

Lord Cornwallis In North Carolina

In attempting to confirm the possibility that Sion Hill was captured by Cornwallis and made to take care of his horses, I decided to do an Internet search of Cornwallis' travels and battles in North Carolina. The following timeline was found at

http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/timeline/revolutionary_war.html

This is a timeline beginning in September 1780 when Cornwallis begins his invasion of North Carolina and concludes with his surrender at Yorktown on October 17, 1781. A quick review of this timeline shows that his major battles were at King's Mountain and Guilford Courthouse on his way to the Danville area of Virginia. This initial timeline does NOT show Cornwallis in the Johnston or Wake County area.

1780

September 8, British General Charles Cornwallis begins his invasion of North Carolina.

1780

October 10, Washington writes Thomas Jefferson, governor of Virginia, on the state of the Army and on British General Cornwallis's severity in his progress through the south. Washington refers to a letter Cornwallis has written to a fellow British officer, a transcript of which Washington has received, in which Cornwallis outlines punishments for rebels. [The text of Cornwallis's letter is reproduced in annotation in the transcription linked to this document.] Washington closes his letter to Jefferson with a full history of Benedict Arnold's defection to the British.

October 7, the Battle of King's Mountain in North Carolina. Cornwallis sends Major Patrick Ferguson ahead of him to raise loyalist troops in North Carolina. Prior to the march to King's Mountain, Ferguson sends a threatening message ahead that he will lay waste to the land if its inhabitants do not cease resistance. This so angers southern militia that they quickly raise a force and brutally defeat Ferguson and his troops. With King's Mountain, Cornwallis begins to realize that loyalist sentiment has been overestimated in British plans to subdue the south. Washington writes Abner Nash, governor of North Carolina, about the "success of the militia against Col Ferguson."

1780

December 2, Nathanael Greene replaces Horatio Gates as commander of the American southern army. He assumes command in Charlotte, North Carolina. His officers are Brigadier General Daniel Morgan, Lieutenant Colonel William Washington (a cousin of George Washington), and Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee and his Legion. When Greene arrives in the south, he is appalled at the brutality and extent of the civil war between patriots and loyalists.

1781

January 1, the Pennsylvania Continentals mutiny. Washington orders the New Jersey Continentals to march to position themselves between the mutinying troops and the British on Staten Island. Nonetheless, British General Henry Clinton learns of the mutiny and on January 3 gets messengers through to the Pennsylvania Continentals. But the mutineers turn the messengers over to Congress and they are hung as British spies.

January 3, Washington writes Anthony Wayne with news of the mutiny of the Pennsylvania Continentals. He worries that if Congress removes itself from Philadelphia, apart from the "indignity," it may provoke the mutineers to "wreak their vengeance upon the persons and properties of the citizens,...." In his January 7 letter to Henry Knox, Washington gives him instructions on where and how to obtain the supplies and necessities that he hopes will appease the mutineers. Washington describes to Knox the

"alarming crisis to which our affairs have arrived by a too long neglect of measures essential to the existence of an Army,...." (See below on the mutiny of the New Jersey Continentals January 20)

January 5, Benedict Arnold invades Richmond, Virginia, and Governor Thomas Jefferson and government officials are forced to flee.

January 16-17, General Daniel Morgan and Lieutenant Colonel William Washington defeat British Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton's Legion at Cowpens, South Carolina. Tarleton escapes and is pursued unsuccessfully by William Washington and a company on horseback. The expression "Tarleton's Quarter," used by American soldiers during War, refers to the British officer's practice of not giving any, even in surrender. (William Washington is a cousin of George Washington.)

January-March, Nathanael Greene (who took command of the Southern Army at Charlotte, North Carolina, December 2, 1780) leads General Charles Cornwallis and his forces on a chase through South and North Carolina.

Greene's path avoids engagements that he cannot win, exhausts Cornwallis and his army, and dangerously lengthens their supply lines. January - February, Greene and Cornwallis race to the Dan River on the Virginia border, with Cornwallis failing to catch up in time to cut off Greene and Colonel Otho Williams and their forces. February 14, Greene and Williams cross the Dan River into Virginia. Washington's March 21 letter to Greene congratulates him on saving his baggage "notwithstanding the hot pursuit of the Enemy," and assures him that his "Retreat before Lord Cornwallis is highly applauded by all Ranks and reflects much honor on your military Abilities."

