

Early Celebrations Led To Establishment Of Kings Mountain National Military Park

For the national attention focused on Kings Mountain, none of the celebrations of the Battle of Kings Mountain competed with the 1930 sesquicentennial celebration when President Herbert Hoover spoke.

But the early celebrations paved the way for making the 4,000-acre Kings Mountain National Military Park what it is today.

A celebration was not held for 35 years after the battle, probably because area citizens didn't want to celebrate a fight in which kin fought against kin. Except for Major Patrick Ferguson, all of the battle participants were Americans.

The first celebration was held in 1815, when a group from the South Fork of the Catawba River, led by Dr. William McLean of Lincoln, gathered, collected and buried the exposed and bleached bones scattered over the battleground. Handed-down accounts have it that when the battle was over, most bodies were left lying or placed in low places and covered with tree limbs.

Dr. McLean pronounced the first commemorative address, and at his own expense, erected on the spot where his friend, Major Chronicle had fallen, the first memorial stone on the field.

The names of Major Chronicle, Captain Mattocks, William Rabb and John Boyde, all South Fork boys, were perpetuated on the stone.

As the years wore on, the monument wore also as vandals defaced it. Eventually, the Daughters of the American Revolution insured its preservation by placing about it an iron fence and erecting beside it a replica in granite.

BIG CELEBRATIONS

Forty more years passed before the first big celebration took place. Citizens realized that 75 years had elapsed since the great victory and almost every man that took part in it had passed on.

Citizens of York took the initiative in planning the event and invited cooperation from other

By GARY STEWART
Co-Editor

Information for this story was supplied by Jim Anderson, Historian for the Kings Mountain National Military Park.

states. Five states played a role in the victory. John Sevier was the first governor of Tennessee and Isaac Shelby was the first governor of Kentucky. Descendants of many of the other heroes lived in the area.

York, 13 miles away, was the center point of mobilization for visitors, who arrived as early as Tues., Oct. 2, for the celebration which was scheduled for Thurs., Oct. 4.

Early Wednesday morning, people on horseback, buggies, carriages, wagons, and foot, left York for the battle site. The journey took four to six hours' Throngs of civilians and military companies camped at the site, cooked outside, danced, talked and sang by campfire, and honored the battle heroes.

By 9 a.m. Thursday, a crowd estimated at 15,000 assembled for the day's program. Members of Congress, the House of Representatives and descendants of KM heroes were in that number.

Fronde Kennedy, in reports on file at the Historian's Office at Kings Mountain National Military Park, said that "there were to be in later years programs more elaborate and more varied. For its fervor and its emotional tone this one was never to be surpassed."

I.D. Witherspoon of York acted as presiding officer in the absence of the Governor of South Carolina. Speeches were made, toasts offered, and a rifle and sword used in the battle were displayed. The sword belonged to Col. William Campbell, present on the platform.

The celebration came to an unexpected halt when, during



1930 SPEAKER - President Herbert Hoover, center, spoke to an estimated 80,000 people at the 150th anniversary celebration of the Battle of Kings Mountain October 7, 1930. This photo

is on a permanent marker at the spot where Hoover stood at Kings Mountain National Military Park.

the firing of a salute at the close of Mr. Preston's address, a gun went off prematurely and shattered the right arm of a soldier, and amputation was necessary. The afternoon part of the program was cancelled.

Friday, the camp broke up and by Saturday, visitors were returning to their homes.

CENTENNIAL

The centennial celebration in 1880 was initiated by the citizens of Kings Mountain under the leadership of W.I.R. Bell, principal of Kings Mountain High School. York was prompt to respond to an invitation for cooperation.

The Kings Mountain Centennial Association was organized and had a strong membership in

the two Carolinas, the two Virginias, Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Colonel Asbury Coward of York was chosen as chairman of the executive committee.

The group began to solicit funds for two goals. They purchased a track of ground in the very heart of the battlefield, where the heaviest fighting took place, and raised funds, partly by legislative appropriations from North and South Carolina, and partly by private subscriptions, for the erection of a monument.

A three-day celebration was planned. October 5, 1880, was designated as "reunion day." The flags of the 13 original colonies, Tennessee, Kentucky and the Stars and Stripes decorated the grandstand.

