, near the Duplin line. If so, he was no doubt either a minute-man in

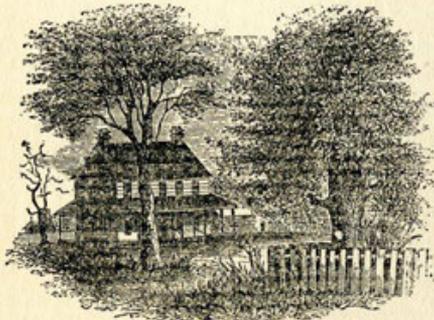
*Col. Recs., Vol. X, 482. †Many of the patriots wore silver crescents on their hats during the battle. Lillington's was sent, with other Revolutionary relics, to the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, where the whole collection was lost. ‡Col. Recs., Vol. XV, 785, 788.

Lillington's Battalion, since his county was in the Wilmington district, or belonged to Ashe's New Hanover volunteers, which formed a part of Lillington's command, a fact helping to show that Lillington's men were in the front of the fight. It is said that he did not go to the war until Caswell's command passed his home, when he marched away with it, and thus reached his old company in time to give his young life for his country.

Tradition in the neighborhood of the battle-field gave the praise of leadership to Lillington, "and the matrons and maidens of New Hanover would often beguile the winter nights by a popular song, whose burden was the field—

"Where Lillington fought for Caswell's glory."*

Mr. Joshua G. Wright, in a speech delivered at the dedication of a monument on the battle-field in 1857, said: "Aye, even from the lips of the late Colonel Samuel Ashe, we have it that Lillington was the Great Leader of the contest." Colonel Ashe was in his fourteenth year at the time of the battle and must have received his in-



LILLINGTON HALL.

*McRee's Iredell, Vol. I, 272.

formation from his uncle, who was there with his volunteers.

Lillington died ten years after the battle and was buried at his home, Lillington Hall, about six miles from Rocky Point. The following inscription on his tombstone is of great interest and help in determining the question of command at Moore's Creek Bridge:

BENEATH THIS STONE
LIE THE MORTAL REMAINS OF
GENERAL
JOHN ALEXANDER LILLINGTON,
A SOLDIER OF THE REVOLUTION
WHO DIED IN 1786.
HE COMMANDED THE AMERICAN FORCES
AT THE BATTLE OF MOORE'S CREEK,
ON THE 27TH FEBRUARY, 1776;
AND BY HIS MILITARY SKILL
AND COOL COURAGE IN THE FIELD
AT THE HEAD OF HIS TROOPS, SECURED A
COMPLETE AND DECISIVE VICTORY.
TO INTELLECTUAL POWERS OF A HIGH ORDER
HE UNITED AN INCORRUPTIBLE INTEGRITY
AND A DEVOTED AND SELF-SACRIFICING
PATRIOTISM; A GENUINE LOVER OF LIBERTY,
HE PERILLED HIS ALL TO SECURE THE
INDEPENDENCE OF HIS COUNTRY,
AND DIED IN A GOOD OLD AGE,
BEQUEATHING TO HIS POSTERITY
THE REMEMBRANCE OF
HIS VIRTUES.

The claim that Caswell commanded the American forces at Moore's Creek is based on the following resolution adopted by the Provincial Congress at Halifax six weeks after the battle:

"Resolved, That the thanks of this Congress be given to Col. Richard Caswell, and the brave officers and soldiers under his command, for the very essential service by them rendered this country at the battle of Moore's Creek."

Now, who were "the brave officers and soldiers under his command," to whom thanks were given for "the very essential service" rendered at Moore's Creek?

We have already seen that when the New Bern Safety Committee heard that the Tories were about to march to Brunswick, it ordered Colonel Caswell of the minute-men in the district to "march immediately with the Minute Men *under his Command to join the Forces* which may march from different Parts of this Province," and that it also ordered the militia Colonels of Dobbs, Johnston, Pitt and Craven counties to take their troops and "join the Minute Men under the Command of Colonel Richard Caswell."*

Having been ordered to "join," and not having been ordered to take command of, forces coming from other parts of the province, he and "the brave officers and soldiers under his command" acted in accordance with the orders of Colonel James Moore from the time of their arrival in, and up to their

*Col. Recs., Vol. X, 444.

