

The Battle of Moores Creek Bridge

At daybreak on February 27, 1776 the banks of Moores Creek in North Carolina echoed the sounds of war. In a brief but violent battle, 950 Patriots in two militia units led by Colonel Alexander Lilington and Colonel Richard Caswell, and under the command of Colonel James Moore, defeated the Loyalist army of 1,600 men under General Donald McDonald and Lieutenant Colonel Donald McLeod.

In the previous summer news of the fighting at Lexington and Concord reached North Carolina and Patriots ousted Royal Governor Josiah Martin from the capital at New Bern. In January of 1776 the exiled Martin called upon all loyal subjects to unite and put down the rebellion. The North Carolina Patriots responded with their own formation of militia and two regiments for the Continental Army. Forty-eight days later the two opposing forces met at Moores Creek Bridge, about twenty miles from Wilmington where the Loyalists hoped to join a British expeditionary squadron. After encountering heavy fire from the Patriots' defensive positions, however, the Loyalists turned and ran, leaving behind fifty casualties. Patriot forces only suffered two casualties, one of which was fatal. The Patriots gained not only a decisive victory but also spoils that would be worth over a million dollars today. Soon those who fought with the British were captured. Many soldiers were paroled but their leaders were imprisoned.

Compared to the rest of the Revolutionary War, the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge was minor, but its results were of strategic, economical, and political importance. As a result of the Patriot victories at Moores Creek and at Sullivans Island, South Carolina in June, the British could not gain control of the South early in the war. These losses also prevented the British

access to vital naval stores in North Carolina and the Royal Navy was forced to turn to Scandinavia, an unstable source.

On April 12, 1776 North Carolina's Fourth Provincial Congress unanimously adopted the Halifax Resolves which directed the colony's delegation to Philadelphia to vote for independence at the Second Continental Congress. North Carolina was the first colony to take this action; Col. Caswell, who fought at Moores Creek Bridge, was one of the delegates appointed.

Of personal significance is the identity of the only Patriot who died in this battle. He was Private John Grady, the cousin of my Patriot ancestor, Robert Grady Sr., who was stirred by the events of February 27, 1776. No doubt the courage of his cousin John inspired Robert to enlist with a group of men under Henry Lightfoot Taylor of Johnson County, North Carolina. To this day John Grady and the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge are remembered in a special way. Along the "History Trail" at Moores Creek National Battlefield in Curie, North Carolina, there stands a monument to Patriot John Grady. Erected in 1857, this monument echoes into the future the great patriot cause of freedom which was put to the test over 230 years ago on these grounds.

John Grady did not die in vain. His heroism prompted others to join the fight for freedom. To his family over succeeding generations, as well as to those who visit Moores Creek National Battlefield, Patriot John Grady's sacrifice stands as a reminder that "freedom is not free."

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