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Memory, Manhood, and Military Service:

Gentlemen and Common Planters in the Battle of King's Mountain

By Meghan Essington*



In early November 1822, Thomas Jefferson reflected on the significance of patriot victory over Patrick Ferguson's army of British and Tories at the Battle of King's Mountain on October 7, 1780. Jefferson explained, that the "turn of the tide success" at King's Mountain "terminated the revolutionary war, with the seal of our independence."¹ It is impossible to study this battle without considering Jefferson's analysis of the victory.

What caused President Jefferson to speak of King's Mountain forty-two years after the action? Jefferson wrote these immortal words in a letter to John Campbell, a descendent of the battle's commander-in-chief, Colonel William Campbell. On November 4, 1822, John Campbell wrote to Jefferson requesting documents related to the character of Colonel Campbell. John Campbell explained, "It is particularly the duty of the relatives [which] Genl. Campbell has left behind him to defend his memory from unfounded and unmerited assumptions."² The same obligation which motivated untrained backcountry men to meet Ferguson at King's Mountain incited John Campbell's protection of his deceased relative.

In fall 1780, frontiersmen from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and present-day Tennessee assembled at Sycamore Shoals along

* The author received her master's degree in history from Western Carolina University in May 2014.

¹ Thomas Jefferson to John Campbell, November 10, 1822, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., available at, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mj.mtjbib024499>.

² John Campbell to Thomas Jefferson, November 4, 1822, with William Preston Letter Dated September 1 and Newspaper Article, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, available at, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mj.mtjbib024492>.

the Watauga River near
1,600 men marched
Mountain. These battalions
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they faced similar numbers
45 and 60 minutes.
losses. The official records
Mountain. The patriot
This patriot victory redefined
theater of the war.³

This watershed moment
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in 1881. Few scholars
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article reviews how
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⁴ Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain,
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the Watauga River near Elizabethton. On October 7, this gathering of about 1,600 men marched to meet Colonel Patrick Ferguson's army at King's Mountain. These backwater soldiers, later dubbed the Overmountain Men, were outmatched by the well-trained and well-equipped British forces, but they faced similar numbers of approximately 1,200. The battle lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The patriots suffered less than the British in total losses. The official report claims a total British loss of 1,105 men at King's Mountain. The patriots' loss consisted of only 28 killed, and 62 wounded. This patriot victory represented an important turning point in the southern theater of the war.³

This watershed moment in the Revolutionary War occurred just a few weeks before the surrender of General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, which overshadowed the significance of the battle. In fact, the first history of the Battle of King's Mountain appeared over one-hundred years later, in 1881. Few scholars have fully explored the importance of this battle, especially the role of perceptions of manhood in frontier communities. This article reviews how British threats to frontier manhood contributed to the events of the Battle of King's Mountain and how later generations chose to remember the heroes and leaders of the battle.⁴

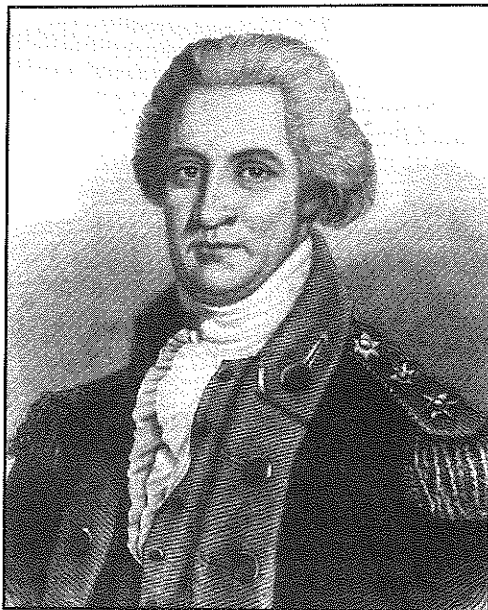
Conceptions of manhood in the Appalachian South differed from those in New England from the eve of the Revolution to early nationhood. An accurate portrait of frontier manhood must be constructed differently, because it is unique from other scholarly interpretations of manhood during this period. The white men living in frontier communities on the eve of the Revolution consisted of two classes: gentlemen and commoners. According to historian Gordon Wood, colonial society was "vertically organized." Wood argued that "most people could locate themselves only in superiority or in subordination to someone else," and a single, "great horizontal division," cut through the vertical organization between, "gentlemen and commoners."⁵

Men of commoner status on the frontier breached this division by gaining honor. A sense of equality between classes of men did not exist on the frontier. Historian Rhys Isaac argued that southern colonies, especially Virginia, expressed class divisions between the common planters and gentry through architecture, dress, and decorum. The same held true in the Appalachian South, specifically the settlements located on the Holston, Watauga, and Nolichucky rivers, in present-day East Tennessee. Men of

³ "Extract of another letter, dated Portsmouth, November 16, 1780," *The Virginia Gazette*, November 18, 1780; Douglas S. Freeman, *George Washington, A Biography*, (New York, 1981), 5:227; William Davidson to Brig. Gen. Jethro Sumner, October 10, 1780, in *State Records of North Carolina* (New York, 1968), 14:685; Cora Bales Sevier and Nancy S. Madden, *Sevier Family History* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 38, 39.

⁴ Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain, October 7th, 1780, and the Events Which Led to It* (Cincinnati, 1881); Oliver P. Temple, *John Sevier: Citizen, Soldier, Legislator, Governor, Statesman, 1744-1815* (Knoxville, 1910), 11.