January 20, the New Jersey Continentals mutiny. Washington, fearing the total dissolution of the Army, urges severe measures. He is less excusing of this mutiny because, as he writes in a circular letter to the New England state governors, Congress has been working to redress the Continental Army's grievances. Washington orders Robert Howe from West Point to suppress the mutiny and to execute the most extreme ringleaders. Howe forms a court martial that sentences three leaders to be shot by twelve of their fellow mutineers. Two are executed and one pardoned. On January 27, Washington writes the Congressional committee formed to respond to the soldiers' grievances that "having punished guilt and supported authority, it now becomes proper to do justice" and urges the committee to provide the much needed redress

1781

March 1, the Articles of Confederation are ratified by Maryland, the last state to ratify, and can now go into effect. The Articles had been sent to the states for ratification in 1777.

1781

March 15 - The **Battle of Guilford Court House** was a battle fought on March 15, 1781 inside the present-day city of Greensboro, North Carolina, during the American Revolutionary War. 1,900 British troops, under General Lord Cornwallis, fought an American force, under Rhode Island native General Nathanael Greene, numbering 4,400.

Despite the relatively small numbers of troops involved, the battle is considered one of the most decisive of the Revolutionary War. Prior to the battle, the British appeared to have successfully reconquered Georgia and South Carolina with the aid of strong Loyalist factions, and that North Carolina might be within their grasp. In the wake of the battle, Greene moved into South Carolina, while Cornwallis chose to invade Virginia. These decisions allowed Greene to unravel British control of the South, while leading Cornwallis to Yorktown and surrender.

1781 May 21-22, Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau, commander of the French army in Rhode Island, meet in Wethersfield, Connecticut, and agree to appeal to Admiral Francois Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, to come north for a combined operation.

May 24, British General Charles Cornwallis encamps with troops on the Virginia plantation of William Byrd.

1781 June 4, British Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton nearly captures Thomas Jefferson at Monticello. Jefferson, governor of Virginia, and other state officials flee to the Shenandoah Valley.

1781 July 6, the French army and its commander Rochambeau, join Washington and his army at Dobb's Ferry, New York. Washington plans a combined assault on the British on Manhattan Island. August 14, he learns that the French fleet, consisting of 34 warships with transports carrying 3200 troops will be arriving in the Chesapeake from the West Indies under the command of Admiral Francois Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, and will be available for a combined effort until October 19.

1781 September 18, Washington, Rochambeau, and de Grasse, meet on the Ville de Paris at Hampton Roads. September 28, their combined forces are arranged for battle against British General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown.

1781 October 14, the Americans and French begin bombarding Yorktown. October 16, Cornwallis orders about 1,000 of his troops to attempt an escape across the York River.

October 17, Cornwallis offers a white flag and negotiations for surrender begin at Moore House in Yorktown.

October 19, Cornwallis' army surrenders.

Now, with all that being said, there are some pension papers to the contrary. You will find below some edited pension papers that can be found at <http://www.southerncampaign.org/pen/r10.pdf>. In these documents, you will find that Cornwallis DID come through the Johnston and Wake County areas in 1781. Therefore, Sion Hill would have been 7-8 years old and could have been picked up. However, when you read these papers, the pensioners state that Cornwallis leaves the Hillsborough District and heads towards Catawba, presumably before the march to Greensboro and the Guilford Courthouse Battle. The author will leave the decision to the reader as to the truth of the story about Sion Hill – but note that it did come through family tradition that was passed down.

Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements

Pension application of John Abernethie...that he entered the Service of the United States under the following named officers and Served as herein Stated in February 1781 at the **County** of Wake in the State of North Carolina the said Affiant Volunteered and joined a body of Militia on the call of Thomas Wootten Col. of the militia of said **County** (Wake), acting under the Orders of Brigadier General Butler [John Butler] commanding of Hillsboro, District North Carolina Subject to the Orders of Major General Caswell [Richard Caswell], commanding the militia of the State for the purpose of joining Major General Green [sic, Nathanael Greene] to assist in the opposition to **Lord Cornwallis**. That the said militia of which this deponent was one under the command of said Col. Wootten assembled at Granville **County** and was marched from that place to Hillsborough under the Command of the said Major General Caswell in chief; to which place this affiant having been previously appointed at said Wake **County** by said Col. Wootten Deputy commissary of said Wake **County**: The said Col. Ordered the said He applicant affiant as such Deputy to proceed with said troops from said Hillsboro, to General Greene's Army when Col. returned back: That said Applicant according to the said order marched with said troops to the High Rock Ford on the Haw River and joined the Army of General Greene at which place Col. Davie the Commissary of General Greene's Army Ordered said Abernethie to return again to the public store in said Wake **County** to have five hundred bushels of corn ground for public use; and have as much bacon collected at that place as possible, that he did so and loaded the Wagons, ground and forwarded the meal and What bacon could be collected to the Army...

