

# Battle of King's Mountain – Local connections

By: D. Ray Smith | Historically Speaking | The Oak Ridger | July 25, 2006

"Muster Day" was set for September 25, 1780. The location was Sycamore Shoals ( Elizabethton, Tennessee). John Sevier and Isaac Shelby had sent riders to all settlements in the Overmountain country of North Carolina asking for volunteer militia to join in an effort to respond to a threat from noted English Colonel Patrick Ferguson.

Ferguson unknowingly signed his own death warrant less than a month earlier when he sent a message from his camp in Gilbert Town, Rutherford County, North Carolina, to the "officers on the Western waters" (west of the Blue Ridge) that if they did not "desist from their opposition to the British army, and take protection under his standard, he would **march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword.**" This statement was documented in *Battle of King's Mountain* by Isaac Shelby, a pamphlet "to the public," published in April 1823 and reprinted in *King's Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7th, 1780, and the Events Which Led to It* by Lyman C. Draper in 1881.

On the morning of September 26, 1780, the men gathered for a religious service before marching off to fight. Colonel John Sevier had asked the Reverend Samuel Doak to lead the service. Reverend Doak said:

*"My countrymen, you are about to set out on an expedition which is full of hardships and dangers, but one in which the Almighty will attend you.*

*"The Mother Country has her hands upon you, these American Colonies, and take that for which our fathers planted their homes in the wilderness – OUR LIBERTY.*

*"Taxation without representation and the quartering of soldiers in the homes of our people without their consent are evidence that the Crown of England would take from its American Subjects the last vestige of Freedom.*

*"Your brethren across the mountains are crying like Macedonia unto your help. God forbid that you shall refuse to hear and answer their call – but the call of your brethren is not all. The enemy is marching hither to destroy your homes.*

*"Brave men, you are not unacquainted with battle. Your hands have already been taught to war and your fingers to fight. You have wrested these beautiful valleys of the Holston and Watauga from the savage hand. Will you tarry now until the other enemy carries fire and sword to your very doors? No, it shall not be. Go forth then in the strength of your manhood to the aid of your brethren, the defense of your liberty and the protection of your homes. And may the Go do Justice be with you and give you victory."*

*"Let Us Pray"*

*"Almighty and gracious God! Thou hast been the refuge and strength of Thy people in all ages. In time of sorest need we have learned to come to Thee – our Rock and our Fortress. Thou knowest the dangers and snares that surround us on march and in battle.*

*"Thou knowest the dangers that constantly threaten the humble, but well beloved homes, which Thy servants have left behind them.*

*"O, in Thine infinite mercy, save us from the cruel hand of the savage, and of tyrant. Save the unprotected homes while fathers and husbands and sons are far away fighting for freedom and helping the oppressed.*

*"Thou, who promised to protect the sparrow in its flight, keep ceaseless watch, by day and by night, over our loved ones. The helpless women and little children, we commit to Thy care. Thou wilt not leave them or forsake them in times of loneliness and anxiety and terror.*

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*"O, God of Battle, arise in Thy might. Avenge the slaughter of Thy people. Confound those who plot for our destruction. Crown this mighty effort with victory, and smite those who exalt themselves against liberty and justice and truth.*

*:Help us as good soldiers to wield the SWORD OF THE LORD AN GIDEON." "AMEN" (The sermon and prayer of Samuel Doak come from the scrapbook of J. Fain Anderson as reprinted in *The Overmountain Men* by Pat Alderman.)*

The men started their march up out of Sycamore Shoals with the battle cry, "***The Sword of the Lord and Gideon!***"

At least one person (David Hall and possibly his twin bother Samuel Hall) who later (in 1795) came to live in present day Anderson County answered this call to "muster" at Sycamore Shoals. Likely there were several more. David Hall is listed among the soldiers who fought at King's Mountain on October 7, 1780 as recorded in *The Overmountain Men* by Pat Alderman. David Hall's Historic Cabin is the oldest structure in Anderson County and is located just east of Bull Run Steam Plant in Claxton. Libby Bumgardner, grand daughter of Walter Thomason, the third owner of David Hall's historic cabin, is the current owner and curator of the historic cabin.

A personal connection I have to King's Mountain is that Joseph Greer, who traveled 600 miles overland to report the victory to the Continental Congress was later given a large land grant that included what is now Petersburg, Tennessee where I attended high school and met my wife Fanny. The historical marker on the square of the small middle Tennessee town of Petersburg in Lincoln County reads:

*"King's Mountain Messenger – About four miles northeast is buried Joseph Greer, son of Andrew Greer, an early member of the Watauga Settlement in east Tennessee. After fighting at King's Mountain, he made a rapid overland trip to Philadelphia, where he officially reported the American victory to the Continental Congress."*

The battle of King's Mountain is unique in America's history: This battle is credited by most early historians with having changed the course of the Revolution. In a little over an hour the Overmountain men, some 1,000 strong, took the hill that is named King's Mountain, killed Colonel Ferguson and took close to 800 prisoners. One unusual aspect of the battle was that it was primarily between Whigs (Patriots) and Tories (Loyalists) with Colonel Ferguson being the commanding British officer a very few British soldiers.