⁵ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 24.



John Sevier, a statesman, soldier, and pioneer of Tennessee, achieved social status as a gentleman because of his participation in Battle of King's Mountain. Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes* (New York, 1929), 174.

genteel status dressed and acted in ways which distinguished them from the rest of society. This does not mean, however, that common planters could not obtain genteel status. The easiest way to achieve this heightened recognition was through participation in successful military action. John Sevier provided such an example. Although his family traced a direct line to the French Huguenot family Xavier, in England and the British colonies, this name held no prestige until Sevier's participation in the Battle of King's Mountain. As a direct result of this battle, Sevier attained genteel status.⁶

Traditional aspects of the gentleman class included: kinship, wealth and costume, liberal arts education, and liberality. Kinship

was the "most important measure" of a gentleman.⁷ What family a man was born into dictated his initial access to genteel society. Another important measure of a gentleman was his wealth—money, land, and slaves owned.⁸ Owning land in the Appalachian South was not uncommon; however, the majority of settlers did not own a single slave. In these frontier communities wealthy men owned the majority of slaves and land. Moreover, being a descendant of a prominent genteel family and possessing abundant wealth did not guarantee a man's acceptance into the class of gentlemen.

A frontier gentleman had to act and dress like his counterparts in England. The periwig, or powdered hair, and "lace-ruffled cuffs proclaimed freedom from manual work in field or workshop."⁹ This was especially difficult in the secluded regions of the frontier, where the settlers had limited access to Atlantic markets, and men of every status wore clothing purchased

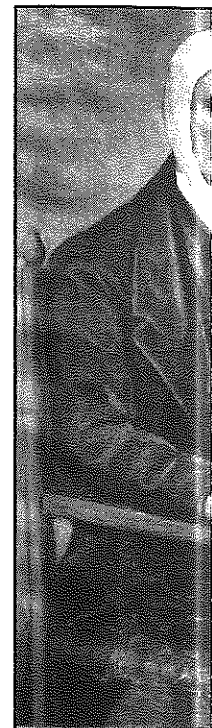
⁶ For the development of frontier society in Tennessee see, Wilma A. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (New York, 1978); John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington, 2001).

⁷ Wood, *Radicalism of the Revolution*, 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

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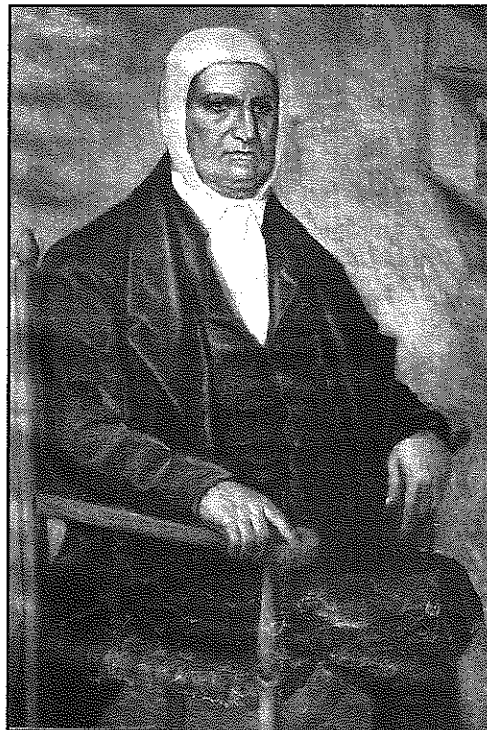
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⁶ Dunaway, *The First* 0-1860 (Chapel *People, Societies, and* *Frontiers: Three Regions in*

from Native Americans. Rhys Isaac stated that, "conscious adaptation to climate was opening a cultural rift between the colony and [British] society."¹⁰ The same can be said for the relationship between the frontier gentlemen and their parent colonies. Frontier conditions required men to alter British hierarchical norms.

Frontier gentlemen were generally less educated than their counterparts in Charles Town, for example, but they possessed more education than most men in their community. What differentiated the gentlemen of southwestern Appalachia from their comrades in the New England and Upper South colonies was the absence of a formal liberal arts education as a requirement for status. Schools on the frontier were few and formal educational programs were just as slim. The St. Martin's Academy was the first school in the far western mountains of North Carolina. In 1783, Reverend Samuel Doak chartered the school in present-day Washington County, Tennessee. This school, which became



Washington College, served the educational needs of the Watauga, Nolichucky, and Holston settlements.¹¹ Sevier enrolled his children in Doak's school in 1796, noting in his diary that he paid a six dollar monthly tuition for his sons, George Washington and Samuel, to attend.¹² It was important for Sevier's sons to receive an education so that they could obtain full genteel status.

The Reverend Samuel Witherspoon Doak was a pioneer preacher and teacher on the Tennessee frontier. His school in Washington County provided formal education to the children of frontiersmen in the gentlemen class. Doak House Museum, Tusculum College, Greeneville.

¹⁰ Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 44.

¹¹ Robbie D. Jones, "Samuel Doak," in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville, 1998), 252.

¹² John Sevier Diary, May 26, 1796, February 24, 1796, Transcript of Diary of Governor John Sevier 1790-1815, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville. The original journal was deposited in the State Department of Archives and History in Jackson, Mississippi.

