

Lincoln County Men at Kings Mountain

Men who contributed to the Kings Mountain victory, 7 October 1780.

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Synopsis

The Battle of Kings Mountain was a decisive Patriot victory during the American Revolution. Its story usually focuses on the extraordinary trek of the Overmountain Men from Virginia and what is now Tennessee. But about half the participants were from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Their stories are also compelling.

Lincoln County men contributed much to the Patriot victory at the Battle of Kings Mountain on 7 October 1780. They were a distinct military unit before and during the battle. Their strength was 60 to 80 men. Yet, their contribution and sacrifice was well out of proportion to their numbers. Important facts are:

- The American Revolution began on 19 April 1775 at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. This event caused widespread anger throughout the 13 colonies. On 14 August 1775, Patriots, called Whigs, of Tryon County, North Carolina, met and composed the *Tryon County Resolves*. It asserted that they would take up arms to defend against “ministerial vengeance and despotism.” It stipulated that all residents were to sign an oath of allegiance to this new government. But Tryon County residents were very conflicted. Many influential men wanted to remain loyal to Great Britain. These Loyalists chafed at being excluded from government decisions from 1775 to 1780.
- Lincoln County was formed in April 1779 from Tryon County. It was named for Major General Benjamin Lincoln who was commanding American forces in South Carolina opposite British occupied Savannah, Georgia. At that time, Lincoln County included present-day Lincoln, Gaston, and Cleveland Counties, with minor deviations.
- On 12 May 1780, British forces captured Charlestown and quickly controlled all of South Carolina. Lincoln County Loyalists saw their chance to reassert control. They assembled at Moses Moore’s plantation and soon afterwards at Ramsour’s Mill. But on 20 June 1780, they were defeated and dispersed by Patriot militia forces led by Colonel Francis Locke and Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford.
- In September 1780, Cornwallis’s army advanced towards North Carolina. In response, Lincoln County Patriots organized at Espey’s plantation. They then moved to Lincoln County Courthouse and Moses Moore’s plantation. They patrolled the county to prevent another Loyalist uprising.
- Beginning in late September, British Major Patrick Ferguson advanced his force of about 1100 Loyalists from South Carolina to near the Burke County Courthouse, present-day Morganton, North Carolina. This threat became untenable for the small number of Lincoln County Patriots, who withdrew to join Colonel Thomas Sumter’s men encamped at Tuckasee Ford on the Catawba River. At this time, Cornwallis’s main army of 2000 redcoats occupied Charlotte, just 11 miles away, but on the opposite side of the river.
- Soon afterwards, Ferguson learned that a very large force of overmountain men Patriots were advancing on his position. He began to withdraw southward towards Gilbert Town, near present-day Rutherfordton, North Carolina. This gave the Patriots assembled at Tuckasee Ford the opportunity to counterattack. They quickly marched to Ramsour’s Mill and then to Flint Hill, present-day Cherry Mountain.

- On the evening of 6 October 1780, these men joined the overmountain men at Cowpens. There 910 of the most able men and horses were selected for a forced march to find Ferguson's troops. Beginning at 9:00 p.m., during a rain, they started marching to the east. Lincoln County men led the column. Since they lived nearby, they could best interpret information gathered from the public. They were also known by the nickname *South Fork Boys*, a reference to the South Fork of the Catawba River.
- Lincoln County man Enoch Gilmer proceeded well in advance of everyone else. He risked his life by posing as a Loyalist trying to find Ferguson's camp. At Cherokee Ford on Broad River, he signaled that the opposite bank was clear. At dawn 7 October, the entire force forded the river. Lincoln County men continued to lead.
- At 4:00 p.m., after an 18-hour nonstop 33-mile march, they surrounded the British hilltop camp. Lincoln County men marched to the furthest side and blocked the only road escape.
- During the battle, Lincoln County men fought as a distinct military unit. Their first commander Colonel William Graham was called away, the second Major William Chronicle was killed, and the third Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Hambright was badly wounded. Nonetheless, they fought bravely. They withstood at least one bayonet charge. Out of about 60 to 80 men, 11 were killed or wounded. That was a higher proportion than any other military unit. Of the 66 names appearing on the 1909 United States monument, 11 were Lincoln County men.
- After the battle, the Lincoln County men returned to their nearby homes. Most were called up again within a few weeks.
- In 1815, the battleground's first monument was dedicated to 4 Lincoln County men.
- Fortunately, names of almost all Lincoln County men are known. 24 of these, or their widows, lived long enough to describe their war-time activities in pension applications. This document lists their names with hyperlinks to their pension applications. It also links signers of the Tryon County Resolves to participants at Kings Mountain.

Timeline Format and Citations

This document follows a strict timeline. That format describes the circumstance when a leader made an important decision or took decisive action. The reader can appreciate the drama of unfolding events and a leader's courage.

History is best appreciated when expressed by actual participants. This document frequently quotes these participants. To assist further research, citations are embedded in the text and appear in the form (author year written, series:volume:page) or some appropriate variation. For example, a quote within a reference is cited as (person quoted year quoted in author year published, series:volume:page). This technique helps evaluate authenticity and, with careful text analysis, often uncovers precise time and place information. A list of all sources, articles, and books appears at the end. Place names and an individual's military rank are specified contemporaneous with the event described. For example, Charlestown was the contemporaneous name of present-day Charleston.

This timeline format with embedded citations creates a working document from which conjectured scenarios can be tested and into which new evidence can be inserted.

Veteran Pension Applications

On 7 June 1832, United States Congress passed a law awarding pensions to all living Revolutionary War veterans. Each applying veteran testified in court about his service, including details about time, place, battles, officers, units, commissions, and discharges. Collaborating witnesses testified. Excerpts from these applications appear throughout this document.

Tryon County in 1775

1775, Tryon County Resolves

Whigs in Tryon County, North Carolina, established a *Committee of Safety* on 26 July 1775. It met on 14 August to write an *Association Oath*, sometimes called *Tryon County Resolves*. Like the Mecklenburg County Resolves, enacted 31 May 1775, it empowered an independent local militia. It was not a declaration of independence. Instead, it was conditional, "til a reconciliation shall take place between Great Britain and

American.” It was a test oath that all Tryon County inhabitants were to sign, in effect endorsing the legitimacy of the Committee of Safety.

