

Lincoln County Men at Kings Mountain

Men essential 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 were 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 across the Broad River to the upper Catawba River valley in Burke County. This threat became untenable for the small number of Lincoln County Patriots, who withdrew to Tuckasegee Ford on the Catawba River. There on 26 September, Colonel Thomas Sumter's joined. These men encamped at Sherrills Ford on the Catawba River. At this time, Cornwallis's main army of 2000 redcoats occupied Charlotte.
- 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 Sherrills Ford the opportunity to counterattack. They marched up the "fork of the Catawba" to Burke County.
- 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.
- 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 about 3:00 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. For these reasons, a citation is more informative than an indirect footnote. Overall, embedded citations efficiently guide the researcher to the best information available with a minimum of effort. A bibliography 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

On 26 July 1775, Whigs in Tryon County, North Carolina, established a *Committee of Public Safety*. It met Christian Mauney's [pronounced Moon-ney] house 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 a test oath that all Tryon County inhabitants were to sign, in effect endorsing the legitimacy of the Committee of Public 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. (NCCR 1886, X:162–163) (Griffin 1937, 17)

It was not a declaration of independence. Instead, it was conditional:

Resolved *nem. con.* That we will Continue to profess all Loyalty and attachment to our Sovereign Lord King George the Third, His Crown & Dignity, so long as he secures to us those Rights and Liberties which the principles of Our Constitution require. (NCCR 1886, X:163)

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 that 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 2006–2011). 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.

In 1833, [James Jack testified](#) in his pension application:

on the 22nd of next June — that in the spring of the year 1776 he entered the service of the United States at the town of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, under Captain Robert Mebane [spelled throughout as “Mabin”], commander of a troop of light horse attached to a regiment commanded by Colonel Thomas Polk [spelled throughout as “Poke”] (that Mebane he believes was the son of Colonel Mebane of Hillsboro North Carolina) and came to Charlotte for volunteers; that he with 63 others turned out in one day; that they each found their own horse, saddle and bridle — that from Charlotte, Captain Mebane marched his company and crossed the Catawba [River] and joined six or 700 men at Dutchman's Creek in South Carolina under the command of Major Sumter [spelled “Sumpter” throughout]; that from thence we crossed Board River at Tuckasegee Ford and from thence we marched to the Golden Grove, where we had an engagement with the Tories and probably some Cherokee Indians. In this engagement we succeeded under the command of Sumter. Immediately after this engagement we marched to the Chalk Bluff on the Savannah River where we remained until the British landed at Savannah. (Jack, James, pension application 1833).

Hezekiah Alexander was a commissary officer during the Cherokee campaign (Preyer 1987, 118). Joel Baldwin, a Mecklenburg County resident, may have participated in this campaign. He died on 21 October 1776 at age 26 and was buried in the Charlotte Burying Ground, now known as Settlers' Cemetery. His grave is the oldest known grave there.

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 Earl 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 Earl 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). That distance from Derick Ramsour's Mill, in present-day Lincolnton, North Carolina, 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 2006–2017). These Loyalists conspired to call out more Loyalists. A few days later, about 1000 Tories assembled at Ramsour's Mill.

On 14 June, Brigadier General Rutherford ordered Colonel Francis Locke, commander of Rowan County militia, to disperse these Tories (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904b, 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 1904b, 214) (B. P. 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 1904b, 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, 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).

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 near 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 resident, John Espey, did enlist in a Mecklenburg County unit and followed Rutherford. 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)

Early September 1780, Graham's Fort

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. Sometime in September, about 23 Tories attacked this fort (Draper 1881, 145). 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)

September–October 1780, Ferguson, Overmountain Men, South Carolina Militiamen and Lincoln County Men to 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 Carolina and South Carolina Continental Army regiments. In late May, 260 Virginia Continentals were brutally killed or wounded at Buford's Defeat. 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 Gates' Defeat. 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 early 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.

Meanwhile, Colonel James Williams with his unit of Little River District militia delivered prisoners taken at Musgrove Mill to Hillsborough. There South Carolina Governor John Rutledge authorized Williams to raise a regiment and return to South Carolina. He received permission from the North Carolina Board of War to recruit soldiers within that state. Some came from Caswell County (Graves 2012, 58).

About 11 September, 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. These men were led by Colonel William Campbell, Washington County, Virginia, militia; Colonel Isaac Shelby, Sullivan County, North Carolina, militia; and Colonel John Sevier, Washington County, North Carolina, militia. On 25 September 1780, they assembled their forces at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga River, at present-day Elizabethton, Tennessee. The next day, they began ascending the west side of the mountains. On 27 September, they crossed Yellow Mountain Gap, 4640 feet above sea level. That location was covered with “shoe-mouth deep” snow (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:372–373). Although it was not known at that time, this traverse was the highest elevation of all military operations during the American Revolution (Dugger 1932, 15) (Lindsey 2015). It greatly exceeded the 1450-foot highest elevation of Colonel Benedict Arnold’s epic expedition to Quebec City during the winter of 1775.

During the summer 1780, about 60 Lincoln County militiamen assembled at Espey’s plantation (Hunter 1877, 265), under the leadership of Colonel William Graham and Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Hambricht. They moved to Lincoln County Courthouse and Moses Moore’s plantation. Moore’s home was near where present-day Shoal Road crosses Indian Creek (Dellinger 2006–2017). Their show of force prevented loyalists from assembling (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832).



Major William Chronicle's South Fork Boys
Part of the Lincoln County Men. Mural at Belmont City Hall, Belmont, North Carolina.
Painted by Peter DeAnna, 1940. (Davis 2008) (Robertson 2015)

About 15 September, because of the threat posed by Ferguson moving into the upper Catawba River valley, the Lincoln County Men moved to the east side of Tuckasegee Ford on the Catawba River.

hearing that [Patrick] Ferguson was coming on in considerable force, it was concluded to retreat across the Catawba River at the Tuckasegee Ford (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

On 23 September, one of Williams' principal subordinates Major Samuel Hammond issued a call for recruits from the refugees from South Carolina and Georgia:

A Call to Arms: Beef, Bread & Potatoes
Huggins' Plantation 23rd Sept. 1780

The undersigned has just returned from Hillsborough to this neighborhood. While there he obtained an order on the Companies and Quartermasters upon this frontier for supplies of provisions and forage for such of the patriotic Citizens of South Carolina & Georgia as might be embodied for actual services and being informed that there is a number of you, resting with patriotic friends in the Two adjoining Counties no doubt anxiously looking for an opportunity to embody for the performance of duty, but without the power or means of supporting yourselves or your horses from you own resources I have thought your wishes would be forwarded by the Establishing of a Camp at a rallying rendezvous at a convenient place for your assemblage, and to be ready when occasion might offer to give our aid for the recovery of Our County.