Gentlemen received more formal education than common men, but it was not necessarily a prerequisite for genteel status on the frontier. Generally, gentlemen possessed a well-rounded education as well as be able to fence, box, dance, and defend themselves both in their community and on the battlefield. Gentlemen needed these lessons in order to converse with other men of genteel society. With knowledge of popular dances, gentlemen participated in the social trappings of their class and court women of equal or elevated stature. Gentlemen obtained a formal liberal arts education from a college or academy. However, for frontier gentlemen of the eighteenth century, the rugged terrain limited access to education. Rough and rocky topography combined with the absence of wagon-suitable roadways made the transportation of books, maps, and other educational materials over the Appalachian Mountains both costly and time consuming. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, Native American hostilities, made travel to and settlement in the frontier communities unattractive.¹³

Gentlemen modified all of the traditional tenets on the frontier, except kinship and liberality. According to Rhys Isaac, liberality "epitomized what was needed to make a gentleman."¹⁴ Liberality indicated freedom. Gentlemen of all locales enjoyed freedom from poverty, from material want, from selfish interests, from manual labor, and from ignorance.¹⁵ According to Wood: "The gentry's distinctiveness came from being independent in a world of dependencies, learned in a world only partially literate, and leisured in a world of laborers."¹⁶ Gentlemen of the frontier participated in formal balls, dinners, and ceremonies, while commoners held less formal celebrations and gatherings.

Regardless of the limited access to formal education, frontier gentlemen were the most learned individuals in their communities. Indeed, liberality was a universal genteel quality; freedom was an attitude—an internal mind-set that projected itself upon the daily actions of gentlemen—supported by the benefits of extraordinary kinship. In all of the colonies, wealth equaled social status. A gentleman's wealth in eighteenth century Euro-American society originated from birth. Through the practice of primogeniture, the eldest son inherited the wealth of his family. In wealthy families, the eldest son and possibly younger brothers would become gentlemen and boast liberality.

Common men with little wealth or family stature accessed genteel status through military service. In the colonies of Virginia and South Carolina, where the British aristocracy retained immense power and influence over society, men from the common class were less likely to cross the "horizontal

¹³ See, David C. Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington, KY, 1997).

¹⁴ Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 131.

¹⁵ Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 131; Wood, *Radicalism of the Revolution*, 33.

¹⁶ Wood, *Radicalism of the Revolution*, 33.



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¹⁷ Bertram Wyatt
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²² *Ibid.*, 141.

divide" and join the genteel class. The conditions of the frontier, on the other hand, allowed men to make this conversion.

Men of common and genteel status possessed honor. According to Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "honor is not confined to any rank of society."¹⁷ For common planters, any person could question one's honor, demanding its defense. On the contrary, a gentleman's honor could only be challenged by men of equal stature. Wood explained that gentlemen "could only be insulted by other gentlemen. A superior could ignore the affront of an inferior."¹⁸ A common man's actions defined his honor; who a gentleman was defined his honor. When a person from outside the community challenged the honor of that community's men, the offended acted in defense of their manhood. Eighteenth century colonists believed society to be an extension of the household, and therefore it was every white man's duty to provide discipline and protection for its members.¹⁹

In September 1780, Ferguson hoped to secure the southern theater and terminate the war. That month, Ferguson sent a message to Colonel Isaac Shelby by way of Samuel Phillips, warning that if the settlers along the Watauga, Nolichucky, and Holston rivers did not discontinue sheltering war refugees, he would "march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword."²⁰ Ferguson's warning and method of delivery sparked the flame that led to the Battle of King's Mountain. It is not a coincidence that Ferguson sent Samuel Phillips to deliver the written threat to Shelby. In August, British troops captured Phillips at the Battle of Musgrove's Mill. Ferguson chose Phillips because he knew the area well and where to find Shelby and also because he was "a distant kinsman and near neighbor of [Shelby]."²¹

What Ferguson probably believed to be a tactful move, backfired in two important ways. First, Phillips revealed what he knew about, "the locality and strength" of patriot forces.²² Second, the content of Ferguson's warning and method in which he had it delivered threatened the manhood of every white male in the backwater communities. He threatened to hang their leaders and burn their communities.

¹⁷ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982), xv.

¹⁸ Wood, *Radicalism of the Revolution*, 41.