Resolved, That this Association be signed by the inhabitants of Tryon County, viz:

An Association

The unprecedented, barbarous and bloody actions committed by the British troops on our American brethren near Boston, on the 19th of April and 20th of May, last, together with the hostile operations and traitorous designs now carrying on by the tools of ministerial vengeance and despotism for the subjugating of all British America, suggest to us the painful necessity of having recourse to arms for the preservation of those rights and liberties which the principles of our constitution and the Laws of God, Nature and Nations have made it our duty to defend.

We therefore, the subscribers, freeholders and inhabitants of Tryon County, do hereby faithfully unite ourselves under the most sacred ties of religion, honor and love to our country, firmly to resist force by force in defense of our natural freedom and constitutional rights against all invasions; and at the same time do solemnly engage to take up arms and risk our lives, and fortunes, in maintaining the freedom of our country whenever the wisdom and counsel of the Continental Congress or our Provincial Convention shall declare it necessary; and this engagement we will continue in and hold sacred till a reconciliation shall take place between Great Britain and America on Constitutional principles which we most ardently desire. And we do firmly agree to hold all such persons inimical to the liberties of America who shall refuse to subscribe to this association.

[Signed] John Walker, Charles McLean, Andrew Neel, Thomas Beatty, James Coburn, Frederick Hambright, Andrew Hampton, Benjamin Hardin, George Paris, William Graham, Robert Alexander, David Jenkins, Thomas Espey, Perrygreen Mackness (Magness), James McAfee, William Thompson, Jacob Forney, Davis Whitesides, John Beeman, John Morris, Joseph Hardin, John Robison, James McIntyre, Valentine Mauney, George Black, Jas. Logan, Jas. Baird, Christian Carpenter, Abel Beatty, Joab Turner, Jonathan Price, James Miller, John Dellinger, Peter Sides, William Whiteside, George Dellinger, Samuel Carpenter, Jacob Mooney, Jr., John Wells, Jacob Costner, Robert Hulclip, James Buchanan, Moses Moore, Joseph Kuykendall, Adam Simms, Richard Waffer, Samuel Smith, Joseph Neel, Samuel Loftin. (Griffin 1937, 17)

In 1919, a monument commemorating the Tryon County Resolves was erected at the site of the original Tryon County Courthouse. That location is on highway NC274 about 4 miles south of Cherryville, North Carolina. Before 1779, Tryon County included present-day Lincoln, Gaston, Cleveland and Rutherford Counties.



Tryon County Resolves Historical Marker

Tryon County in 1776

July–October 1776, Campaign against Cherokees

In July 1776, Cherokees, who were encouraged by the British and led by Dragging Canoe, raided throughout western Carolinas, including present-day Tennessee, killing at least 44 settlers (Preyer 1987, 117). In retaliation, each of the four southern states organized an expeditionary army. Colonel Griffith Rutherford organized a 2000-man army of North Carolinians. At this time, William Graham was commissioned colonel in command of Tryon County militia. His commission was granted by the North Carolina Provincial Congress.

North Carolina, Hillsboro. In Congress September 9, 1776
 this may certify that William Graham Esq. is appointed by
 act of Congress Colonel of the militia in the County of
 Tryon by order of Samuel Johnston, President
 Andrew Knox, secretary. (Graham, William, pension application 1832)

Corporal Samuel Espey was typical of many Tryon County militiamen. He volunteered as a ranger against the Cherokees. Beginning 10 July 1776, for about one month, he remained at McFadden's Fort on Mountain Creek just west of present-day Rutherfordton. On 19 August, at Moses Moore's home 6 miles from present-day Lincolnton, he joined Captain Peter Carpenter's company in Colonel William Graham's regiment. Moore's home was near where present-day Shoal Road crosses Indian Creek (Dellinger 2006–2008). From there he marched to Pleasant Gardens, on the Catawba River headwaters, and joined Colonel Rutherford's expedition. It crossed the French Broad River and advanced as far as the Little Tennessee River and then returned. Espey was discharged on 6 October (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832).

British support of this Indian uprising alienated many Tryon County German-speaking settlers who otherwise would have been loyalists. Jacob Plunk II was typical among this group. He served as a militia private starting about June 1776 in Captain Robert Alexander's company (Plunk, Jacob, pension application 1832). That company marched to Monfort's Cove (Hunter 1877, 297) in present-day Rutherford County, North Carolina. From there, his company joined Rutherford's campaign.

Rutherford's army used no wagons; all provisions were carried by packhorse (Hunter 1877, 177). During September 1776, it destroyed the Cherokee Middle Towns with their crops. That location was between the

present-day towns of Cherokee and Murphy, North Carolina. Most Cherokees fled the attack. Some who were captured were sold into slavery (Hatley 1995, 194–197). In early 1777, Cherokees attacked again, but by May, their resistance collapsed. In a 20 July 1777 treaty, Cherokees relinquished most of their lands in the Carolinas.

Lincoln County in 1779

In April 1779, Major General Benjamin Lincoln and Colonel Griffith Rutherford were heroes among the Whigs. Both were opposing British forces within Savannah, Georgia. In North Carolina, the local Tryon County Whig government split and renamed their new counties Lincoln and Rutherford.



Major General Benjamin Lincoln
Painted by Charles Willson Peale, 1781–1783.

Colonel William Graham received a new commission as head of Lincoln County militia. Its text was typical of all officer commissions.

State of North Carolina: to William Graham Esq.,

greetings, we, reposing special trust and confidence in your Valor, Conduct and Fidelity do by these presents Constitute and appoint you to be Col of the Lincoln [County] Regiment of Militia of this State. You [illegible words] carefully and diligently to discharge the duties of a Colonel by exercising and well disciplining the Officers and Soldiers under your Command and by doing and performing all manner of things thereunto belonging and we do Strictly Charge and require all Officers and Soldiers under your Command to be Obedient to your Orders as Colonel and you are to Observe and follow such Orders and Directions from time to time as you shall receive from your Superior Officers according to the Rules and Directions of Military Discipline and the law of this State.

Witness: Richard Caswell, Esq., Governor Captain General and Commander in Chief of the said State under his hand and the Great Seal of this State at Smithfield the 12th day of May Anna Dom 1779 and in the 3rd year of our independence.