I have with this view formed a Camp at Huggins' Plantation a few miles from Capt. Brannon's Tavern, near the road leading westwardly to Torrence's Crossroads, where we will be supplied with the needful. I am justified in the expectation of the arrival of a powerful support shortly and that we may return

toward home with a strong army. Let us be prepared to do our part, our little force will be important if Combined possessing as we do a better knowledge of the County and its resources. Now is the time to show ourselves and I invite you, both Officers & soldiers to obey the call: I here assure you that I shall cheerfully surrender the Command, and Cooperate fully to and with any Officer of Senior Rank of either State that may think proper to Join; Should an opportunity offer immediately for my advancing toward the enemy with a prospect of doing good an officer will be left at this Camp authorized to obtain Rations for such as may Join there after my departing. I have some other good news. Come and hear it.

S. Hammond Major
Comdg Refugees Lower Regt.
So Carolina 96 Brigd.

Huggins' Plantation near Brannon's, Roan [Rowan] County, NC (Hammond, Samuel, pension application 1832)

The purpose of the recruitment was to "return towards home [South Carolina] with a strong army." However, Ferguson's northward movements obstructed Williams' plans and forced him to confront the enemy earlier. These two objectives may be the source of the misunderstanding with Colonel William Hill that arose later. Huggins plantation (Miller 1988) was west of Salisbury and near Colonel Francis Locke's plantation. Williams may have personally stayed at Locke's plantation (Whelchel, John, pension application 1832).

Among those who joined Williams were Georgia refugees under Colonel William Candler.

On 25 September, Colonel Thomas Sumter's 260 South Carolina militiamen camped on the east side of the Catawba River at Bigger's Ferry (Hill 1815, 17). His subordinates included Colonel William Hill of the New Acquisition District militia and Colonel Edward Lacey of the Chester District militia. When pursued by Lieutenant Colonel Francis Rawdon (Money 1780, 24 Sep), Sumter crossed to the west side and continued up river. On 26 September, he joined Graham at Tuckasegee Ford (Hill 1815, 18) (Draper 1881, 214).

arriving at that point we then met with some South Carolina troops retreating before Cornwallis, whom they informed us was then in Charlotte (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

This group intended to join Brigadier General William Lee Davidson who was retreating towards Salisbury before Cornwallis's advance on Charlotte. However, Davidson informed them that a large force including Overmountain Men was assembling to confront Ferguson (Hill 1815, 18). Consequently, on 27 September, this group marched up the river's east side to Beattie's Ford and re-crossed (Hill 1815, 18) (Merrell, Benjamin, pension application 1833).

On 27 September, Ferguson withdrew from Gilbert Town and the next day crossed Twitty's Ford (Allaire 1780 in Draper 1881, 509). In later accounts, it was conjectured that Ferguson intended to march to Ninety Six (Vance 1799 in Henry 1850 in Schenck 1891, 21). However, Ferguson's mission was to support Cornwallis's advance into North Carolina. Consequently, he never contemplated returning to Ninety Six, as made clear from the contemporaneous diaries of Lieutenant Anthony Allaire (Allaire 1780 in Draper 1881, 509) and Uzal Johnson (Johnson 1780 in Moss 2000, 69–71).

On 28 September, Sumter and Graham's men proceeded to Sherrill's Ford (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:158) (Espey, Samuel, pension application 1832). There, probably early on 29 September, Colonel James Williams' joined with his unit of Little River District militia and new recruits from North Carolina, many from Caswell County. Sumter and Williams did not agree who had superior rank. Nonetheless, Williams prevailed since Sumter with a few principal subordinates departed from his troops to resolve the dispute with Rutledge in Hillsborough. Sumter's absence indicated that Williams had overall command. This is confirmed by several original sources (Williams 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:94) (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:663–664) (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832). Although Hill and Lacey objected in principle to Williams' as commander (Hill 1815, 18), the combined forces moved as one unit. On 30 September, these troops marched towards the advancing Overmountain Men (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:158). Some of Williams' men joined after passing Island Ford on the Catawba River (Whelchel, John, pension application 1832).

In Charlotte, Cornwallis learned of this gathering threat against Ferguson. On 1 October, he wrote Ferguson:

I am informed that Colonel [James] Williams with part of Sumpter's corps marched yesterday from Kerrel's [Sherrill's] Ford, giving out that they were going against you. My informant saw only 150, but the enemy told him they had 400 more — that is not good authority. Sumpter has had a quarrel with Williams about command and is gone to Hillsborough to refer it to Gates. (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:158)

On 30 September, about 1060 Overmountain Men camped at Quaker Meadows, the wide bottomland just north of present-day Morganton, North Carolina. There about 240 militiamen 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 30 September at Step's Plantation, Ferguson wrote Cornwallis that he necessarily had to retreat towards Charlotte and that a protective escort would help (Draper 1881, 201–202). Because the carriers took a circuitous route, they were delayed, and Cornwallis did not receive this message until 7 October (Draper 1881, 202). On 1 October, at Dennard's Ford on Broad River, Ferguson desperately attempted to recruit more local loyalists. He wrote:

Denard's Ford, Broad River, Tryon County, October 1, 1780

Gentlemen: — Unless you wish to be eat up by an inundation of barbarians, who have begun by murdering an unarmed son before the aged father, and afterwards lopped off his arms, and who by their shocking cruelties and irregularities, give the best proof of their cowardice and want of discipline; I say, if you wish to be pinioned, robbed, and murdered, and see your wives and daughters, in four days, abused by the dregs of mankind — in short, if you wish or deserve to live, and bear the name of men, grasp your arms in a moment and run to camp.

The Back Water men have crossed the mountains; McDowell, Hampton, Shelby, and Cleveland are at their head, so that you know what you have to depend upon. If you choose to be degraded forever and ever by a set of mongrels, say so at once, and let your women turn their backs upon you, and look out for real men to protect them.