That said applicant continue, I was born in the Village of Edmun in North Britton in the year 1754 on the Second day of September and landed in Virginia October 1772, and went from there to said Wake **County** North Carolina in the same month of October. Yes I have my Original Indenture (Specifying my age) as an apprentice to the merchant business, at my house Seven miles from this place, and this **County**...Soon after the battle of Guilford, fought by General Greene against **Lord Cornwallis** (March 17th, 1781) North Carolina, General Greene detached off upwards of four hundred Militia man, whose time of service was nearly expired to the public Store in Wake **County** North Carolina under the command of General Butler, the General of Hillsboro district that State, and under him a Col. Thomas – the men were to continue at or near the Store until their time of service expired, they did so, and were discharged in due time. General Greene directed General Butler to endeavor to ascertain what route Cornwallis was taking from Wilmington in North Carolina – it was rumored that Cornwallis intended to march up to Hillsborough from Wilmington by way or through Dobbs, Johnson [sic, **Johnston**]& Wake Counties – Col. Thomas, Col. Wootten the Col. of Wake **County** and Commissary, turned out. Col. Wootten permitted me the Subscriber also to go, John Skinner a Dragoon on furlough, and two of the Militia man also turned out, six of us in all. We marched down the Wilmington Road from the public store about 40 miles and **Johnston** old Court-house, there we met Col. Ben Williams of **Johnston** flying from the enemy, the Col. was informed that Cornwallis intended crossing Neuse River at Col. Williams' ferry – the Col. told us that some days ago he had sent a friend of his well mounted to find out where the enemy was, & where he was bound to – the man returned in a very little time after we met Col. Williams, he told the Col. that the enemy had crossed Neuse below his ferry, and was on his way to Petersburg in Virginia, by way of Horn's Mill on Cotentiny [sic, Contentnea] Creek, thence on to Lemmon's bridge on Tar River, thence on

to Halifax on Roanoke River, thence on to Petersburg – we left Col. Williams and pushed on to Horn's Mill-- on the third day early in the morning on the main road that lead from Smithfield the seat of Justice in **Johnston County** on to Halifax we met a young man who told us that he left his lordship's Army between daybreak and sunrise that morning, and that they were all preparing to start to Horn's Mill, in order to get meal and corn for the use of the Army & horses-- the young man told us it was only between 3 and 4 miles to the Mill – the man asked us who we were, Col. Thomas told him that we were a “small party in disguise” sent through the Country in order to find out where Greene and his rebel Army was, a young man told us that he understood that Greene & his rebel Army lay near Hillsborough...In consequence of Cornwallis's marching to Hillsborough about thirty five miles from the public Store in Wake, a number of the militia of that **County** were drafted & turned out to join General Caswell, who was collecting the North Carolina militia to meet in Granville **County** North Carolina. We furnished the Wake men with provisions to last them for some time. We likewise furnished a division of the Hillsboro mounted infantry with provisions and forage for their horses & wagon teams. Wake **County** is one of the Counties that belongs to Hillsborough District, General Butler of the Brigadier General of the district. In February the North Carolinians met in Granville. Cornwallis with his Army staid but a very few days in Hillsborough, we believed that he was afraid of being made a Burgoyne – he marched on towards Salisbury.

I went on with the Army to the high rock ford (with Col. Wootten's permission), he directed me to call on Col. Davie the Commissary of General Greene's Army, and inquire of him if he did not want Bacon & Corn meal for the use of the Army (it being now in the month of March, we had collected in a great deal Bacon & Corn). If he wanted meal & Bacon, for him to send some wagons and that a quantity of these articles would be sent out to the Army, Col. Davie said, that they were pinched for provisions, and that these articles would be very acceptable if they were here, but he also said, that from the best accounts that he could get, Cornwallis was about marching down in the forks of Haw River and Deep River (the two rivers that make Cape Fear River) on his way through Chatham on to Wilmington (near the mouth of Cape Fear about 10 or 12 miles from the sea) in order to get Clothing &c for his armies he Col. Davie said that he expected that General Greene and his Army would in a short time move down into Wake **County**, he therefore said that he would give me a line to Col. Wootten, the Commissary of Wake, to have as soon as possible, five hundred bushels of Corn ground into meal, and to get all the Bacon, Wheat and Brandy, that he possibly could for the use of the Army when in Wake (I was personally acquainted with Col Davie) the Col., told me to push on to the public Store in Wake – as soon as I received the letter to Col. Wootten, I started off immediately for the Store...