By his Excellency commanded: [signed] J. Glasgow, Sec.
[signed] Richard Caswell (Graham, William, pension application 1832)

Lincoln County in 1780

May 1780, Charlestown

In 1780, the American Revolutionary War was over 5 years old. Whigs controlled governments in almost all towns and state governments. They required all residents to sign oaths of allegiance. New state government constitutions were in effect. State legislatures and governors held office. Those residents who wish to remain loyal to the British royal government could not hold public office or expect the Whig governments to protect them. Deep resentments simmered for 5 years and exploded when the British Army invaded the South. In 1778, the British captured Savannah, Georgia.

On 12 May 1780, after a 6-week siege, the British captured Charlestown, South Carolina. All North Carolina and South Carolina Continental Army regiments were captured and removed from the war. The British Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Charles Lord Cornwallis, immediately extended its control into the Carolina upcountry, establishing strong forts at Augusta, Ninety Six, Camden, and Georgetown. The British strategy was to encourage local Loyalists to rise up, fight the Whigs, and reestablish loyal governments.



Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis
Painted by Thomas Gainsborough, 1783,
National Portrait Gallery, London.

June 1780, Ramsour's Mill

Meanwhile, on 10 June 1780, Colonel John Moore held a secret meeting of 40 Loyalists “in the woods on Indian Creek seven miles from Ramsour’s [Mill]” (Schenck 1890, 53). Seven miles from Derick Ramsour’s Mill would be near where present-day Shoal Road crosses Indian Creek. The home of John Moore’s father Moses Moore was near that location (Dellinger 2006–2008). These Loyalists conspired to call out more Loyalists. A few days later, about 1000 Tories assembled at Ramsour’s Mill, in present-day Lincolnton, North Carolina.

On 14 June, Brigadier General Rutherford ordered Colonel Francis Locke, commander of Rowan County militia, to disperse these Tories (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 213–214). On 17 June, Rutherford, after learning that Rawdon had withdrawn from Waxhaw Creek to Hanging Rock, planned to join Locke in attacking the Tories at Ramsour’s Mill (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 214) (Robinson 1957, 43). Rutherford recalled the militia to assemble in Charlotte. Meanwhile, about 400 Rowan militiamen assembled under Colonel Francis Locke. They marched from Salisbury across the Catawba River at Sherrill’s Ford and Mountain Creek. At daybreak, on 20 June, these Whigs attacked in what became known as Battle of Ramsour’s Mill. Both sides were poorly led, resulting in mayhem in which neighbor farmers killed and maimed each other. Approximately 100 men died on each side. About 2 hours later, Lieutenant Colonel Davidson’s troops arrived in advance of Rutherford’s army on the march from Charlotte. The

battle's significance was that Tories dispersed and were demoralized. Fortunately for the patriot cause, this Tory assembly did not occur 3 months later when the British Army was in nearby Charlotte.

Some Tory soldiers were superstitious Germans:

At one time during the conflict when the battle was at its bitterest an incident occurred which came near breaking the enemy's lines. A soldier who was a "Conjurer" — the Germans were generally believers in Witchcraft — had practiced his art on the Tory soldiers and "conjured off bullets" from a good many who were of his faith, by mysterious motions, incantations, and all sorts of rig-a-marole and manipulations, always accepting a fee for his services. According to him none of his "patients" could be shot with leaden bullets, nothing but a silver bullet could possibly hit a "Conjured soldier." But this Conjurer was singled out and shot in his right hand, whereupon he dropped his gun and ran down the hill to the mill pond and plunged in; gathering an old rotten stump which he managed to keep near his head as he swam the mill pond and made his escape. One of Reep's sharpshooters ran down and fired at his head but the old stump saved his life. About 20 of his manipulated believers saw him run after being shot in the hand and they, too, left the ranks and started down the hill for the mill pond at full speed, crying out, "Silver bullets, silver bullets." Captain Warlick witnessed this break and had them all brought back and gave orders to shoot the first man who attempted to run. (Fair 1937)

Immediately after Ramsour's Mill, Rutherford and Davidson pursued Loyalists assembling under Colonel Samuel Bryan at Abbotts Creek on the east side of the Yadkin River. As soon as these Loyalists learned the results of Ramsour's Mill, they attempted to escape along the east side of the Yadkin towards the British encampment at Cheraw, South Carolina (Graham 1820 in Graham 1904, 193). Rutherford tried to prevent this escape, but failed. After Ramsour's Mill, the Mecklenburg militiamen under Colonel Robert Irwin returned to Charlotte and were temporarily dismissed. Soon afterwards, they reassembled and marched to South Carolina to assist Sumter. Lincoln County patriots were ordered to remain in a high state of readiness. In 1832, Colonel William Graham later [testified](#):

About that time our forces began to embody and I think in the same summer the Battle was fought at Ramsour's [Mill]. I was not there at the battle but arrived there in company the next day with General Rutherford and Col Martin. I was then ordered to keep in readiness as strong a force as I could raise ready at a moment's warning. We could not keep in large bodies. We had nothing to subsist on. I kept up what was called the Flying Camp. (Graham, William, pension application 1832)

In 1832, Abraham Forney [testified](#):

That sometime in June 1780, there was a call upon the Militia, he [Abraham Forney] volunteered and served as a private in Captain John Baldrige's Company and a part embodied at the time first mentioned at Ramsour's Mills, from thence we marched to Espey's, where we joined more troops and lay there about three weeks collecting men. At this place Colonel [William] Graham & Lt. Col. Hambright took the command of us. From thence we marched to Lincoln old Court House, to old Moses Moore's, the father of Colonel John Moore the Tory and marched and counter marched through all that section of Country (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

Late July–Early August 1780, Graham's Fort, Wofford's Iron Works

For about three weeks in July 1780, Lincoln County Whigs assembled at Espey's plantation (Hunter 1877, 265) under the leadership of Colonel William Graham and Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Hambright (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832).

