JOSEPH GREER: THE KING'S MOUNTAIN MESSENGER — A JOURNEY THAT CAME HOME TO PETERSBURG

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of January 4, 2027)

Occasionally, while researching a story for Historically Speaking, I come across a piece of history that is more than just something I find interesting. It is something that comes home and rests well in my memory.

That happened recently when I came across the story of Joseph Greer, the "King's Mountain Messenger." I had scheduled a trip with *Yes! Go Travel*, Suzie Housley's travel agency, to go to Abington, VA, for a play about Kings Mountain. I knew about Joseph Greer because he is buried near where I grew up in Middle Tennessee.

So, the opportunity to see a play about that battle was of interest enough that I signed on to join the bus trip on a Sunday. Joseph Greer, the Kings Mountain messenger, was not included in the play. Much to my dismay…

Greer's story begins on October 7, 1780, at the Battle of Kings Mountain in South Carolina, where Patriot militia (a group of frontiersmen really) defeated a force of Loyalists commanded by Major Patrick Ferguson. Among those fighting with the Overmountain men was Joseph Greer, a frontier settler associated with the Watauga community.

Following the Patriot victory, Greer was chosen to carry the news north to Philadelphia and the Continental Congress. And that is where his story becomes extraordinary.

According to the long-standing account, Greer undertook a journey of more than 600 miles from the Carolina frontier to Philadelphia, arriving there on November 7, 1780, exactly one month after the Battle of Kings Mountain. The mission was important. The American cause had suffered serious setbacks in the South, and news of the victory at Kings Mountain was to become recognized as a key turning point in the Revolutionary War.

Greer was a frontier man accustomed to traveling through a wilderness where roads were few and danger was never far away. Tradition says he traveled with a musket and compass and encountered hostile forces along the way. Some versions of the story tell of his horse being shot and of Greer hiding in a hollow log while enemies passed nearby.

Those dramatic details need to be treated as tradition rather than documented fact. There is no known first-person account from Greer describing his journey, and modern research by the Tennessee Society of the Sons of the American Revolution acknowledges that portions of the story have been handed down through family tradition.

But there is a solid historical core to the story: Greer reached Philadelphia on November 7, 1780, and became known as the messenger who carried the news of the American victory at Kings Mountain to the Continental Congress.

And then there is the part of the story that makes this especially meaningful to me. Petersburg! I grew up in Haislip Hollow near Delina and Petersburg, Tennessee.

I went to grade school and high school there. Petersburg was not simply a place where I studied, it is where I met and married my wife, Fanny, she lived on 300 Dollar Road. That name probably wouldn't mean much to someone unfamiliar with Petersburg.

But 300 Dollar Road is important to the Joseph Greer story because, just off that road, lies the Greer family cemetery, where Joseph Greer was ultimately buried. The Tennessee Society of the Sons of the

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American Revolution identifies the Greer family cemetery near Petersburg as the final resting place of the King's Mountain Messenger.

So when I look at the photograph of the historical marker standing in Petersburg, I don't see merely another roadside marker, I see a connection to the place where I grew up.

The Tennessee Historical Commission marker tells the story in a few carefully chosen words: "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."

That marker stands in the very community where Greer spent the latter part of his life.

And then there is the bronze plaque. The weathered bronze plaque has an even more remarkable history.

It reads: KINGS MOUNTAIN MESSENGER: Joseph Greer carried the message of the victory at Kings Mountain to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, thereby turning the tide of the revolution. D.A.R 1780.

The plaque was placed on Greer's tomb by the Kings Mountain Messenger Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Fayetteville, Tennessee. The Tennessee Sons of the American Revolution records that it was later moved from Greer's tomb to the lawn of the Lincoln County Courthouse in Fayetteville.

Think about that for a moment. A bronze tablet was placed beside the grave of a man whose most famous accomplishment had taken place more than a century earlier. And today, even though the bronze has weathered and the lettering has darkened with age, it still tells the story and in a more visible location for more people to see.

From Kings Mountain to Philadelphia and back to Petersburg, there is a beautiful circle to Joseph Greer's life. And one that intersects with my story as well.

He was born in Philadelphia in 1754. His family later moved south, and Greer became part of the frontier community in what is now East Tennessee. He fought at Kings Mountain. He then headed north toward Philadelphia, the city of his birth, with the news of an American victory. And eventually, he returned to the South and established his home near Petersburg.

The Greer house, according to the Tennessee Sons of the American Revolution, remained in the family until 1943. His family cemetery remained nearby, and Joseph Greer was buried there in 1831. The Greer cabin has recently been moved to the Camp Blount Historic Site State Park in Fayetteville, TN.

The Tennessee Historical Commission marker in Petersburg, pointing toward the man who rests nearby, and the old Daughters of the American Revolution bronze plaque in Fayetteville, both serve well in preserving the story of the messenger who carried the news of Kings Mountain to Philadelphia and the Continental Congress. And the cabin now adds to that history also in a very tangible way.

And for me, there is something especially moving about knowing that this remarkable Revolutionary War story unfolded in a landscape that was part of my own childhood. Haislip Hollow, Delina, and Petersburg remain well established in my memory and even more so as I grow older. 300 Dollar Road holds a special place in my memory because of my beloved Fanny growing up in a house located on that road.

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I drove the roads around Petersburg as a young teenage boy. I went to school there. And my wife, Fanny, lived on 300 Dollar Road before we married right out of High School in Petersburg, TN. I well remember when I drove up the steep hill to her house on the 300 Dollar Road. I even recall on one snowy night when I lost control of my car and ended up in a ditch. As a young boy, I could not have known then that a Revolutionary War hero lay buried nearby. History sure has a way of coming home for me in this story.

Joseph Greer died on February 23, 1831, at the age of 77. His old stone tomb reportedly carried an inscription describing him as a man distinguished for his benevolence and humanity. His most famous journey lasted only about a month. His legacy has lasted nearly 246 years. And perhaps that is what makes local history so compelling.

The great events of American history did not happen somewhere else. They happened along roads, creeks, farms and small communities that still exist today. They are our stories and come home to rest when we but look at our local areas.

For the people of Petersburg, the story of Joseph Greer is not simply the story of a Revolutionary War messenger who traveled hundreds of miles to Philadelphia. It is the story of a man who came home and lived a good life there.

And every time I see that old marker in Petersburg, or the weathered bronze plaque in Fayetteville, or that restored cabin, I am reminded that sometimes the most important pieces of American history are waiting quietly in the places we thought we already knew. Petersburg was one of those places for me. And Joseph Greer was one of those stories.



The Tennessee Historical Commission marker in Petersburg, Tennessee, identifies Joseph Greer as the "King's Mountain Messenger" and notes that he made the rapid overland journey to Philadelphia after the October 7, 1780, Patriot victory (Courtesy of Ray Smith)

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The original bronze plaque honoring Joseph Greer was placed on his tomb by the King's Mountain Messenger Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The plaque was later moved to the Lincoln County Courthouse lawn in Fayetteville. (Courtesy of Ray Smith)



Joseph Greer and his family members are buried here just off 300 Dollar Road (Courtesy of Ray Smith)

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Display at the grave site placed there when the site was recently cleaned and better identified by the Tennessee Society Sons of the American Revolution's local Joseph Greer Chapter (Courtesy of Ray Smith)