Pat. Ferguson, Major 71st Regiment. (Draper 1881, 204)

On 1 October, the Overmountain Men group moved to Bedford Hill. Because of rain they remained there for two days.

On 1 or 2 October, Williams' troops camped near present-day Valdese, North Carolina. On 2 October, Williams reported to Gates:

Burke County, Oct, 2d. 1780.

Sir:

I am at present about seventy miles from Salisbury, in the fork of the Catawba, with about four hundred and fifty horsemen, in pursuit of Col. Ferguson. On my crossing the Catawba River, I dispatched to different quarters for intelligence, and this evening I was favoured with this news, which you may depend on: That Col. Clarke, of the State of Georgia, with one hundred riflemen, forced his way from South Carolina to Georgia. On his route thither, being joined by seven hundred men, he proceeded to the town of Augusta, and has taken it with a large quantity of goods; but not finding it prudent to continue there, he has retreated to the upper parts of South Carolina, in Ninety Six district, and made a stand with eight hundred brave men. This moment another of my expresses is arrived from Cols. McDowell and Shelby; they were on their march, near Burke Court House, with fifteen hundred brave mounted men, and Col. Cleveland was within ten miles of them with eight hundred men, and was to form a junction with them this day.

I expect to join them to-morrow, in pursuit of Col. Ferguson, and under the direction of heaven I hope to be able to render your honor a good account of him in a few days.

I am, &c.,

James Williams. (Williams 1780 in Tarleton 1787, 194) (Williams 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:94)

There are important inferences in Williams' correspondence:

- Williams considered himself in command of all South Carolina and Lincoln County troops by reporting directly to Gates.
- Williams' estimate of 450 horsemen would require all of Hill's, Lacey's and Graham's troops be with him. The actual number was probably closer to 390.
- Williams said he would join the Overmountain Men the next day. Thus he was within a day's march of the Overmountain Men who were at Bedford Hill. That meant Williams could not have been in central Lincoln County.
- Williams indicated that pursuing and defeating Ferguson was his near-term objective.
- By indicating that he would report any victory to Gates, Williams implied that he might command the Overmountain Men although his force was much smaller. He might have expected that since he was the oldest colonel at age 40.

Williams wrote that he was in Burke County, 70 miles from Salisbury, and "in the fork of the Catawba". Historian Lyman Draper could make no sense of this and concluded a different route:

This party of South Carolinians and their associates marched through Lincoln County, crossing the upper forks of Dutchman's [now Killian] creek, proceeding

on to Ramsour's Mill, on the South Fork of the Catawba; thence bearing somewhat south-westerly, crossing Buffalo and First Broad rivers, to Flint Hill. (Draper 1881, 194)

Draper was well aware of the above discrepancy between his route and Williams' location. He wrote:

By some unaccountable mistake, or misprint, this letter of Colonel Williams is dated "Burke County:" when all the other authorities, Hill, Floyd, Hammond and Whelchel — the two latter of Williams' party — combine to show, beyond a doubt, that they were at this time in Lincoln County, west or south-west of Tuckasegie Ford. (Draper 1881, 192)

Here Draper cited William Hill's Memoirs (Hill 1815, 18–19), and the pension applications of Andrew Floyd (Floyd, Andrew, pension application 1832), Samuel Hammond (Hammond, Samuel, pension application 1832) and Dr. John Whelchel (Whelchel, John, pension application 1832). However Draper must not have read these sources carefully, because none of them explicitly mentions the direction south-westerly or Buffalo Creek or First Broad River or even Ramsour's Mill in this context. So why was Draper so confident in the route through the center of Lincoln County? Was he influenced by another historian? This might be discovered by a thorough search into the Draper Manuscripts, in particular the correspondence of Colonel John Randolph Logan and W. L. Twitty (Draper 1881, 194). Also, in Draper's above quote, he made the minor mistake assuming Flint Hill was a particular place. Original sources refer only "the Flint Hills" which apparently meant present-day Cherry Mountain and its surrounding hills in all directions.

On first reading, Williams' description of his location is suspect because the usual meaning of "in the fork of the Catawba" is the region around present-day Belmont, North Carolina, about 25 miles south of Sherrill's Ford where Williams' men had been. It would not make sense for Williams to have moved so far south and be so close to British occupied Charlotte. There appears to be no way to reconcile "in the fork of the Catawba" and "Burke County". However, Williams could have meant a broader interpretation of "fork" which leads to a timeline consistent with other facts.

By "in the fork of the Catawba", Williams could have included the land between the Catawba River and Henry Fork, a tributary of the South Fork River. That is consistent with being in Burke County and "seventy miles from Salisbury". That location was near present-day Valdese, North Carolina, between Hickory and Morganton. This casts a new light on how these troops marched from Sherrill's Ford on the Catawba River to Cowpens. It suggests that their first objective was to join the gathering Overmountain Men. It implies that they took the ridgeline road between Sherrill's Ford to where Williams wrote on 2 October. There, Williams learned that McDowell and the Overmountain Men were moving towards Ferguson who had recently been at Gilbert Town.

There is other evidence to support this northern route along the west side of the Catawba River. Abraham Forney testified in his 1832 pension application:

we united with these forces under the command of a Colonel [James] Williams and marched up the West side of the Catawba River (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

Veteran Benjamin Merrell, a South Carolina militiaman, testified in his 1833 pension application:

crossing the Catawba River at the Tucasejah [Tuckasegee] Ford thence up the East side of said River to Baiteys [Beatties] Ford thence up the South fork of the Catawba (Merrell, Benjamin, pension application 1833)

In Williams' 2 October correspondence to Gates, he indicated that he planned to join the Overmountain Men and pursue Ferguson (Williams 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:94). Is made good military sense to combine forces before confronting Ferguson's 1100 troops. So, if Williams had followed his stated intension what would have been his expected action? He would have followed the Overmountain Men. That way:

- He would have minimized the risk of losing the Overmountain Men's trail by following in their footsteps.
- For safety reasons, he would have had the Overmountain Men between him and Ferguson.

Late on 2 October, Brigadier General William Davidson learned of Williams' movements. Davidson wrote Brigadier General Jethro Sumner:

October 3d., Near Capt. Phifer's.