Encouraged by the British advance, marauding Tories threatened the Whig families of southern Lincoln County, present-day Cleveland County. For protection, the Whigs gathered at the fortified home of Colonel William Graham on the west bank of Buffalo Creek. In September 1780, about 23 Tories attacked this fort. Only three fighting men were present to defend the many young and old in the fort. They were William

Graham, David Dickey, and nineteen-year-old William Twitty. (Graham, William, pension application 1832) (Draper 1881, 145)

One fellow [Tory], John Burke, more venturesome than the rest, ran up to the house, and through a crack aimed at young Twitty, when Susan Twitty, the sister of the young soldier, seeing his peril, jerked her brother down just as the gun fired, the ball penetrating the opposite wall. She then looked out of the aperture, and saw Burke, not far off, on his knees, re-loading for another fire; and quickly comprehending the situation, exclaimed: “brother William, now’s your chance—shoot the rascal!” The next instant young Twitty’s gun cracked, and bold Tory was shot through the head. So eager was Miss Twitty to render the good cause any service in her power, that she at once unbarred the door, darted out, and brought in, amid a shower of Tory bullets, Burke’s gun and ammunition, as trophies of victory. She fortunately escaped unhurt. It was a heroic act for a young girl of seventeen. (Draper 1881, 145–146)

Some Lincoln County men joined Colonel Joseph McDowell at Cherokee Ford on Broad River (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832). About 2 August, Colonel Isaac Shelby, Colonel Elijah Clarke, and Colonel Graham moved their 400 troops south to Brown’s Creek (Graham, William, pension application 1832). On 6–7 August, these men withdrew to Fair Forest Creek (Draper 1881, 90) near present-day Spartanburg, South Carolina.

During the summer 1780, Scotsman Major Patrick Ferguson recruited loyalist militiamen in upstate South Carolina. In reaction, patriot militiamen harassed these loyalists. On the night of 7–8 August, about 400 patriots camped at Fair Forest Creek near present-day Spartanburg, South Carolina. At dawn, they were alerted that Ferguson was advancing on them with a 1000-man army at nearby Cedar Springs. They quickly abandoned camp and fell back to a better defensible position across Lawson’s Fork Creek at Wofford’s Iron Works in present-day Glendale, South Carolina. Loyalist light-cavalry, call dragoons, under Captain James Duncan arrived first. The patriots repulsed two dragoon charges and for a short while remounted and pursued them. However, when Ferguson’s full army arrived, the outnumbered patriots withdrew. (Draper 1881, 90–94).

Mid August 1780, Gates’ Defeat, Sumter’s Surprise

Apparently, no Lincoln County militia units marched with Brigadier General Rutherford in pursuit of Colonel Samuel Bryan down the Yadkin and Pee Dee Rivers to Cheraw and later joined the large American army led by Major General Horatio Gates. However, at least one Lincoln County residents who enlisted in Mecklenburg County units did follow Rutherford. John Espey did so. On 15 August, while at Rugeley’s Mill, South Carolina, Espey was among the soldiers ordered by Gates to reinforce Colonel Thomas Sumter. He was lucky to survive Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton’s surprise attack at Fishing Creek on 18 August. (Espey, John, pension application 1832)

September–October 1780, Ferguson, Overmountain Men, Kings Mountain

In September 1780, the patriot situation was desperate. During the previous May, Charlestown fell with many Continental soldiers taken prisoner, including all active North and South Carolina Continental Army regiments. In late May, 260 Virginia Continentals were brutally killed or wounded at Buford’s massacre. Tories proved they could assemble in large numbers as at Ramsour’s Mill on 20 June. On 16 August, 1050 soldiers, including many Continentals, were killed or captured at Camden. American Major General Horatio Gates was discredited. Two days later, 150 of Colonel Thomas Sumter’s soldiers were killed at Fishing Creek. Finally, Charlotte was occupied. It appeared that Cornwallis would soon subdue North Carolina. It is remarkable that rebel resistance continued.

By late September, Major Patrick Ferguson had recruited over 1100 Loyalists, about half from upstate South Carolina and half from North Carolina (Draper 1881, 293). In addition, he had a cadre of uniformed provincial troops, mostly New Yorkers, from four regiments: *King’s American Regiment* commanded by Captain Abraham DePeyster, *Loyal American Regiment* commanded by Major Main, *New Jersey Volunteers* commanded by Captain Samuel Ryerson, and *Prince of Wales American Regiment* led by Sergeant Townsend.

Ferguson sent a threatening verbal message to rebels in western North Carolina, which at that time included present-day Tennessee, saying he would “march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword.” (Draper 1881, 169). This threat was certainly counterproductive since among the addressees it provoked a determination to destroy Ferguson before he destroyed them. More than 400 Scotch-Irish rebels, some called *overmountain men*, assembled and pursued Ferguson. On 30 September, they camped at Quaker Meadows, the wide bottomland just north of present-day Morganton, North Carolina. There an equal number of Scotch-Irish from Wilkes and Surry County joined. That evening, the six militia leaders planned tactics under a large tree, later known as *Council Oak*.



Colonel Charles McDowell House, built in 1812
Quaker Meadows, Morganton, North Carolina

On 1 October, this group moved to Bedford Hill. On 3 October, they marched to Gilbert Town, near present-day Rutherfordton, North Carolina. On 4 October, at Probit’s Place on Broad River, Major Chronicle and about 20 Lincoln County men from the South Fork River joined (Draper 1881, 214).

During the summer 1780, Lincoln County Whigs assembled at Espey’s plantation (Hunter 1877, 265), under the leadership of Colonel William Graham and Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Hambright (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832). They moved to Lincoln County Courthouse and Moses Moore’s plantation (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832). Moore’s home was near where present-day Shoal Road crosses Indian Creek (Dellinger 2006–2008). Their show of force prevented Loyalists from assembling. In late September, about 60 men were at Ramsour’s Mill (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832). On 2 October, because of the threat posed by Ferguson, these men moved east to join Colonel Thomas Sumter’s 340 South Carolina militiamen camped on the Catawba River west bank at Tuckasegee Ford (Draper 1881, 214). Sumter was away and leadership fell to Lieutenant Colonel James Hawthorne, Colonel Edward Lacey, and Colonel James Williams. On 3 October, they marched back to Ramsour’s Mill. On 4 October, they marched to Flint Hill, now called Cherry Mountain, in eastern Rutherford County, North Carolina (Draper 1881, 194). In 1832, Abraham Forney [testified](#):

hearing that [Patrick] Ferguson was coming on in considerable force, it was concluded to retreat across the Catawba River at the Tuckasegee Ford and arriving at that point we then met with some South Carolina troops retreating before Cornwallis, whom they informed us was then in Charlotte, we united with these forces under the command of a Colonel [James] Williams and marched up the West side of the Catawba River and then towards South Carolina in the rear of Ferguson and fell in with the over mountain troops under the command of [William] Campbell, [Benjamin] Cleveland, [Issac] Shelby & [John] Sevier at the Cowpens, from thence we united in the pursuit of Ferguson and came up with him at King’s Mountain on the 7 day of October 1780. After this battle that he was dismissed and he returned home. (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