We had about three bushels of Corn ground into Meal, when we were informed that Cornwallis instead of marching on to Wilmington at that time, marched towards Guilford Court house. General Greene having early got intelligence from Col. Washington of the enemy's movement, and having got his whole force together, he marched on and met Cornwallis at Guilford Court house – they fought the well fought bloody battle of Guilford, on the 17th day of March A.D. 1781. General Greene retired towards Roanoke River and Cornwallis marched on to Wilmington.

We were all directed not to say what the number was, some of the Guard declared there was at least one thousand men encamped in the thicket, there was plenty of good springs convenient to the thicket & in it. General Greene directed Butler to send out a scout, and for them to go on towards Wilmington and endeavor to find out the route Cornwallis was taking – we heard just before we left the Store, that he had left Wilmington with his Army-- Col. Thomas, Col. Wootten, J. Skinner, a Dragoon (on furlough), myself (with Col. Wootten's permission) and two other men were the scout, six of us in all we started down the road that led to Wilmington & Newbern [sic, New Bern], to **Johnston County** Old Courthouse, there we found Col. Ben Williams who informed us that Cornwallis had left Wilmington, but whether he intended to march of towards Hillsboro through **Johnston** & Wake, he could not say – the Col., also told us that three days ago he had sent a man well mounted (he expected the man to return to the old Courthouse every minute) he had directed the man to go on towards the enemy and endeavor to find out the route

the Army was taking – the man Col. Williams had sent out, returned to the old Courthouse soon after our arrival there, he said that he was informed that the enemy it was believed would cross Neuse River below Col. Williams' on his way to Lemon's Bridge on Tar River-- the Col. said that he thought it would be best for us to cross Neuse at Lockhart's Mill and get into the Main road that lead from Smithfield (the **Johnston County** seat) on to Horn's Mill to the bridge over Contentnea Creek – and continued on to Lemon's bridge on Tar River...we immediately started for Horn's Mill and on the second day early in the morning we met a young man within about 3 or 4 miles from the bridge – Col. Thomas asked him if his Lordship with the Army had moved on...when done [with] our meal, we immediately crossed the Creek, and started on our way to the public Store in Wake, where we arrived on the second day in the evening – General Butler sent Col. Thomas on to General Greene to inform him of Cornwallis's route. Butler also discharged the Militia at the Store as soon as their time expired. I forgot to mention, that in October 1780 we commenced receiving of bacon and Pork in the season, we had Barrels made at the Store & Barrelled up the Beef, and also the pork, and sent them up to Hillsboro for the use of the troops that were on their march to the Southward. We continued collecting in Tax Corn & Bacon until July A.D. 1781 also purchasing provisions until time, and issuing out to the troops and others in the public service, until in July as above stated, Col. Wootten resigned his Commissary Office in that month, my time as Deputy Commissary &c also expired then. In August 1781 Col. Wootten was informed that McNeale [sic, Hector McNeil or McNeal] the man who commanded the Tories in Wilmington District (North Carolina) was about forming a Junction with Fanning [David Fanning], who commanded the Tories in Chatham, Randolph & Moore Counties (North Carolina) – there were two companies of the Wake Militia drafted, Col. Rogers of Wake raised a Company of volunteers. I was one who joined the volunteers – we Joined the drafted Wake militia and a company of Volunteers from **Johnston County** and at Cape Fear River we were Joined by the Chatham Volunteers & some of the Cumberland men – we were informed that McNeil with his men lay at McLane's Mill on Little River (a river that made into Cape Fear on the West side). We marched to the Mills, we were told there, that McNeil with his men had gone to the Swamp, but that if we stayed only half the day that McNeil would be sure to attack us – we then marched off from the Mill into the open woods about nine o'clock in the morning, we continued on the ground until sunset (August 10th, 1781).

Personally appeared before me Benjamin Bacon a Justice of the peace in and for the **County** aforesaid John Abernethie of said **County** and State, who being duly sworn according to law, declareth and saith that, to the best of his recollection, he wrote a Letter addressed to J. L. Edwards Esq. Commissioner of Pensions (United States) City of Washington, dated he said Abernethie believes either on the last of August or the first of September last (about one or two days before the birth day of said Abernethie, viz., the second day of September, he was then Seventy Nine years of age) he thinks that the substance or a part of the substance of said letter was that Major General Nathaniel Greene the Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of the Southern district, did soon after the battle of Guilford (North Carolina) fought by him against **Lord Cornwallis** in March 1781, detached a number of Militia to the public provision Store in Wake **County** North Carolina, and for them to continue there until the time of their service expired, they did so the said Militia were commanded by Brigadier General Butler of Hillsboro District North Carolina.