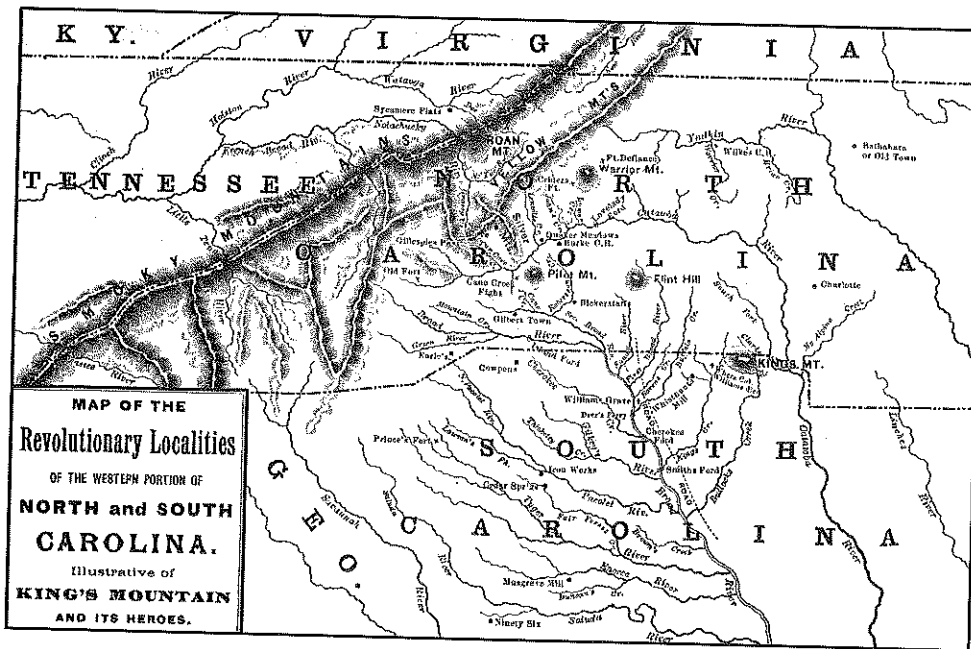
¹⁹ Wood, *Radicalism of the Revolution*, 36-37, 44; Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, 2001), xv, xx, 170.

²⁰ Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes*, 169.

²¹ Samuel C. Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War* (Nashville, 1944), 141.

²² *Ibid.*, 141.

The part of Ferguson's warning, which ultimately united frontier gentlemen and common planters in battle, was the threat of fire. The communities on the Nolichucky, Holston, and Watauga rivers were tightly knit and represented a network of families. An attack on their property translated to an attack on their manhood. According to Wyatt-Brown, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "loyalty to family was transformed into duty to country."²³ By threatening their communities under the heat of fire and blade of his sword, Ferguson challenged the manhood of the frontiersmen. Burning their land and homes prevented them from providing food and protection for their families, and stripped them of what made them men. The threat alone would have been enough to raise an army, but by sending a kinsman and neighbor to Shelby as a British prisoner of war, Ferguson challenged the honor of a gentlemen. This was an unspoken threat; it implied that Ferguson could and would take his family and friends prisoner. It also insulted the honor of Shelby and his fellow gentlemen for their inability to protect their fellow men from becoming property of the enemy.



Map of the Tennessee frontier with settlements and the location of the Battle of King's Mountain to the middle right. Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes* (New York, 1929), 16.

²³ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 59.

Upon receiving word of the attack on Ferguson's camp throughout the region, Colonel William Campbell, a prominent Virginia planter in the army of the British, that his men were needed for forces. Campbell, of his own accord, immediately went to the aid of the Cherokee and the Cherokee agreed to join the British.

Having no other choice, battle, Shelby responded to the purpose. Until then, Campbell showed that he had travelled to the largest region of the Carolina Land. Colonel Charles Campbell of criticism of the British for securing \$12,700 for the Carolina Land.

After hearing the news, he responded. One of the general proclamations of North Carolina was that men still loyal to the British.

Gentlemen of the barbarian age, the aged, the shocking, and wretched murdered the dregs of the name.

²⁴ Helen D. Chandler, "The Revolution," *October*, 1911; Shelby-Campbell, *The Filson Club Historical Papers* (1981): 22-26.

²⁵ Williams, *Tennessee Mountain*, 22; E. C. Kirkham, *1885*: 70; Sevier

*The Back Water men have crossed the mountains; McDowell, Hampton, Shelby and Cleveland are at their head, so that you know what you have to depend upon. If you choose to be p_d upon by a set of mongrels so say so at once, and let your women turn their backs upon you and look out for real men to protect them.*²⁶

The purpose of Ferguson's letter was clear: to gather more troops. In order to appeal to men not already bearing arms, he called their manhood into question.

The proclamation identified how distinct the frontier common and genteel men were from their British counterparts in the late eighteenth century. It is significant that Ferguson addressed his call to arms with "Gentlemen." He used this title because gentlemen possessed liberality. They could afford to leave their homes at a moment's notice, and because most eighteenth century genteel families were loyal to the crown through kinship. Patriarchy existed as a process of ordering society and their allegiance. Englishmen on both sides of the Atlantic in the eighteenth century used, "the language of paternalism and filial obligation . . . to describe their hierarchical experiences."²⁷ Colonists in defending separation from the crown called the king of England a "tyrannical father" and "bad father."

Similarly, the language of patriarchy was used in Ferguson's proclamation to describe the frontiersmen. The proclamation opened with a description of these backwater men as barbarians who killed an "unarmed son" in front of his "aged father." The unarmed son represented Tories and Loyalists (British subjects living in the colonies) and the "aged father" refers to an alleged atrocity by backwater residents. The "irregular" barbarian falls outside the language of patriarchy; the backwater men are not viewed by Ferguson as Englishmen. The text also suggested that the backwater men removed the hands of justice ("lopped of his arm") and, like dependents, needed discipline. Ferguson concluded the first portion of the proclamation by suggesting that if these gentlemen do not wish to be robbed of their manhood by the "dregs of mankind" then they should meet at British camp within four days to fight.

The second half of Ferguson's proclamation abandoned the language of patriarchy and adopted the language of manhood. The text concluded with intelligence about the patriot forces, including its leaders. Ferguson listed four colonels who he believed were at the head of the party and suggested that they were incapable commanders. These accusations were not unfounded, at least in the case of McDowell who, after an earlier campaign in South Carolina, received criticism for sending his men to fight in the front lines while he stayed behind.²⁸

²⁶ Major Pat Ferguson to the Inhabitants of North Carolina, October 1, 1780, in Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War*, 151.