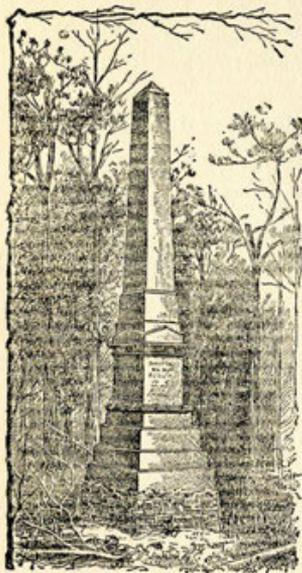
departure from, the Wilmington military district. Two days after the battle, in a letter to Harnett, Caswell wrote: "I, therefore, *with Colonel Moore's consent*, am returning to New Bern with the troops *under my command*,"—that is, with those he had brought with him from his own district and not Lillington's men, for they went down to the defence of Wilmington.*

With the evidence before me I believe that the vote of thanks to Caswell has been misconstrued beyond the intent of the Congress, that Lillington, the resident colonel of minute-men in the district, was technically the ranking officer in the battle; that he bore the brunt of the attack and turned the enemy back; that Caswell joined in the pursuit and helped to make the victory more complete; that each strove for victory, thinking little of rank, and that the Provincial Congress, to which Caswell had already been elected and in which he was soon to take his seat, gladly gave a vote of thanks to him who, twice their representative in the Continental Congress, had now led eight hundred men into a neighboring district and rendered "very essential service" in gaining the first battle fought in the province.

The great and undisputed hero of the campaign, however, was James Moore, of Brunswick, Colonel of the First North Carolina Regiment in the Continental Army. He planned the whole campaign, provided for every contingency, and drove the enemy into the hands of the two brave colonels who had taken their stand at Moore's Creek Bridge in faithful

*Col. Recs., Vol. XV, 785, 788.

obedience to his orders. The success of the American arms is due entirely to his foresight, energy, and skill; and the Provincial Council, the military Board of Control in the Province, most promptly and properly passed the following resolution at a meeting held in New Bern, March 4, 1776:



MONUMENT AT MOORE'S CREEK.

*“Resolved, That the thanks of of this Council be given to Col. James Moore and all the Brave Officers and Soldiers of every denomination for their late very important services rendered their country in effectually suppressing the late daring and dangerous insurrection of the Highlanders and Regulators, and that this Resolve be published in the North Carolina Gazette.”**

In 1857 a monument was erected on the battle-field to commemorate the victory. On one face of the monument is the name of LILLINGTON and on the opposite one is that of CASWELL; on the third face is the inscription already quoted, while on the remaining face is the following:

*Col. Recs., Vol. X, 475.

HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF
 PRIVATE JOHN GRADY,
 OF DUPLIN COUNTY,
 WHO FELL BRAVELY FIGHTING FOR HIS
 COUNTRY—THE FIRST MARTYR IN
 THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM IN NORTH
 CAROLINA, AND THE ONLY WHIG
 KILLED IN THE BATTLE.

It would be of great interest, did space permit, to write more fully of these gallant leaders,—Moore and Kenan, Thackston and Martin, Lillington and Caswell, Ashe, Hinton, and others. Their names will ever be gratefully remembered when the story is told of how they fought the fight that saved our State and won "The first victory of the Revolution." But of equal interest, charm and pride would be the story of the lives of the brave men they led to battle, those sturdy patriots who never laid aside their arms until independence was acknowledged, and who then went back to their homes where, as quiet, private citizens, they helped to build up the "Old North State"—that State which their descendants will ever love, honor and defend.

CHAPEL HILL, N. C.,
 March 31, 1904.

NOTE.—I thank Dr. C. A. Smith, of the University of North Carolina, for careful reading of the proof, and Mr. A. D. Ward, of New Bern, and Messrs. Junius Davis and J. O. Carr, of Wilmington, for help in collecting *data* used in the preparation of this BOOKLET. M. C. S. N.

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