Last evening I was informed by Col. Watson that Col. Williams, Seavey [Sevier?] and Graham had formed a junction west of the Cattawba, their force about 600. They had held a council and sent an express to Col. Cleaveland, whom they expected to join & co-operate with in pursuit of Ferguson, who had retreated to Gilberts town. It is expected they are now on their march. Ferguson, by the best accounts, is 800 strong ; Cleaveland about 600, and is probably now thoroughly reinforced. Should our troops be successful in that quarter it will probably be a diversion to the enemy in Charlotte. (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:782)

Although Williams had the opportunity to join the Overmountain Men, he chose to remain separated. Perhaps an express message from the Overmountain Men described the latest decisions made at Bedford Hill including their planned departure for Gilbert Town. By early 3 October, Williams decided not to immediately join the Overmountain Men. His reasons are not known with certainty, but could have been one or a combination of:

- Ferguson had withdrawn from Gilbert Town and his last known position was Dennard's Ford on 1 October. It would make sense for him to move eastward towards Cornwallis's army at Charlotte. So, Williams may have wanted to take the shortest route to Ferguson assuming that the Overmountain Men would join him rather than vice versa.
- Williams was jealous not to lose command the South Carolinians.
- Williams surmised that he would not command the Overmountain Men since their colonels already agreed on Campbell.
- Williams wanted to maintain the independence of the South Carolinians since his ultimate mission, as directed by Rutledge, was to suppress the Tories around Ninety Six.

Hill intimated some of these reasons (Hill 1815, 19–20).

On 3 October, Williams probably marched down the east side of South Mountain and camped. This route matches Hill's description of the topography (Hill 1815, 19–20).

Colonel William Graham, the commander of the Lincoln County Men, who had been with Williams since 30 September, was not required to follow Williams because Graham was a North Carolina militia colonel. Graham's first responsibility, as directed by Davidson, was to join the other North Carolina colonels. So, on 3 October, Graham's Lincoln County Men separated from Williams, as implied by (Henry, Malcolm, pension application 1834), and marched towards the Overmountain Men. Major William Chronicle, one of Graham's subordinates, led an advance group of about 20 militiamen and caught up at a location later called Probit's Place (Vance 1799 in Henry 1850 in Schenck 1891, 21). Archeologist Ken Robinson, who has investigated this area, discovered the property of William Probit, who was enumerated in the 1790 United States Census in Burke County and listed on the 1805 tax list as being in the militia company of Captain James Dysart (Robinson 2015).

On 4 October, Campbell marched to Camp Creek near Gilbert Town, north of present-day Rutherfordton, North Carolina. The objectives of the Overmountain colonels had changed. Apparently, they abandoned the pursuit of Ferguson. They wrote Gates:

Rutherford County, Camp near Gilbert Town
October, 4, 1780.

Sir:

We have now collected at this place about 1,500 good men, drawn from the Counties of Surry, Wilkes, Burke, Washington and Sullivan Counties in this State, and Washington County of Virginia, and expect to be joined in a few days by Colo. Clark of Georgia and Colo. Williams of South Carolina, with about 1,000 more. As we have at this time called out our militia without any orders from the Executive of our different States, and with the view of Expelling the Enemy out of this part of the Country, we think such a body of men worthy of your attention, and would request you to send a General Officer, immediately to take

the command of such Troops as may embody in this quarter. All our Troops being Militia, and but little acquainted with discipline, we could wish him to be a Gentleman of address, and able to keep up a proper discipline, without disgusting the Soldiery. Every assistance in our power shall be given the Officer you may think proper to take command of us.

It is the wish of such of us as are acquainted with General Davidson and Colo. Morgan (if in Service) that one of these Gentlemen may be appointed to this command.

We are in great want of Ammunition, and hope you will endeavor to have us properly furnished with Article.

Colo. [Charles] McDowell will wait upon you with this, who can inform you of the present situation of the Enemy, and such other particulars respecting our Troops as you may think necessary.

We are, Sir,
Your most obdt. and very hble. Servts.,

BENJA. CLEVELAND.

ISAAC SHELBY.

JOHN SEVIER.

ANDW. HAMPTON.

WM. CAMPBELL.

JO. WINSTON. (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:663–664)

It is noteworthy what this correspondence did not mention:

- Ferguson or his position.
- A pursuit plan of Ferguson.
- A sense of urgency.

It is also noteworthy that the Overmountain colonels recognized Williams as commanding the South Carolinians with no mention of Hill or Lacey. Since Graham did not sign this correspondence, presumably he had not yet joined. It was possible that Graham did not actually join but veered to the east towards Cowpens, possibly passing Biggerstaff's Plantation (Henry, Malcolm, pension application 1834).

Since the Overmountain Men included both Virginians and North Carolinians, the correspondence was sent to Gates. There is no mention of informing Brigadier General William Davidson who officially commanded all the western North Carolinian militia.

The Overmountain colonels' mindset suggests that they had concluded that Ferguson had already evaded them. And since the simple tactic of chasing Ferguson no longer applied, they

needed a general officer to strategically plan their next actions. Also they did not want to exceed their authority without explicit executive orders. Of course, the colonels had no expectation that a general officer would arrive soon. They may have believed Colonel Charles McDowell was not their most dynamic leader, and thus asked him to carry the correspondence to Gates. On this mission, McDowell passed through the South Carolina camp (Draper 1881, 189).

On 4 October, Williams probably camped between South Mountain and present-day Cherry Mountain.

Late on 4 October, the remainder of Graham's troops joined the Overmountain Men at Camp Creek (Vance 1799 in Henry 1850 Schenck 1891, 21). This is based on Colonel David Vance's narrative of 1799 which was written in the company of Joseph McDowell and Robert Henry, all three who were present at this juncture. Had the juncture not happened, either McDowell or Henry could have challenged the assertion or Henry could have corrected it any time before his death in 1863. Nonetheless, the cited troop strength of 160 horsemen was too large. According to Vance's narrative, Graham told the Overmountain colonels to expect Williams at Gilbert Town. This is evidence that Graham had earlier separated from Williams, but recently enough to know Williams' plans. The narrative also indicated that Graham told the Overmountain colonels that Ferguson had "left Gilbert Town and had crossed Broad River at Twitty's Ford on his way to [Lieutenant Colonel John Harris] Cruger at Ninety-Six." In actuality, Ferguson left Gilbert Town on 27 September (Allaire 1780 in Draper 1881, 509) which had to be old news to the Overmountain colonels by 4 October. Those present at the Vance's 1799 narrative, knew that Ferguson did not actually move towards Ninety Six. So the narrative must mean that on 4 October, Graham had a rumor of Ferguson's movement towards Ninety Six. If so, it would have been quickly dismissed with knowledge of Ferguson's proclamation on 1 October at Dennard's Ford. In actuality, Ferguson never intended to return to Ninety Six (Allaire 1780 in Draper 1881, 509) (Johnson 1780 in Moss 2000). That would have been contrary to his responsibility to support Cornwallis's advance in North Carolina. By not mentioning that the Ferguson's movement towards Ninety Six was bad information at the time, the Vance 1799 narrative created a myth that was repeated, and even suggested that Williams deliberately misled the Overmountain Men (Hill 1815, 20) (Moore 1859).