There may well be more reasons than just he Colonel's threat as to why the battle was necessary from the Overmountain men's perspective. Remember that the land on which they lived was disputed by the Cherokee, not wanted by North Carolina or the British because of the cost and difficulty of protecting the settlers. The settlers faced continually changing circumstances because of the numerous treaties and land speculation taking place. The Overmountain settlements were uncertain at best. Until the state of Tennessee was formed in 1796, the area where we live now was a battle ground between Dragging Canoe of the Chickamauga Cherokee and the settlers.

Treaties in 1772 and 1773 had led to Richard Henderson's Purchase in 1775 where large tracts of land was made available to settlers in the Overmountain area, but Dragging Canoe and his followers resisted by attacking settlers at every opportunity causing a cry for protection from the government. When Ferguson's message came the reaction was to break with the British government and loyal Tories in support of a more understanding and local government. However, the Overmountain region was to remain in an undetermined status for the next 21 years and undergo an attempt at local government that was the failed state of Franklin before finally being formed into the state of Tennessee in 1796.

In the midst of this turmoil the American Revolution was being fought with numerous battles. In 1780, the revolution had stalled in the North and was precarious in the South. The Battle of King's Mountain changed all that and set the nation on a course that led to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown just one year and 10 days later.

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The victory at King's Mountain was indeed the turning point of the American Revolution. David Hall was there! Joseph Greer fought along side David and then traveled for a month on horseback until hostile Indians shot his horse from underneath him and then by foot, even hiding in a hollow log while Indians sat on top of the log, until he strode forcibly into Philadelphia's Continental Congress with his six foot seven inch frame to demand they listen to his report of the victory at King's Mountain. Can't you just imagine what a strong and reassuring message was conveyed by this roughly dressed and very large frontiersman barging in as he was not known by those keeping the security at the Continental Congress and stating that a major victory had been won. Some of the members of the Continental Congress are said to have exclaimed "with men of his size and strength, no wonder the frontier patriots won!"

A most intriguing and interesting opportunity is soon to exist right here in Anderson County to learn the King's Mountain history and to capture the exciting details of the muster, the march overland to King's Mountain, the one-hour battle and the return trip where the 700 Tory prisoners along with many of the Whig captors just walked away from the return militia march back to the Overmountain region. **Mike Dahl will present a unique historical demonstration and talk about the battle that was King's Mountain - a pivotal battle in the American Revolution.**

The following is taken from the press release announcing the event. "The University of Tennessee Arboretum Society, in conjunction with the University of Tennessee, will sponsor local story teller Mike Dahl for a special historical outdoor drama at the **UT Arboretum, 901 S. Illinois Ave. (Hwy. 62), at 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, July 29, 2006.** Admission for this unique event is \$5.00 per person; children under 12 are free. Bring lawn chairs and picnic fixings for the family, or purchase grilled hot dogs – with side trimmings – from the UT Arboretum Society, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Mike Dahl has been following the footsteps of the Overmountain Men for nearly 30 years, telling their story all across American and as far away as the British Isles. Mike is the featured speaker in a video that is in hundreds of schools in Virginia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina."

Mike Dahl has presented this outdoor drama to a wide variety of audiences even including some in England. Mike is also the person who attempted to purchase the statue of the Cherokee Beloved Woman - Nancy Ward, cousin of Dragging Canoe who warned the Watauga settlers of an impending attack by Dragging Canoe in 1776. In 1980 he traveled to upper east Tennessee to purchase the statue to place it on Nancy Ward's grave. He found the statue had been stolen. It has only recently been located after being missing for 26 years from the Arnwine Cemetery where it sat for over 70 years on a white woman's grave. As you may recall from a previous Historically Speaking article on the "traveling statue," I have maintained a personal quest for several years to locate that statue and to return it to Tennessee. I first met Mike through this Nancy Ward Statue and my web page describing the history of the stolen statue. He has an intense interest in the history of East Tennessee.

Please make your plans to join Mike Dahl at the U.T. Arboretum on Saturday, July 29 at 8:00 PM. You will be glad you did!

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David Hall Historic Cabin, located in Claxton near Bull Run Steam Plant



Mike Dahl with Lord Laird of Artigarvan (John Laird), a member of the British House of Lords, taken July 12, 2005 in Belfast, Northern Ireland during a Cultural Heritage and speaking tour sponsored by the Ulster Scots Agency of Northern Ireland