On 6 October, the two groups marched separately to Cowpens, a well-known crossroad in South Carolina (Draper 1881, 223–227). Both groups arrived about sundown. Lincoln County men were supplemented by about 20 fellow Lincoln County men under Major William Chronicle who had joined the overmountain men two days previously (Draper 1881, 214). At Cowpens, officers selected their ablest men with good horses for the final pursuit. At 9:00 p.m., during a rain, 910 men departed. Lincoln County men led since

they knew the terrain and could properly interpret intelligence gathered from local residents. Enoch Gilmer proceeded well in advance of everyone else. He risked his life by posing as a Loyalist trying to find Ferguson's camp (Draper 1881, 226). At Cherokee Ford on Broad River, he signaled that the opposite bank was clear (Draper 1881, 228). At dawn 7 October, the entire force forded the river (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832). Cherokee Ford is immediately upstream of present-day Cherokee Falls, South Carolina. Lincoln County men continued to lead. Colonel Isaac Shelby insisted that the troops press on without rest (Draper 1881, 229).



Cherokee Ford over Broad River

Actual ford with rock bottom is 200 yards downstream of access road (Moss 1990).

Word was passed that the acknowledgement countersign was "Buford," an ominous reminder of Buford's massacre and symbolic of their resentful motivation. Rain continued until noon (Draper 1881, 230). They learned of Ferguson's exact position on a ridge top near Kings Mountain. It had been a deer-hunting camp of Major William Chronicle and Captain Charles Mattox (Draper 1881, 231). At 4:00 p.m., after a nonstop 18-hour, 33-mile, horseback pursuit, Patriots surrounded Loyalists and defeated them within an hour.

While approaching the battleground, Lincoln County commander Colonel William Graham was called away (Draper 1881, 232). Command fell to Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Hambright, but he delegated command to Major William Chronicle. Lincoln County men marched to the furthest side where they blocked the only road escape. Historian Lyman Draper wrote about the Lincoln County men, nicknamed the "South Fork Boys."

Major [William] Chronicle and Lieutenant Colonel [Frederick] Hambright led their little band of South Fork boys up the north-east end of the mountain, where the ascent was more abrupt than elsewhere, save where Campbell's men made their attack. As they reached the base of the ridge, with Chronicle some ten paces in advance of his men, he raised his military hat, crying out—"Face to the hill!" He had scarcely uttered his command, when a ball struck him, and he fell; and William Rabb, within some six feet of Chronicle, was killed almost instantly thereafter. The men steadily pressed on, under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Hambright, Major Joseph Dickson, and Captains Mattocks, Johnson, White, Espey and Martin—a formidable list of officers for so small a body of men; but they all took their places in the line, and fought with determined heroism. Before they reached the crest of the mountain, the enemy charged bayonet—said to have been led by DePeyster—first firing off their guns, by which, Robert Henry supposed that Captain Mattocks and John Boyd were killed, and William Gilmer, a brother of the noted scout, and John Chittim wounded—the latter of Captain Martin's company, was shot in his side, making an orifice, through which, according to tradition, a silk handkerchief could be drawn, and yet he recovered, living to a good old age. (Draper 1881, 257).



Location of “Face to the hill!” command.

Photo taken during winter. In 1780, trees were bigger and widely spaced.

Many years later, Robert Henry, a Lincoln County man, wrote about the action during a bayonet charge.

I was preparing to fire when one of the British advancing, I stepped back and was in the act of cocking my gun when his bayonet was running along by the barrel of my gun, and gave me a thrust through my hand and into my thigh. My antagonist and I both fell. The Fork boys retreated and loaded their guns. I was then lying under the smoke and it appeared that some of them were not more than a gun’s length in front of the bayonets, and the farthest could not have been more than 20 feet in front when they discharged their rifles. It was said that every one dropped his man. The British then retreated in great haste, and were pursued by the Fork boys.

William Caldwell saw my condition, and pulled the bayonet out of my thigh, but it hung to my hand; he gave my hand a kick and it went out. The thrust gave me much pain, but the pulling of it was much more severe. With my well hand I picked up my gun and found her discharged. I suppose that when the soldier made the thrust, I gripped the trigger and discharged her; the load must have passed through his bladder and cut a main artery at his back, as he bled profusely. (Henry 1850).

Many rebels observed that Loyalists consistently overshot their targets. Present-day marksmen call this effect *terrestrial refraction* (Draper 1881, 279). It is an optical illusion.

When the battle ended, rebels suffered 28 killed and 62 wounded. Loyalists suffered 157 killed, 163 wounded, and 698 captured (Draper 1881, 300–301). Ferguson was killed. He was an officer in the 71st Highland Regiment. In prior years, he was a leading developer of breech loading firearms and held a patent on a threading design that reduced fouling.



Major Patrick Ferguson, wax bust, about 1775, artist unknown.
Burial rock carn. Monument erected 7 October 1930.

Patriot participants knew they achieved an important victory, but could not have appreciated its full importance. The bronze plaque on the obelisk south side states the importance concisely:

TO COMMEMORATE THE VICTORY
OF
KING'S MOUNTAIN
OCTOBER 7, 1780
ERECTED BY THE GOVERNMENT
OF THE
UNITED STATES
TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WHICH
THE HEROISM AND PATRIOTISM OF
THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS
BATTLE SO LARGELY CONTRIBUTED.



Kings Mountain Battleground Obelisk
Constructed by United States Government in 1909.



Killed and wounded Patriots
Of the 66 names, 25 were Virginians and 11 were Lincoln County men.

About casualties, Draper wrote:

The Lincoln County men, considering their small number, suffered considerably in the engagement—Major Chronicle, Captain Mattocks, William Rabb, John Boyd, and Arthur Patterson [incorrect], killed, and Moses Henry mortally wounded; Lieutenant-Colonel Hambright, Captain Espy, Robert Henry, William Gilmer, John Chittim, and William Bradley, wounded. There must have been other losses; for of Captain Samuel Martin’s company of about twenty men, he relates in his pension statement, that four were killed, and two mortally wounded. (Draper 1881, 302).