Robert Henry, 1765–1863
Daguerreotype 1859 (Arthur 1914, 96) (Holland 2014)

It is also possible that Graham, although trailing Overmountain Men along Cane Creek, never actually joined them. Instead, after learning of the plan to rendezvous at Cowpens, Graham may have veered to the east to take the shortest path. That route led past Biggerstaff's Plantation. This scenario is suggested by the pension application of Malcolm Henry:

In a short time Colonel Shelby returned to Rutherford County to Gilbert Town. He [Malcolm Henry], this applicant, was sent to Shelby by Colonel Graham to know of Shelby where the troops under his command should join those under Shelby. It was agreed that all the troops should rendezvous at the Cowpens 16 miles from the Cherokee Ford on Broad River. It was then expected that Ferguson and his Tories were there [at Cherokee Ford]. On the same evening Colonel Graham marched to that place [Cowpens] with his command and met the troops commanded by Colonel Shelby, Col. Campbell, Colonel Sevier, Colonel Cleveland, Col. Williams and other officers not recollected. (Henry, Malcolm, pension application 1834)

Also the pension application of Abraham Forney indicated that the Graham's Lincoln County Men joined at Cowpens:

[We marched] towards South Carolina in the rear of Ferguson and fell in with the over mountain troops under the command of Campbell, Cleveland, Shelby & Sevier at the Cowpens (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832)

On 5 October, Cornwallis ordered Major Archibald McArthur to march the 71st Regiment 1st Battalion from Waxhaw Creek to Armour's Ford on Catawba River on either 7 or 8 October to support Ferguson (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:282). At the same time, he ordered Ferguson:

I would have you come to Armer's Ford just below the forks [of the Catawba River]. If we can then fix the enemy, or if they presume to pass on towards Ninety Six, I will detach in force against them. Take all possible pains to get intelligence and let me hear when you arrive at Armer's Ford. Major McArthur will meet you there. (Cornwallis 1780 in CPS 2010, II:161)

Cornwallis was concerned for the safety of Ninety Six. Since Ferguson did not move towards Armour's Ford during 6–7 October, he probably never received this order.

On the morning of 5 October, the two American camps were 20 miles apart. That was close enough for Williams to have personally taken a "pathway that led to the mountain," presumably conspicuous Cherry Mountain, and conferred with the Overmountain colonels (Hill 1815, 19). Williams considered himself in command of all South Carolinians and was probably concerned about the terms of joining the North Carolina and Virginia Overmountain Men: who would command, length of commitment, etc.

Since Hill described Williams as having taken a "pathway that led to the mountain," then implicitly Hill did not take such a path (Hill 1815, 19). For that reason, Hill and Lacey's South Carolinians marched to the Flint Hills, southeast of present-day Cherry Mountain.

When Williams met with the Overmountain colonels early on 5 October, what was the situation? Ferguson's current position was not known. Yet it was known that he had been at Dennard's Ford 4 days earlier and that he was likely moving toward the safety of Cornwallis's army at Charlotte. That gave Ferguson a 4 day lead to reach safety 70 miles away. Given this premise, what were the options? Ferguson had been the target of the Overmountain Men. He was the reason so much effort had been expended over the previous 10 days. But if Ferguson had evaded capture, the next best strategy was to threaten the British posts, like Ninety Six, behind Cornwallis's advance. This secondary aim was doable. Even though the Overmountain Men might not be expected to stay a long time, Williams' South Carolinians had every motive to regain control of the South Carolina upcountry. Besides, that was Williams' mission as directed by South Carolina Governor John Rutledge and the purpose of his recruitment during September. Such a move could stop Cornwallis's advance and force him to return to South Carolina which is what actually happened on 12 October (Rawdon 1780 in CPS 2010, II:126). Not only was this move viable, it was arguably the best option before these officers, and certainly less risky than battle. Unfortunately, the deliberation of these officers is not known. However, their decision can be surmised from what they did. The meeting ended with a decision to join forces at Lawson's Iron Works on the way to Ninety Six.

Consequently, later in the day, the Overmountain Men marched over Twitty's Ford to Alexander's Ford to get to the west side of Broad River. Did they know that Ferguson had been on the east side since 2 October? The route they took avoided the many tributaries on the east side. Hill indicated that their destination was the iron works on Lawson's Creek (Hill 1815, 20), a

tributary of the Pacolet River. Interestingly, a good, perhaps the best, road to that location passed through Cowpens.

While Williams was away on 5 October, Hill indicated that the South Carolina troops moved on to the Flint Hills (Hill 1815, 19). This camp was likely at the southeast base of present-day Cherry Mountain since that is about 18-20 miles from Alexander's Ford (Draper 1881, 219) and 20 miles from Cowpens (Draper 1881, 221). On this day, during Williams' absence, Hill and Lacey learned of Ferguson's position with more precision (Hill 1815, 19). He was at Cherokee Ford, within capture distance.

When Williams returned that evening, the situation had changed and notification had to be sent to the Overmountain Men. Some historians dismiss everything Hill reported in his memoirs. But could there be some insights from Hill's description? Williams described to Hill his deliberations with the Overmountain colonels including a plan to march to Ninety Six by way of Lawson's Iron Works. Hill was probably angry that he and Lacey were excluded from the deliberations. He interpreted Williams' subtle distinctions as devious. Later, Hill impugned Williams' reputation by assigned self-serving intent (Hill 1815, 20). In any event, Lacey made an overnight ride over a "spur of the mountain" to the Overmountain Men to acquaint them of Ferguson's approximate position (Moore 1859). Apparently, there was no alternative plan if Lacey failed to reach them. That meant the South Carolinians waited for the initiative of the much larger Overmountain force. During the night of 5–6 October, Lacey caught up with the Overmountain Men at Alexander's Ford on Green River and arranged a rendezvous at Cowpens. The Overmountain Men probably planned to pass through Cowpens anyway, but knowing that Ferguson was within reach made their march urgent (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:163–165). In the morning 6 October, Lacey returned to the Flint Hills camp. The South Carolinians immediately began their march to Cowpens. They crossed Broad River at Island Ford (Merrell, Benjamin, pension application 1833) (Robertson, *Global Gazetteer of the American Revolution* 2006–2014).