²⁷ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 43.

²⁸ Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War*, 148.



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The final line of Ferguson's decree exploited the language of manhood. It gave the gentlemen of North Carolina two choices: eternal disgrace and the loss of their manhood; or the defense of their honor from a group of lawless barbarians.²⁹ The censored word p_d is most likely "pissed." In eighteenth century English society, being urinated on, or having urine thrown on you, was considered one of the greatest insults. It demonstrated that the public did not recognize a man's honor and therefore could insult his reputation without the threat of retaliation. In *Southern Honor* (1982), Bertram Wyatt-Brown tells a story of women of this time period emptying their urine bowls on the heads of defeated men returning home from battle.³⁰ Returning home defeated was almost as dishonorable as avoiding battle. A presentation of Ferguson's letter appeared during the 150th anniversary of the Battle of King's Mountain. The explicative "pissed" was replaced with "degraded forever and ever." This supports the idea that being urinated upon was one of the most degrading forms of public expression in the late eighteenth century. Ferguson continued by suggesting that these gentlemen's wives will leave them for "real men" if they do not fight. This is significant, because wives were considered a man's property and thus a prerequisite for full manhood—if they leave him, he is no longer capable of manhood.

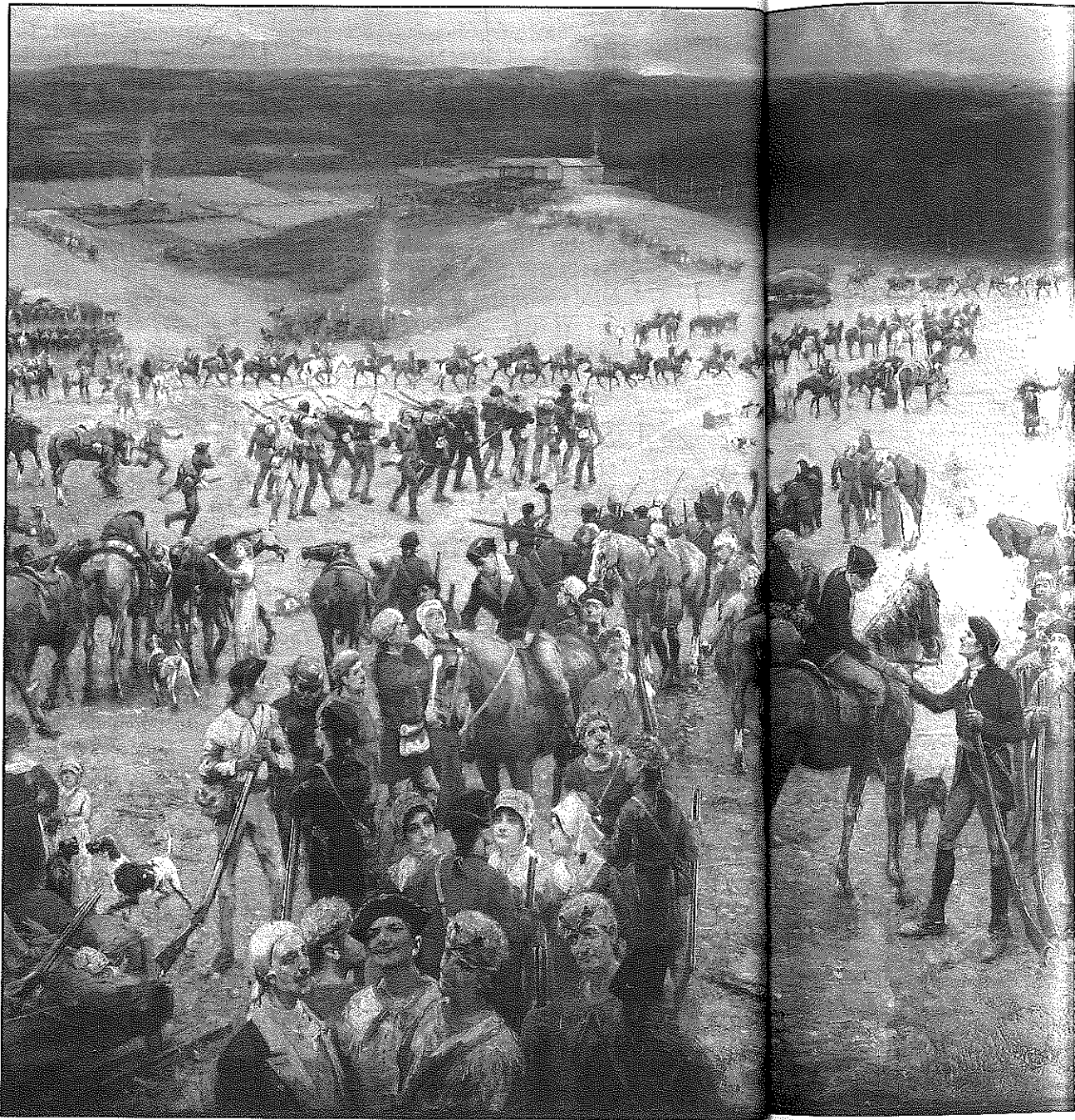
Written or published responses to Ferguson's proclamation do not exist, but within the next week patriot forces assembled at Sycamore Shoals and marched to King's Mountain to engage the British. After about an hour of fighting, the backwater patriots overwhelmed the opposing forces, killed Ferguson, and claimed an important victory against the British. For many backwater soldiers, both gentlemen and commoners, the battle successfully defended their manhood.