In 1815, Doctor William McLean purchased and erected the battlefield’s first commemorative marker. It honors Lincoln County men killed and is located where that military unit approached the steep hill. Today, it is on the hiking trail beside a modern copy. The marker reads, “Sacred to the memory of Major William Chronicle, Captain John Mattocks, William Robb, and John Boyd who were killed at this place on the 7th of October, 1780, fighting in defense of America.” Of historical interest, McLean did not include Arthur Patterson Sr. among the killed as appears on the obelisk plaque. Martha Rudisill, an Arthur Patterson Sr. descendant, indicates that he was not killed (Rudisill 2006–2010).



1815 Lincoln County Men Marker and modern copy

On 7 October 1930, United States President Herbert Hoover spoke at the 150-year commemoration ceremony that included other dignitaries and 75,000 attendees.

Each year on 7 October, a commemoration service is held. An invited speaker discusses a historical aspect. A small group of hikers retrace the overmountain victory trail from Sycamore Shoals, Tennessee.



Commemoration Day, 7 October 2001. 38 floral wreaths.

On 8 October 1780, Brigadier General William Davidson moved his 600 troops from Phyfer's plantation to Rocky River on Salisbury Road, present-day highway US29 near Lowes Motor Speedway (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1896, XIV:677). That was 16 miles from Charlotte. When news of Kings Mountain got to Davidson, he hurriedly wrote Major General Jethro Sumner:

Camp Rocky River, October 10, 1780

Sir — I have the Pleasure of handing you very agreeable Intelligence from the West. Ferguson, the Great Partizan, has miscarried. This we are assured of by Mr. [Samuel] Tate, Brigade Major in General Sumpter's Brigade. The particulars from that Gentleman's Mouth stand thus: that Colonels Campbell, Cleveland, Shelby, Sevier, Williams, Brandon, Lacey, Etc., formed a Conjunct Body near Gilbert Town consisting of 3000 — From this Body were selected 1600 good Horse, who immediately went in search of Colonel Ferguson, who was making his way to Charlotte — Our people overtook him well posted on King's Mountain, and on the evening of the 7th Instant at 4 o'clock, began the attack which lasted forty seven minutes, Colonel Ferguson fell in the action, besides 150 of his men — 810 were made prisoner, including the British — 150 of the prisoners are wounded — 1500 Stands of arms fell into our Hands. the enemy surrendered. We lost about 20 men among whom is Major Chronicle of Lincoln County, Colonel Williams is mortally wounded, the number of our wounded cannot be ascertained. This blow will certainly affect the British very considerably. The designs of our conquering Friends near King's Mountain not certainly known, it is most probable that they will secure their prisoners in or over the Mountains and proceed toward Charlotte — The Brigade Major who gives us this was in action. The above is true. The Blow is great and I give you Joy upon the Occasion.

I am, Etc.,

Wm. Davidson (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 86)

Davidson's letter was forwarded from Sumner to Gates, to Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson, to Continental Congress in Philadelphia (Draper 1881, 358). It was published in newspapers across the country.

The degree of American resistance surprised the British. On 24 October, Cornwallis's second in command, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon, reported, that Gates's army "unveiled to us a fund of Disaffection in this Province of which we could have formed no Idea And even the dispersion of that Force

[at Camden] did not extinguish the Ferment which the hope of its support had raised.” (Borick 2003, 240). Later, British commander-in-chief Major General Henry Clinton wrote about Kings Mountain:

And, surely, never was the trite apothegm that the greatest events often proceed from little causes more fatally confirmed than by the present check [at Kings Mountain]— which, though in itself confessedly trifling, overset in a moment all the happy effects of our successes at Charlestown and His Lordship’s glorious victory at Camden, and so encouraged that spirit of rebellion in both Carolinas that it never could be after humbled. For no sooner had the news of it spread through the country than multitudes of disaffected flew to arms all parts, and menaced every British post on both frontiers, carrying terror even to the gates of Charlestown. (Morrill 1993, 112)

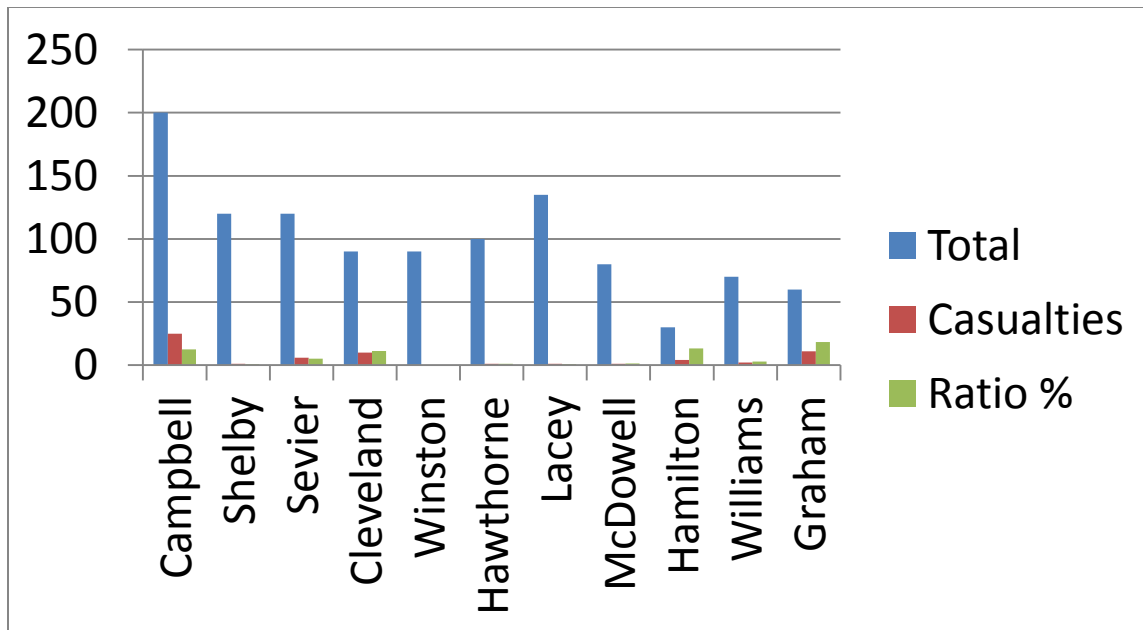
During the 1700s and 1800s, battles were often represented in verse. A Kings Mountain ballad by an unknown author appears in reference (Draper 1881, 591).

