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A KING'S MOUNTAIN DIARY

Edited by Mary Hardin McCown

Lyman C. Draper, in his search for source material for his book, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes*, published in 1881, contacted one William McCall, a resident of the North Cove region of the Catawba River, near Marion, North Carolina. McCall had obtained his data from a maternal grandfather, David Gillespie, son of Henry Gillespie, who had emigrated from Ireland in 1769 and settled in the Turkey Cove section of Burke (now McDowell) County, North Carolina. David was a lad about fourteen years old at the time of the Battle of King's Mountain. At the time of Draper's visit, there was in the possession of the Gillespie family, but not shown to Draper, a small, brown, calf-skin book, four inches by six inches in size, said to have been found on the battle field after King's Mountain and to have been given to Henry Gillespie. In this manuscript arithmetic book near the middle of page 47 is recorded a diary, dated "September ye 24th, 1780" and continuing until October 7, 1780. Several verses of old war-time ballads, and some local family names are also inscribed on scattered pages. The entries in the diary were probably made by a member of some detachment of the British army, and give a fleeting glimpse of the events prior to that decisive battle of King's Mountain. The diary is now in the possession of Miss Edna Brinkley of Marion, North Carolina, a descendant of Henry Gillespie through the younger of his two sons, William, who remained on the family tract in Turkey Cove. Photostatic copies are in the McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville, and in the possession of the editor.

Had the interesting diary been discovered by Draper, it is almost certain that he would have published it in the appendix to his *King's Mountain and Its Heroes* along with the lengthy and informative record kept by Lieutenant Anthony Allaire. The unwillingness of the descendants of Henry Gillespie to reveal to Draper the existence of the diary may have been due to the fact that there is to be found pasted on page 53 of the same book a slip of paper—a pass to Henry Gillespie, signed by the commander of the British forces at the Battle of King's Mountain:

Henry Gillespie having engaged to be faithfull to the King and his
Govert. is not to be injured in person or Property
Sept 18th—1780—

Pat Ferguson
Major 71 Reg.

Denied the opportunity of seeing this pass, Draper wrote of Henry Gillespie (*King's Mountain and Its Heroes*, page 181) that he was acting a neutral part in the war—probably, from his exposed situation, as his only recourse to save himself and family from destruction by the Indians, instigated as they were, by British emissaries stationed among them. Gillespie was kept at camp during the night [of September 29, by Col. William Campbell's party of Overmountain men, seeking intelligence of Ferguson's whereabouts]; but he really had no secrets to reveal and was set at liberty the following morning.

The existence of the pass, however, does not necessarily prove that Henry Gillespie was a Tory, and it is unfortunate that the fears engendered by it postponed the publication of the diary for so many years.

September ye 24th 1780

Lower Creek Camp¹—A small party of his Majesties Subjects Being Assembled Together² Received Account of five hundred Rebels A Coming, on us³ We Retreated over to Silver Creek Camp⁴—

Tuesday ye 26th—

We Retreated up to the head of Muddy Creek⁵ and Camped—

Wednesday ye 27th—

We Received an Express [illegible] that very many of the Rebels Being on the Lower Creek⁶ and [illegible] We sent an Express on down to head quarters at Gilberttown⁷—

¹The exact location of this "Lower Creek Camp" is not known, but it was obviously in Burke County, North Carolina, near the boundary between the present day counties of Rutherford and McDowell. The next entry shows it was not more than two days march from the Silver Creek British camp.

²This "small party of His Majesties Subjects" was probably some detachment of the British army, which at this time was scattered throughout this vicinity.

³Lieutenant Anthony Allaire's Diary, published by Draper, reports that on Sunday, September 24, 1780, news was received at Gilbert Town (Ferguson's headquarters) of the advance northward of 600 rebels, who, led by Colonel Elijah Clarke, had laid siege to Augusta, Georgia. Upon the arrival of Colonel Cruger with aid for Colonel Browne, the commander at Augusta, Clarke's men had moved north. Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and its Heroes* (Cincinnati, 1881), 508.

⁴Silver Creek has its headwaters in the Silver Creek knob, about three miles south of the present village of Brindletown. Draining the southwest portion of Burke County, it flows northeast and empties into the Catawba River just west of Morganton. After the skirmish on September 12, when Ferguson and his Tory followers had routed and driven back McDowell's men near the head of Cane Creek, the British had moved to the north of Cane Creek, and established a camp site near the White Oak Spring, near Brindletown. This is on the direct road between Morganton and Gilbert Town, and was probably the Silver Creek camp site here mentioned. *Ibid.*, 148, 149.

⁵Muddy Creek, another tributary of the Catawba River, drains that part of Burke County (now McDowell) and has its mouth at Bridgewater, flowing into the recently formed Lake James of the Catawba.

⁶Either the troops from South Carolina under Colonels Lacey, Hill and Williams or those from Wilkes and Surry counties led by Colonels Cleveland and Winston.

⁷Located three miles north of the present Rutherfordton, and named for William Gilbert, of Rutherford County, who was a loyal friend of King George. Allaire said, "This town contains one dwelling house, one barn, a blacksmith shop and some out houses." *Ibid.*, 508.