It is noteworthy that Hill's memoirs do not accuse Williams of telling the Overmountain colonels that Ferguson went to Ninety Six, but of arranging a rendezvous of Americans at Lawson's Iron Works to march to Ninety Six (Hill 1815, 20).

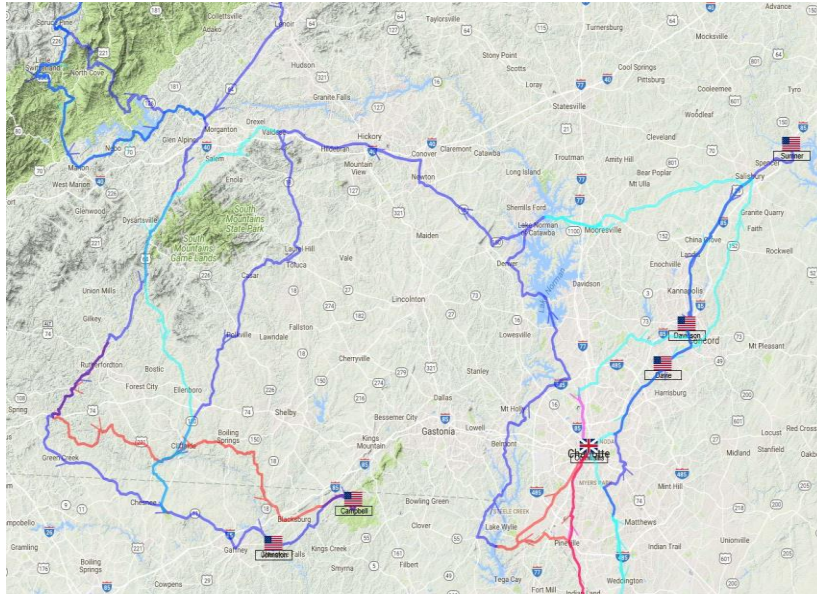
On 6 October, the three groups marched and united about sundown at Cowpens, a well-known crossroad in South Carolina (Draper 1881, 223–227). Officers selected their ablest men with good horses for the final pursuit. Campbell later wrote:

We marched to the Cowpens, on Broad River in South Carolina, where we were joined by Col. James Williams, with four hundred men, on the evening of the 6th of October, who informed us that the enemy lay encamped somewhere near the Cherokee Ford of Broad River, about thirty miles distant from us.

By a council of the principal officers, it was then thought advisable to pursue the enemy that night with nine hundred of the best horsemen, and leave the weak horsemen and foot-men to follow as fast as possible. We began our march with

nine hundred of the best men, about eight O'clock the same evening, and marching all night, came up with the enemy about three O'clock P. M. of the 7th, (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:163–165)

At Cowpens, Colonel William Hill delegated command of the New Acquisition District militia to his subordinate Lieutenant Colonel James Hawthorne (Hill 1815, 22).



Trail of South Carolina Militiamen and Lincoln County Men to Kings Mountain
24 September – 7 October 1780

The approximate mileage of the three major routes to Kings Mountain was: 248 miles from Abingdon, Virginia, 178 miles from Surry County muster ground, and 173 miles from Tuckasegee Ford. An appropriate name for the latter route is *Catawba River Valley Victory Trail*.

In Hillsborough, Colonel Thomas Sumter conferred with South Carolina Governor John Rutledge. On 6 October, Rutledge promoted Sumter to militia brigadier general (Scoggins 2010–2017). Sumter's promotion settled the rank issue with Williams. However ironically, it had no practical consequence because of Williams' death on 8 October.

7 October 1780, Kings Mountain

At 9:00 p.m. on 6 October, during a rain, 910 men departed Cowpens for Cherokee Ford on Broad River (Campbell 1780 in NCSR 1895, XV:163–165) (Draper 1881, 227). Lincoln County Men led since they knew the terrain and could properly interpret intelligence gathered from 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 Defeat 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). While approaching the battleground, Lincoln County commander Colonel William Graham was called away. Command fell to Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Hambright, but he deferred command to Major William Chronicle (Vance 1799 in Henry 1850 in Schenck 1891, 25) (Henry 1850 in Schenck 1891, 34) (Draper 1881, 232).

Private James Potter Collins later wrote:

The sky was overcast with clouds, and at times a light mist of rain falling; our provisions were scanty, and hungry men are apt to be fractious; each one felt his situation; the last stake was up and the severity of the game must be played; everything was at stake — life, liberty, property, and even the fate of wife, children and friends, seemed to depend on the issue; death or victory was the only way to escape suffering. (Collins 1859, 51)

At about 3:00 p.m., after a nonstop 18-hour, 33-mile, horseback pursuit, Patriots surrounded the loyalists (Campbell 1780 in Draper 1881, 523). Lincoln County Men marched to the furthest side where they blocked the only road escape. Historian Lyman Draper wrote about the Lincoln County Men, referred to as 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.

The nickname “South Fork Boys” was a reference to the South Fork of the Catawba River where some of these Lincoln County Men lived. However, not all lived there including the leaders William Graham and Frederick Hambright. Also, this expression does not appear once in approximately 20,000 transcribed pension applications dated from 1832–1850 (Graves and Harris 2005–2015). Apparently, it appeared first about 1850 in Robert Henry’s narrative (Henry 1850 in Schenck 1891, 34–36) and repeated in Draper’s book of 1881 (Draper 1881, 257). Some historians apply this nickname strictly to Major William Chronicle’s company of 18 men, not all of whom were in the battle (Hall 1965). But even with this interpretation, the nickname is imprecise because some of these men’s homes, including Chronicle’s, were in the Catawba River watershed. So, in summary, the nickname “South Fork Boys” first arose about 70 years after Kings Mountain and has been used ambiguously ever since. Arguably, the name Lincoln County Men is more descriptive since it explicitly associates with the organization’s actual identity, the Lincoln County Militia. It is also a name the actual participants would have recognized.