The location of British troops on King's Mountain contributed to victory by the patriot forces. Ferguson's greatest oversight was his choice to camp on top of King's Mountain. The terrain did not lend the British shelter from the elements or patriot forces. Rocks and boulders scattered the hillside provided the approaching patriot forces safety from British bullets. The hilltop, where Ferguson made his camp, was bald, while the hillside was thick with tall trees. These trees provided camouflage and allowed the frontiersmen to approach the enemy's camp undiscovered. Once engaged in battle, the untrained and unskilled frontier militia overpowered the British forces.

The backwater soldiers who fought against the British at King's Mountain risked their social status in colonial society. Gentlemen who did not ally with the British during the Revolutionary War, in terms of patriarchy, became orphans. Because they challenged the king of England by ignoring British

²⁹ For observations of backwater settlers see, Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill, 1953).

³⁰ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 40.



Painting by Lloyd Branson (1855-1926) depicting the muster of patriots from North Carolina, Virginia, and Kentucky at Sycamore Shoals prior to their march to King's Mountain. "Gathering of the Overmountain Men at Sycamore Shoals," by Lloyd Branson, Tennessee Historical Society Collection, Tennessee State Museum, Nashville.





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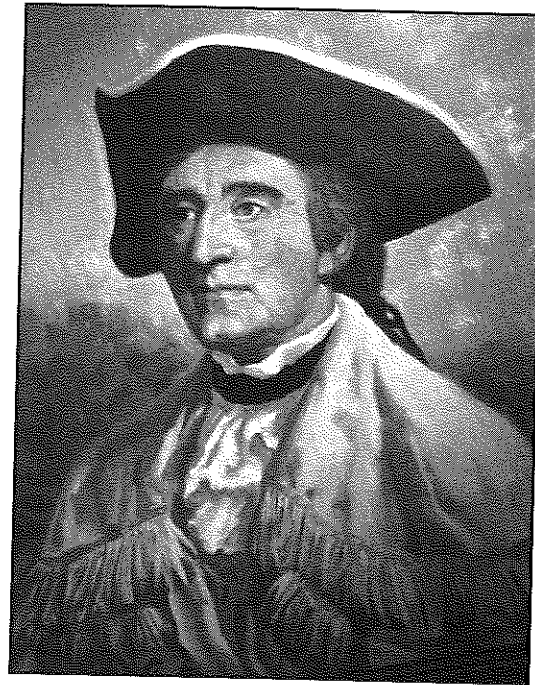
legislation throughout the late eighteenth century, those still loyal to the crown called these patriots rebels and barbarians. Loyalists most often prefaced these terms with "lawless." Ferguson's proclamation to the gentlemen of North Carolina, for example, calls the backwater men "lawless barbarians."³¹ These metaphors were not unearned. For instance, frontier settlers continued to move across the Proclamation Line set in 1763 by the king of England. John Blair, the President of the Virginia House of Burgesses, responding to the continued encroachment of frontiersmen into Native American lands with a speech to the general assembly on March 31, 1768. In the talk he called these frontier settlers "banditti" and "abandoned Men."³² This terminology supports the idea that by the late eighteenth century, Englishmen believed these frontiersmen were separate from British society.

Ferguson's proclamation was intended to be a threat of

³¹ Major Pat Ferguson to the Inhabitants of North Carolina, October 1, 1780, in Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War*, 151.

³² John Blair, "Speech of President to Assembly About Encroachment on Indian Lands," *Journals of House of Burgesses, 1766-1769*, 141-142, quoted in *Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607-1789*, ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Frederick, MD, 1983), 5:325.

Decades after the Battle of King's Mountain, William Campbell's contributions to the battle were called into question by Isaac Shelby and John Sevier. "William Campbell," by Robert W. Wilson, 1975, National Park Service, King's Mountain Military Park, Blacksburg, South Carolina.



British invasion or further attacks of the backcountry settlements, and not a direct attack on the honor or manhood of the leaders of these communities. Because these men had separated themselves from the crown, they were not British subjects; therefore, in the eyes of Ferguson, these backwater men were capable of neither common nor genteel status. In Ferguson's opinion, they were human waste.³³ In contrast, Shelby and Sevier interpreted the declaration as a threat to their honor and manhood, because they saw themselves as members of genteel society.

Ironically, Sevier sent a similar warning to the Cherokees in 1793. Sevier addressed this letter to "the Cherokees and their warriors if they have Any." In Sevier's opinion, the Cherokee men were savage barbarians who he expected to "fight like men." He wrote that he pitied their women and children because "they must suffer and live like dogs" due to their men's cowardice.³⁴ Similar to Ferguson's judgment of the backwater men thirteen years earlier, Sevier did not believe that the Cherokee were men. Sevier's letter came long after the Battle of King's Mountain, but the text demonstrated the importance of the language of manhood during this period.

A direct challenge to manhood was a second reason for the success of unskilled backwater soldiers against the well-trained British army at King's Mountain. The frontiersmen's determination to win, or die trying, illustrated manhood's prevailing influence. Shelby expressed to his father that his countrymen, "being determined to conquer or die . . . finally got

³³ Ferguson to North Carolina, October 1, 1780, in Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War*, 151.