Wednesday ye 27th At Night—

We Retreated Back and Camped on Cain Creek⁸—

Sept 28th

from Cain Creek we Retreated to Gilberttown⁹—

28th at night

we Retreated to head Quarters about three miles¹⁰ from Gilberttown

Sept ye 29th—

we Continued at Camp; at night we had an alarm¹¹ Which kept us In Confusion great part of the Night

Sept ye 30th—

We marched of [f] Very Early in the Morning and Continued Our March Till of the middle of the Afternoon And Camped on the South Side of Broad River¹²—

October ye 1st—

We continued at Camp: About noon Col Ferguson¹³ Marched In to Camp—

Oct ye 2nd—

About half an hour By Sun in the after Noon we marched Across Broad River¹⁴—And marched in the night Eastward to Barnakings [?] ¹⁵ And Camped—

⁸The retreat was southward. Cane Creek flows south, emptying into the Second Broad River several miles east of Gilbert Town. The headwaters of Cane and Silver creeks interlock, and it was in this same vicinity that the Overmountain men made their camp on October 1, just four nights later. *Ibid.*, 186.

⁹The march continued southward.

¹⁰This was the main headquarters of Ferguson's army.

¹¹On September 27, during the march of the Overmountain men, James Crawford and Samuel Chambers deserted and went to Ferguson's headquarters to warn him of the approach of the American troops. This news most likely reached Gilbert Town about this time, causing the alarm mentioned. *Ibid.*, 177.

¹²The retreat turned eastward, the route lying between the Second Broad and the main Broad rivers. This latter river has its source in the foothills of the mountains of western North Carolina and flows east, draining the southern border. At its confluence with the Second Broad near the South Carolina state line, it turns southward and joins the Saluda River near Columbia, South Carolina to form the Congaree. The course of the Broad River is so indented with curves and bends that the writer correctly states the camp to be on the "south side of Broad river," although they had not yet crossed it.

¹³Ferguson had hoped to intercept Colonel Clarke's army; so on September 27, he left Gilbert Town and moved west into the Green River region in search of Clarke. Three days later, on September 30, he got news of the coming of the Overmountain men, and he promptly sent a dispatch to Lord Cornwallis, at Tryon Courthouse (Charlotte) asking for help. This dispatch was delayed and did not reach Cornwallis until the morning of October 7, the very day of Ferguson's defeat and death. A second dispatch was sent to Colonel Cruger, at Ninety-Six, seeking aid. Ferguson tarried in this region, still hoping to intercept Clarke's men, and on October 1, he marched to Denard's Ford of the Broad River, where he camped for the night. This was eight miles south of Gilbert Town. *Ibid.*, 201-03. Allaire said, "Sunday, October 1, Ferguson's troops got in motion at 5 o'clock in the morning and marched 12 miles to Denard's Ford of Broad River and took up our old ground where we lay on September 8, and camped for the night." *Ibid.*, 509.

¹⁴Ferguson's troops crossed Broad River at Denard's Ford at 4 p.m. on Monday, October 2. *Ibid.*, 509.

¹⁵Impossible to decipher this line.

from Gilberttown

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p.m. on Monday,

Octbr ye 3rd—

We marched of[f] Very Early in the morning¹⁶ and Crossed Second Broad at the high Shoals¹⁷ And Camped on the West of first Broad River¹⁸

Octo the 4th—

We Continued our march toward the southeast and Incamped on the East side of Buffelloe¹⁹—

October ye 5th—

We Continued at Camp²⁰—

October ye 6th—

We marched of[f] Towards tryon old Courthouse²¹ And Camped near kings mountain;²² From thence we Marched to the high Pinnacle²³ of —K— [illegible] where we thought we would Camp But Adverse fortune Confused our Imaginations, for the 7th²⁴ of Octor. the cursed rebels Came upon us Killed and Took us every Soul and So

My Dear friends I bid you farewell for I am Started to the warm Country²⁵—

¹⁶Allaire states that Ferguson's troops got in motion about 4 o'clock in the morning, October 3, marched six miles to Camp's Ford of the Second Broad River; forded it and marched six miles to Sandy Run, forded it, and then seven miles to Buffalo Creek, which they forded and took camp at Tate's, one mile to the east. *Ibid.*, 509. This account does not mention crossing the First Broad River, which lies between Sandy Run and Buffalo Creek.

¹⁷It is not known whether this is the Camp's Ford mentioned by Allaire as the place where Ferguson crossed.

¹⁸The retreat continued eastward. First Broad River is another tributary of the main Broad River. It rises near Flint Hill and flows south, emptying into the main Broad below the mouth of Second Broad and above the mouth of Buffalo Creek.

¹⁹Buffalo Creek is another tributary of main Broad River. This "unknown party" had traveled more slowly than Ferguson, who had crossed Buffalo on October 3. It was from this camp at Tate's that Ferguson sent his last desperate appeal for help to Cornwallis.

²⁰Ferguson's troops also remained in camp on October 5.

²¹Charlotte, the headquarters of Cornwallis.

²²Allaire states, "Friday, October 6. Got in motion at 4 o'clock in morning and marched 16 miles to Little King's Mountain, where we took up our ground." *Ibid.*, 510.

²³The King's Mountain range is sixteen miles in length, extending northeast and southwest, lying in both North and South Carolina. The Pinnacle, or highest part of the range, is a sort of a lofty tower, lying in North Carolina and about six miles northeast of the oblong stony hill, on which the battle proper was fought, this latter being in South Carolina. The summit of the battle ground is only about sixty feet above the level of the surrounding country. It is about 600 yards long and varies in width from 250 yards at the base to about sixty yards at the top. This territory is now a national military park.

²⁴The Americans had continued the chase after Ferguson's men all the morning of October 7, in a pouring rain, which ceased only at noon. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon they arrived near King's Mountain where they knew the British were encamped. After a brief halt, they advanced into battle.

²⁵The victors encamped on the battle ground with the dead and wounded on the night of October 7, and took up the march on the morning of the 8th, eager to hasten away from the vicinity before the approach of Tarleton, whom Cornwallis had sent to aid Ferguson.