Many years after the battle, 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 in Schenck 1891, 34–35).

Private James Potter Collins, although a South Carolina militiaman, was temporarily assigned to the Lincoln County Men. He later wrote:

I looked around; every man's countenance seemed to change; well, thought I, fate is fate, every man's fate is before him and he has to run it out, which I am inclined to think yet. I was commanded this day by Major Chronicle and Capt. Watson. We were soon in motion, every man throwing four or five balls in his mouth to prevent thirst, also to be in readiness to reload quick. The shot of the enemy soon began to pass over us like hail; the first shock was quickly over, and for my own part, I was soon in a profuse sweat. My lot happened to be in the centre, where the severest part of the battle was fought. We soon attempted to climb the hill, but were fiercely charged upon and forced to fall back to our first position; we tried to second time, but met the same fate; the fight then seemed to become more furious. Their leader, Ferguson, came in full view, within rifle shot as if to encourage his men, who by this time were falling very fast; he soon disappeared. We took to the hill a third time; the enemy gave way; when we had gotten near the top, some of our leaders roared out, "Hurra, my brave fellows! Advance! They are crying for quarter." (Collins 1859, 52)

Many rebels observed that loyalists consistently overshot their targets. Present-day marksmen call this effect *terrestrial refraction* (Draper 1881, 279). It is an optical allusion. Collins later wrote:

Their great elevation above us had proved their ruin; they overshot us altogether, scarce touching a man, except those on horseback, while every rifle from below, seemed to have the desired effect. In this conflict I had fired my rifle six times, while others had perhaps fired nine or ten. (Collins 1859, 53)

Fighting lasted about an hour (Draper 1881, 296–297). When it ended, rebels suffered 28 killed and 62 wounded. Loyalists suffered 157 killed, 163 wounded, and 698 captured (Draper 1881, 300–301). Ferguson was shot 6 or 8 times (Draper 1881, 290–292) and died. Although it is not known who fired these shots, the Lincoln County Men were in a good position. Ferguson's body was moved to the base of the steep hill where it remains today. Ferguson 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, 1778 wax bust, 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 Espey, 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, 302–303).

After the battle, the Lincoln County Men dispersed and returned to their nearby homes (Forney, Abraham, pension application 1832) (Henry, Malcolm, pension application 1834). Most were called up again in a few weeks.

In 1799, Joseph McDowell, a participant, compared Kings Mountain favorably to Thermopylae. While this is an interesting analogy, it is arguably an overstatement since the first battle in 480 BC was part of a clash of civilizations.

Taking the whole campaign, including the battle, I know of no parallel to it in the annals of ancient or Modern warfare; the nearest was that of the Grecian Leonidas and his army at the battle of Thermopylae with the Great Xerxes. Leonidas and his army were found, victualled and clothed at public expense; each individual of our army had to find at his own expense; Leonidas' army were under Governmental orders; we were under no government at all, but were volunteers; Leonidas' army were furnished with arms and camp equipage: We

had to find our own arms, ammunition and horses at our own expense", Leonidas' army were under Government pay; we were under no pay or reward, or the expectation of any; Leonidas' army had choice of ground at the pass at Thermopyle; our enemies had the boasted choice of ground; Leonidas' army had to fight superior numbers— so had we; Leonidas had never a coward—neither had we any; but Leonidas had a traitor who was his overthrow and destruction of all but one man: We had neither coward or traitor to face our enemy—hence we were successful: Leonidas would have been successful, and have defeated or put to flight the great Xerxes if he had not had a traitor aboard; Leonidas' defeat was the destruction of the fine country of Greece, and the burning and destruction of their fine city of Athens, the labor of ages: Our success was the salvation of our country and our liberty. There is no parallel here: We will see if there is any in modern times. (McDowell 1799 in Vance 1799 in Henry 1850 in Schenck 1891, 28–29)

In 1814, Doctor William McLean purchased and erected the battlefield's first commemorative marker (Jones 2015). 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 Rabb, 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). Also, McLean's oration during the 4 July 1814 monument dedication did not mention the expression "South Fork Boys" although all 4 men belonged to Chronicle's company (Hall 1965) (Jones 2015).



1814 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 group of *Overmountain Victory Trail Association* members retrace the trail from Abingdon, Virginia, to the battleground.



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 1895, XIV:677). That was 16 miles from Charlotte. When news of Kings Mountain got to Davidson, he hurriedly wrote Brigadier 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 Tarleton 1787, 195) (Davidson 1780 in NCSR
1895, XIV:685) (Davidson 1780 in Davidson 1951, 86)

When Davidson's letter arrived at Sumner's camp on the Yadkin River, Colonel Thomas Polk wrote the North Carolina Board of War:

Camp Yadkin River, 11th Oct. 1780

Gentlemen:

I have the pleasure to inform you that on Saturday last the noted Col. Ferguson with 150 fell on Kings Mountain, 800 taken Prisoners with 1500 Stand of Arms. Cleaveland and Campbell Commanded. A glorious affair. In a few Days doubt not but we will be in Charlotte & I Will take Possession of my house & his Lordship take the Woods.

I am, Gent., with Respect, Your humb. Servt., Thomas Polk (Polk 1780 in NCSR
1895, XV:414)

Davidson's letter was forwarded from Sumner (Sumner 1780 in Tarleton 1787, 196) 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' 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 Gates' Defeat] 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, upset in a moment all the happy effects of our successes at Charlestown and His Lordship's glorious victory at Camden [Gates' Defeat], 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 United States history documents, 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)

Kings Mountain Order of Battle

British/Loyalists

- Commanding Officer: Major Patrick Ferguson
 - Provincials: Captain Abraham DePeyster: 115
 - Loyal American Volunteers detachment: Major Main: 18
 - Kings American Regiment detachment: Captain Abraham DePeyster: 22
 - New Jersey Volunteers detachment: Captain Samuel Ryerson: 58
 - Prince of Wales Regiment detachment: Sergeant Townsend: 17
 - Loyalists: 800
 - North Carolina Militia: 450
 - Tryon County: Colonel Ambrose Mills
 - Rutherford County: Major William Green
 - Burke County: Colonel Vezey Husbands
 - South Carolina Militia: 450
 - Fair Forest District: Major Daniel Plummer
 - Long Canes District: Colonel Richard King
 - Stevens Creek District: Colonel John Cotton