³⁴ John Sevier Diary, October 20, 1793, UT Special Collections.



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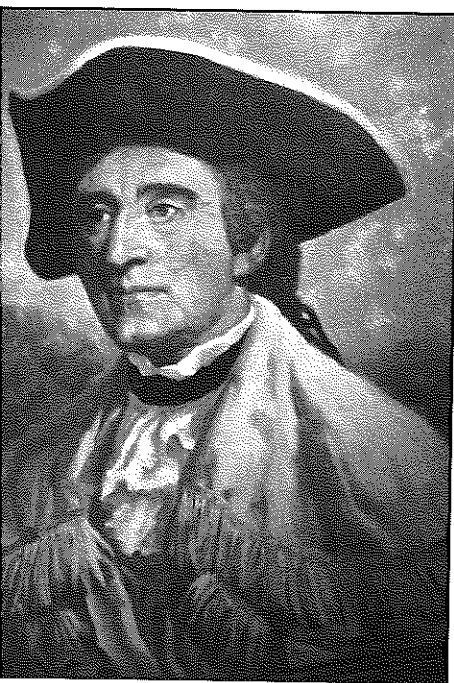
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possession," of the enemy camp.³⁵ As historian Anne Lombard explained, once challenged, "manhood had to be defended."³⁶ The same motivation accounts for John Campbell's determination to defend the name of his ancestor William Campbell in 1822.

John Campbell claimed that Shelby challenged the honorable memory of Colonel William Campbell in a letter to Thomas Jefferson on November 4, 1822, declaring it to be a "most extraordinary charge."³⁷ In response, Jefferson, cautioned Campbell, stating that the memory of old men sometimes fails them. Moreover, he stated that this was the first time he had ever heard of someone calling into question, "the laurels which Col. Campbell so honorably won in the battle of King's Mountain."³⁸ In fact, so ubiquitous was this sentiment among Virginians that on November 10, 1780, the House of Delegates in Senate decided "that a good horse . . . and sword be purchased at the publick expense, and presented to Col. Campbell, as a further testimony of the high sense the General Assembly entertain of his late important Service to his country."³⁹ The horse was presented to Colonel Campbell before his death, but for reasons unknown, the sword was not. Isaac Shelby's "extraordinary charge" against Colonel Campbell began twelve years earlier after Virginia's General Assembly voted to pay fifteen hundred crowns for "the most elegant sword that could be procured in France."⁴⁰ Outraged by this, Shelby wrote to John Sevier.

In his book on Sevier, Oliver P. Temple wrote that, "history [had] done this battle and its heroes, and especially Sevier and Shelby, tardy and niggardly justice."⁴¹ Correspondence between Sevier and Shelby in January 1810 shows they shared this attitude. Shelby asked Sevier, "What did Colonel Campbell merit more than you or [I] did?" Saying it to be a well known fact that Campbell was not present at the surrender, and although he did not want to "detract from the honor of the dead," Shelby believed that the legislature of North Carolina owed him and Sevier equal gifts of gratitude.⁴² Shelby's frustration was warranted. Ferguson sent Shelby the warning, and Shelby yielded the "command of enterprise which [he] had originated, and had the right to claim for [himself]."⁴³ Sevier agreed that there were other officers in that battle who "merited as much notice from their Country

³⁵ "Extract of a letter from Col. Isaac Shelby to his Father upon Holston, Dated October 12, 1780," *The Virginia Gazette*, November 4, 1780.

³⁶ Anne S. Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (London, 2003), 132.

³⁷ Campbell to Jefferson, November 4, 1822, with Preston Letter, Library of Congress.

³⁸ Jefferson to Campbell, November 10, 1822, Library of Congress.

³⁹ "In the Senate, November 15, 1780," *The Virginia Gazette*, November 18, 1789.

⁴⁰ Isaac Shelby to John Sevier, January 1, 1810, in Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 172.

⁴¹ Temple, *John Sevier*, 22.

⁴² Shelby to Sevier, January 1, 1810, in Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 172-73.

⁴³ Temple, *John Sevier*, 23.

as [Colonel Campbell]."⁴⁴ In this exchange of letters, the public's failure to observe the equal merits of Shelby and Sevier threatened their genteel status because "at the heart of honor . . . lies the evaluation of the public."⁴⁵ Without the public's recognition of their merits, Sevier's and Shelby's contributions were null and void.

In 1812, Shelby wrote Sevier asking for a statement placing him in the heat of the battle, saying he had been accused of not being, "in the action at King's Mountain," and that he was, "only a lieutenant or some inferior officer."⁴⁶ Sevier responded saying, "it is very well known that your [were] in the heat of that action."⁴⁷ The defense of a gentleman's honor, like the questioning of it, can only come from another gentleman. In the same year, *The Reporter*, a Lexington, Kentucky newspaper, published an article downplaying the contributions of both Sevier and Shelby at the Battle of King's Mountain. This led Shelby to believe that there was a conspiracy against his and Sevier's manhood. The question of Shelby's honor coincided with his campaign for a second term as governor of Kentucky in 1812. If his adversaries could prove to, or at least convince, the public that Shelby did not earn honor in battle, like Campbell, then they could make him an illegitimate leader.⁴⁸

In the 1820s, debates about Campbell's legacy at the Battle of King's Mountain resumed. In July 1822, George Washington Sevier, the son of John Sevier, published the correspondence between Shelby and his father regarding William Campbell's contributions at King's Mountain. In November, descendants of William Campbell published articles in several newspapers defending their ancestor and their family's name. At the same time John Campbell wrote to Thomas Jefferson for his opinion. The debates about what Campbell did or did not do at the Battle of King's Mountain largely ended the next year when Shelby published a small pamphlet on the matter.⁴⁹

The fact that this debate over honor continued for many decades after the actual events, showed the importance of manhood and honor during the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, it demonstrates how imperative it was for descendants to defend the honor of their relatives. In the case

⁴⁴ John Sevier to Isaac Shelby, January 17, 1810, in Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 173-74.