In American history, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton is often maligned. But his book is balanced and perceptive. Only 7 years after these events, he described of the significance of the British invading Charlotte and Mecklenburg County:

It was now evident, beyond contradiction, that the British general [Cornwallis] had not adopted the most eligible plan for the invasion of North Carolina. The route by Charlotte town, through the most hostile quarter of the province, on many accounts, was not advisable. Its distance likewise from Ferguson allowed the enemy to direct their attention and force against that officer, which ultimately proved his destruction. A movement on the west of the Catawba, towards Tryon county, would have been better calculated either to cover the frontier of South Carolina or to protect detachments from the army. Another operation might also have been attempted, which, in all probability, would have had a beneficial effect. Considering the force of the King’s troops at this period, a march to Cross Creek [present-day Fayetteville] would have been the most rational manoeuvre that could have been adopted; where the inhabitants were acknowledged to be almost universally loyal: Upon this move Ferguson would have been undoubtedly ordered to retire, and to remain upon the defensive to the westward; and Earl Cornwallis would have had a favourable and convenient opportunity to try the fidelity of the King’s friends, and to discover whether the water communication between that place and Wilmington could be opened; a point which should necessarily have been ascertained before the Royal army proceeded to the interior parts of North Carolina. (Tarleton 1787, 168)

Lincoln County Patriot names

Between 60 to 80 Lincoln County men participated at Kings Mountain. Fortunately, most of their names are known. Many were from what is now Gaston County (Carpenter 2006–2009). At the battle, they blocked the only road escape, and thus engaged in severe fighting. Of these men, 4 died at Kings Mountain, 1 was mortally wounded, and 6 were wounded. Thus, about 1 in 6 was a casualty. That was the highest casualty proportion of any military unit. Of the 400 Virginians (Draper 1881, 214) under Colonel William Campbell, about 200 participated in the battle. Of these, 25 suffered casualties, the second highest casualty proportion.



Casualty Ratio

At least 24 Lincoln County men, or their widows, lived long enough to describe their war-time activities in pension applications. Those pension applications can be read from hyperlinks below.

[James Alexander](#)

Matthew Armstrong

[Robert Barkley](#)

Andrew Barry

John Boyd, killed

William Bradley, wounded

[Samuel Caldwell](#)

John Chittam, wounded

William Chronicle, Major, killed

[James Conn](#)

John Dellinger

David Dickey

Joseph Dickson, Major

[James Espey](#)

[Samuel Espey](#), Captain, wounded

Hugh Ewin?

[Andrew Floyd](#)

[Abraham Forney](#)

[James Furgason](#)

Enoch Gilmer

William M. Gilmer, wounded

[James Glenn](#)

[William Graham](#), Colonel

Frederick Hambricht, Lt. Col., wounded

John Hardin Hambricht, Captain

[Charles Hamilton](#)

James Henry

Joseph Henry

[Malcolm Henry](#)

Moses Henry, mortally wounded

Robert Henry, wounded

[James Hill](#), Lieutenant

[Thomas Hill](#)

[George Hofstalar](#)

James Johnson, Captain

William Johnson, Captain

[Matthew Leeper](#)

[Thomas Lofton](#), Captain

[William Logan](#)

[Jacob Martin](#)

[Samuel Martin](#), Captain

Charles Mattocks

John Mattocks, Captain, killed

[Alexander McLaen](#)

Charles McLean

William McLean?

[William Newton](#)

Arthur Patterson Sr., not killed as on obelisk

Arthur Patterson, Jr.

Thomas Patterson

William Patterson

William Rabb, killed

Philip Sailors

Robert Shannon

[John Tubb](#)

William Twitty

John Weir, Captain

Isaac White, Captain

Joseph White, Major

Thomas White, Lieutenant

(Moss 1990) (Rudisill 2006–2010)

Names of the 11 men killed or wounded appear on the obelisk plaque. A source states that James Alexander was wounded at Kings Mountain (Moss 1990, 2), but his 1834 [pension application](#) did not make that claim. Major Joseph White was wounded earlier on Cain Creek (Draper 1881, 199).

Linking Tryon County Resolves signers to Kings Mountain participants

It is interesting to link Tryon County Resolves signers to Kings Mountain participants. Five years separated the two events. Many signers became Whigs. Others became Loyalists. In particular, it appears that 4 of the 49 signers fought at Kings Mountain. They were Frederick Hambright, William Graham (although called away immediately before the battle), John Dellinger, and Charles McLean. All of these were Patriots (Moss 1990). Other signers had sons who fought at Kings Mountain. They were Thomas Espey's sons Samuel Espey and James Espey; and Jacob Forney's son Abraham Forney. Other possible relationships exist between signer Charles McLean and fighter William McLean; signer Andrew Hamilton and fighter Charles Hamilton; signer Robert Alexander and fighter James Alexander; and signer George Dellinger and signer/fighter John Dellinger. It is possible that fathers and sons with the same first name are confused. Signer Moses Moore's sons John and Patrick were staunch Loyalists. There is no known relation between signer James Logan and the four Logan brothers who fought on opposite sides at Kings Mountain. William and Joseph Logan fought as Patriots. John and Thomas Logan fought as Loyalists (Moss 1998, 50). At the time of the battle, William Logan was a resident of Rutherford County (Moss 1990, 157–158). He is included among Lincoln County men because he fought under Colonel William Graham.

Subsequent Actions of Lincoln County Men

Lincoln County men remained active in the American Revolution after Kings Mountain. Here is a brief sketch of their activities.