- Spartan District: Colonel Zacharias Gibbs
- Little River District: Major Patrick Cunningham
- Dutch Fork District: Colonel Daniel Clary
- Wagoner's: 10
- Total: 1025
- Casualties: Killed: 157, Wounded: 163, Captured: 705 (Moss 1998) (OKelley 2004–2005, 2:322–327)

Americans/Patriots

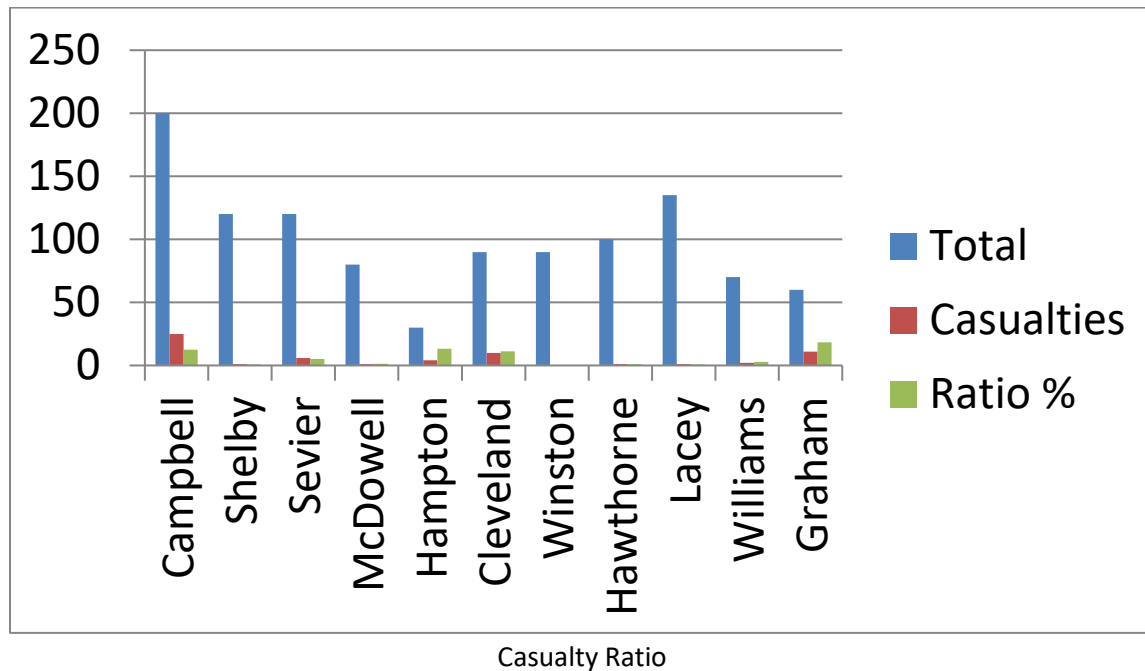
There were 3 trails and 4 groups that led to Kings Mountain. Approximate strengths of all participants including the follow-up group are shown in black. Actual battle commanders and their strengths are shown in red.

- Overmountain Victory Trail: 1060
 - Overmountain Men: 880, 440
 - Washington County, VA: Colonel William Campbell: 400, 200
 - Sullivan County, NC: Colonel Isaac Shelby: 240, 120
 - Washington County, NC: Colonel John Sevier: 240, 120
 - Burke and Rutherford County Men: 180, 90
 - Burke County: Major Joseph McDowell: 120, 60
 - Rutherford County: Colonel Andrew Hampton: 60, 30
- Yadkin Valley Victory Trail: 240
 - Wilkes and Surry County Men: 240, 120
 - Wilkes County: Colonel Benjamin Cleveland: 120, 60
 - Surry County: Major Joseph Winston: 120, 60
- Catawba Valley Victory Trail: 390
 - South Carolinian led men and Lincoln County Men: 390, 260
 - New Acquisition District: Colonel William Hill, Lt. Colonel James Hawthorne: 140, 70
 - Chester District: Colonel Edward Lacey: 120, 60
 - Little River District: Colonel James Williams: 70, 70
 - Caswell County, NC
 - Lincoln County: Colonel William Graham, Major William Chronicle, Lt. Colonel Frederick Hambright: 60, 60
- Total 1690, 910
- Casualties: Killed: 28, Wounded: 64 (Draper 1881, 214)

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 2006–2018). 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.



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 Hambright, Lt. Col., wounded

John Hardin Hambright, 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 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 Cane Creek (Draper 1881, 199). William McLean, who dedicated the first battlefield monument, indicated that he did not participate in the battle (Jones 2015).

Major Joseph Dickson may not have participated in the Battle of Kings Mountain although many accounts show his participation (Moss 1990). He commanded the Lincoln County militia cavalry which, at this time, was attached to Colonel William R. Davie's cavalrymen who were based on the Salisbury Road northeast of Charlotte and were running patrols around Charlotte. Earlier on 26 September, Dickson was under Davie in the Battle of Charlotte (Graham 1904b, 62–63). He is also credited with being at the skirmish at Polk's Mill which was probably on 7 October. On 8 October, Brigadier General William Lee Davidson reported a "Dixon" "attacked at Col. Polk's mill" the previous day (Davidson 1780 in NCSR 1895, XIV:784).

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 these two events. Many signers became Whigs. Others became Loyalists. In particular, 5 of the 49 signers fought at Kings Mountain. They were Andrew Hampton, 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 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 1904b, 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 1904b, 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 Tuckaseegee 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 1904b, 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's death, on about 11 February, the Salisbury District militia was temporarily placed under the command of Brigadier General Andrew Pickens (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904b, 203). Lincoln County cavalymen under Major Joseph Dickson joined Pickens while the ordinary militiamen remained near home under Major John Carruth.

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 1904b, 318) and in Clapp's Mill on 2 March (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904b, 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 1904b, 347–348).

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

After Guilford Courthouse, 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 1904b, 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 was referring to Hobkirk Hill battle. He probably did not mean the 16 August 1780 battle since his contemporaries usually called it "Gates' Defeat."

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) (Kincaid, Robert, pension application 1833). This was probably Colonel John Marshall, commander of the local Camden District militia.

September–November 1781, Wilmington

Lincoln County militiamen were called up in September 1781 by Brigadier General Griffith Rutherford (Graham 1827 in Graham 1904b, 356) and during 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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