⁴⁵ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 14.

⁴⁶ Isaac Shelby to John Sevier, August 12, 1812, in Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 191.

⁴⁷ John Sevier to Isaac Shelby, August 27, 1812, in Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 191.

⁴⁸ Isaac Shelby to John Sevier, February 20, 1814, in Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 201-202; Riley, "King's Mountain Controversy," 220, 223; "Col. Isaac Shelby," *The Reporter* [Lexington, KY], July 25, 1812.

⁴⁹ Riley, "King's Mountain Controversy," 222-28; Isaac Shelby, "Battle of King's Mountain," April 1823, in Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes*, 560-73.



of John Campbell's attack on the reputation of Campbell was the entire Campbell family have suffered. They not have lost their names but their names were tarnished.

The definition of honor necessitated by the backwater status of the 1780s, and it affected the descendants of the war. When some of the war's a gentleman's honor was offended for the first time, defend themselves to their status, and then to their family. Because the public questioned their manhood, they elevated their status. It was necessary to defend their publically conducted actions. Eighteenth-century genteel manhood could be confused with the definition of genteel manhood in England. Reputation components were essential.

In the American definition of honor, this different definition of gentlemen and their enforced reputation. American Revolutionaries defend their reputation in military service. The battle united the definition of manhood and its part in the King's Mountain controversy. King's Mountain was agreed with the favorable turn of events.

⁵⁰ Shelby to Sevier

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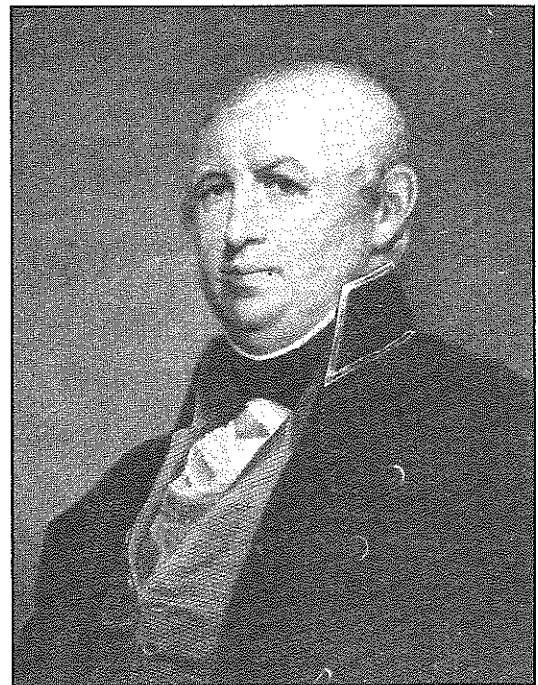
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Battle of King's Mountain,"

of John Campbell, if Shelby's
attack on the memory of William
Campbell was successful, the
entire Campbell family would
have suffered. The family might
not have lost their genteel status,
but their name would have been
tarnished.

The defense of manhood
necessitated the actions of the
backwater frontiersman in
1780, and it also motivated their
descendants in the early 1800s.
When someone questioned
a gentleman's honor, the
offended fought valiantly to
defend themselves, their social
status, and their family's name.
Because the public assigned men
their manhood and gentleman
their elevated status, it became
necessary when challenged to
publically confront their accusers.
Eighteenth century frontier
genteel manhood should not
be confused with constructions
of genteel manhood in New
England. Religion and a formal liberal arts education were important
components of New England genteel manhood in the eighteenth century.

In the Appalachian South, formal education was limited. As a result, the
definition of elite manhood was different than in New England. However,
this different definition of manhood did not mean greater equality among
gentlemen and common planters on the frontier. A system of hierarchy,
enforced through a language of patriarchy, existed on the frontier. The
American Revolution offered common frontier planters the opportunity to
defend their manhood, claim honor, and obtain elevated status through
military service. The Battle at King's Mountain is such an example. This
battle united gentlemen and commoners with a shared goal: the defense
of manhood as part of creating a new nation. The memory of that battle
and its participants changed over time, but the significance of victory at
King's Mountain to American independence remained clear to all. Shelby
agreed with Jefferson that, "it was the very first perceivable event that gave a
favorable turn to the American Revolution."⁵⁰



Isaac Shelby played a significant role in the Battle of King's Mountain. His legacy and the contributions of William Campbell, the commander of the patriot forces, came into question in the early 1800s. Lyman C. Draper, King's Mountain and Its Heroes (New York, 1929), 252.

⁵⁰ Shelby to Sevier, August 12, 1810, in Sevier and Madden, *Sevier Family History*, 175.