1 February 1781, Cowan's Ford

An American rear guard under Brigadier General William Lee Davidson planned to impede the British Army crossing the Catawba River. Guard forces were posted at Beattie's, Cowan's, Tool's, and Tuckasegee Fords. At Tool's and Tuckasegee Fords, he ordered felled trees to impede wagons (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 288). During the afternoon 31 January, Generals Greene, Morgan, and Davidson and Colonel William Washington conferred at Beattie's Ford's east bank. While there, Greene wrote a letter to Colonel Locke, commander of Rowan County militia, imploring immediate assistance (Tarleton 1787, 252–253). Morgan marched his troops away from Sherrill's Ford towards Salisbury. Davidson transferred 200 troops from Beattie's to Cowan's Ford. Captain Farmer of the Orange County militia remained in command at Beattie's Ford (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 290). Davidson ordered Major Joseph Graham's cavalry to patrol all fords during the night. In 1833, Joseph Graham later [testified](#):

State of North Carolina Lincoln County: General Joseph Graham appeared in open Court of Pleas & Quarter Sessions on the 30th day of April 1833 and after being duly sworn deposeth & saith that on the 15th or 16th of Jan^y 1781 he came to an encampment in said County near Tuckasegee Ford on the Catawba River where Colonel William Graham (then of this County now of Rutherford,) had the command of a Regiment of men then assembling to serve a tour of duty of three months and at different times from that to the 31st day of January saw him in command of said Regiment on the East side of Catawba in Mecklenburg and on the said 31st day of January near Cowans Ford he the said Colo. was arrested by Brigadier General William L. Davidson on a charge of being intoxicated it being the day before the British crossed the Catawba River at said Ford where General Davidson fell and the Command of the Regiment devolved on Major John Carruth until after the Battle of Guilford Court House.

Sworn to and subscribed the day above written.

In open court [signed] J. Graham

Test: [signed] Vardry McBee, Clerk

(Graham 1833 in Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832)

That night, Cornwallis sent a diversionary force to Beattie's Ford while the main force marched to Cowan's Ford and successfully crossed at daybreak on 1 February. Davidson commanded 350 Americans at

Cowan's Ford. He was killed there; some believed by Tory guide Frederick Hager's rifle shot (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 294). British soldiers stripped Davidson's body and confiscated his wallet, containing a transcribed message from George Washington and orders from Nathanael Greene. The wallet was sent to a British archive where it remained in obscurity until 1964 when rediscovered by Davidson's biographer Chalmers G. Davidson. Today, a dam crosses Cowan's Ford immediately south of William Bulgin McGuire Nuclear Power Station.

Peter Forney, a Lincoln County resident, was with the guard posted at Beattie's Ford. On 31 October 1832, he [testified](#):

I volunteered as one to reconnoiter the encampment of the British while they lay three days at my father's plantation extending their lines on to a plantation which I occupied at that time. While they laid there they destroyed everything we possessed. After they moved from this position with the Main Army to Beatties Ford, I was one of those who took part on the opposite side, endeavoring to oppose what obstructions we were able to prevent their crossing and remained there until a part of the light troops had effected a passage at a bye ford four or five miles below at the ford called Cowan's Ford – and in effecting our retreat, two of the men with me were lost, one killed and the other taken prisoner – upon this I fled to the widow Torrence's being pursued by Tarlton's [sic, Tarleton's] troop of cavalry – at this place I found a considerable body of Militia, but in great confusion in consequence of the death of General [William Lee] Davidson who had been killed that morning by the British upon their crossing the River. Here our troops were utterly defeated and dispersed and I retreated across the Yadkin River and remained about Abbott's Creek about six weeks. (Forney, Peter, pension application 1832)

After Davidson death, on about 11 February, the Salisbury District militia was temporarily placed under the command of Brigadier General Andrew Pickens (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 203). Major John Carruth temporarily commanded Lincoln County militiamen (Graham 1833 in Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832), but soon afterwards Major Joseph Dickson commanded.

February–March 1781, Pyle's Defeat, Clapp's Mill, Weitzell's Mill

As many as 200 Lincoln County men under Major Joseph Dickson participated in Pyle's Defeat on 24 February 1781 (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 318) and in Clapp's Mill on 2 March (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 331). They probably participated in Weitzell's Mill on 6 March. Beginning about 10 March and before Guilford Courthouse on 15 March, Pickens led all his men back to their home areas (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 347–348).

March–July 1781, Crooked Creek, Rugeley's Mill

After Guilford Courthouse, on 15 March, Colonel Thomas Polk, commander of the Salisbury District militia, feared that Cornwallis might march towards Camden through Salisbury and Charlotte. Consequently, he called up the district militia (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 351). Colonel Polk was acting in the role of brigadier general, but that rank was never officially commissioned by the North Carolina General Assembly. On 25 March 1781, Lincoln County militia was embodied. Captain Samuel Espey led a company that included Sergeant Abraham Forney (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832). They marched from Charlotte along Lawyer's Road to Matthew Stewart's farm on Goose Creek (Hunter 1877, 117). That company joined Polk's Salisbury District militia brigade at nearby Crooked Creek (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832). From there, Polk's brigade marched towards Camden along the ridge road, present-day Rocky River Road. It "halted at Flat Rock and ate beef butchered on that wide-spread natural table." (Hunter 1877, 117). They then joined Greene's Army at Rugeley's Mill, South Carolina, 14 miles north of Camden (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832). These soldiers may have been the reserve unit in the battle at Hobkirk Hill on 25 April. However, on 31 October 1832, [Abraham Forney testified](#):

That on the 25th day of March 1781 when he [Abraham Forney] again embodied and he was attached to the Company of Captain Samuel Espey and acted as Sergeant. We joined a detachment of Militia under the command of General Thomas Polk and marched into

South Carolina and came up with General Greene's Army at Rugeley's Mills, after the Battle of Camden [Hobkirk Hill]. (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

From the context, Forney almost certainly refers to Hobkirk Hill battle. He probably did not mean the 16 August 1780 battle since his contemporaries usually called it "Gates' Defeat." On the other hand, if his unit departed Lincoln County on 25 March, there was ample time to reach the Camden area by 25 April.

On 10 May 1781, British Lieutenant Colonel Francis Rawdon withdrew his forces from Camden. Soon afterwards, Greene move his forces to Ninety Six, South Carolina. Lincoln County men remained posted at Rugeley's Mill or Flat Rock until at least June under Colonel Marshall (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832).

September–November 1781, Wilmington

Lincoln County militiamen were called up in September 1781 by Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904, 356) and on a two-month campaign drove the British out of Wilmington, North Carolina. On this campaign, like the original 1776 Cherokee campaign, German-speaking residents were active participants (Plunk, Jacob, pension application 1832). During this time, they learned of Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, on 19 October 1781 that effectively ended military fighting.

Conclusion

Lincoln County men played an important role before, during, and after the Battle of Kings Mountain. After Ramsour's Mill on 20 June 1780, they prevented a second Loyalists uprising in Lincoln County. They led the overmountain men on their 18-hour forced march from Cowpens to the Kings Mountain battleground. During the battle, they fought bravely and suffered casualties higher than any other military unit. Fortunately, almost all their names are known.

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