The crowd was estimated at 12,000. As was the case 25 years earlier, people came and camped on the grounds.

Fourteen companies participated in a military display, and Gov. Holliday of Virginia was the presiding officer. Music was sung by a 1,000 voice chorus, accompanied by military bands, and South Carolina poet Paul Hamilton Hayne wrote a "Kings Mountain Ode" which was read by Col. Charles F. Jones of Augusta, Ga.

The speaker of the day was Col. John W. Daniels of Lynchburg, Va.

Four states shared the honor of unveiling the monument, each state being represented by a young lady escorted by its governor. They were Miss Mary Belle Culp with Gov. Jeter of South Carolina; Miss Leila Young with Gov. Jarvis of North Carolina; Miss Nora Nixon with Gov. Campbell of Tennessee; and Miss Emily Blair with Gov. Holliday of Virginia. As the young ladies loosed the cords to unveil the monument, Col. Coward led the vast crowd in the singing of the long metre doxology.

The legislatures of North and South Carolina each appropriated \$1,000 toward the erection of the monument, and citizens of York gave almost \$800.

The DAR enlisted the active cooperation of Congressmen D.E. Finley of York and E.Y. Webb of Shelby, and they, with other enthusiastic colleagues, secured the passage of a bill appropriating \$30,000 for a national monument. The drive for a national monument began in 1903 and it was unveiled in 1909.

129th CELEBRATION

The DAR had charge of the 129th celebration which was set for Oct. 6-8, 1909. Members of the DAR of the two Carolinas, and the governors of the Carolinas, Virginia, Tennessee and Georgia were on the plat-

form. Col. Asbury Coward acted as chairman of the executive committee.

Guest speaker was Dr. Henry Nelson Snyder, president of Wofford College. Finley and Webb were scheduled for speeches. Finley spoke briefly but Webb was unable to attend because of illness. He sent greetings by Congressman D.N. Page of North Carolina.

The day included other speeches and a basket dinner spread by the DAR.

A sham enactment of the battle was presented on Fri., Oct. 8.

HOOVER SPEAKS

Twenty-one years later, the celebration received national attention when President Herbert Hoover accepted an invitation to be guest speaker.

The celebration also included the unveiling of a monument to the memory of Col. Patrick Ferguson, the only non-American and the only professional military man to participate in the battle.

The crowd was estimated at 80,000, and it included about 100 newsmen. On the speaker's platform were President and Mrs. Hoover, Ronald Campbell of the British Embassy, a huge number of governors, senators, and descendants of battle heroes.

A huge, military parade was viewed by the President, a historical pageant was presented and actual presentations of episodes of the battle were presented by a large cast under the direction of Miss Laura Plonk of Asheville.

The Oct. 7, 1930 celebration provided the final impetus to the movement for establishment of a military park for Kings Mountain. His presence gave the prestige of his office to the long-standing proposal that the area was deserving of greater national recognition.

Kings Mountain National Military Park was finally established 151 years after the battle, in 1931.

The park includes 4,012 acres, but the government did not at first own the land. In 1933, responsibility for the development of the site was transferred by Presidential executive order from the War Department to the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior.

On Sept. 24, 1935, the Kings Mountain Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, located in York, donated the 40 acres of the battleground to which the chapter held title. That was the original 40 acres purchased by the Centennial Association, which had been disbanded after the 1880 celebration. Additional lands were acquired between 1936 and 1940 to bring the total to 4,012.

LATER EVENTS

Celebrations since 1930 have been low-key compared to the Hoover appearance.

The only one to come anywhere close to 1930 as far as the national attention focused on Kings Mountain was the 195th in 1975.

Gerald Ford, President of the United States, agreed to be guest speaker for the climax at John Gamble Stadium on the campus of Kings Mountain High School. A few days before the event, Ford changed his mind and sent Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller.

Rockefeller was well-received. Over 10,000 people jammed into the football stadium, which seats 4,000, and thousands of others who could not make their way to the stadium viewed the huge parade, which included a number of VIPs.

Jim Holshouser, the first Republican Governor of North Carolina in almost a century, spoke at the VIP luncheon at noon at Kings Mountain Junior High. Congressman James T. Broyhill of Lenoir, who played a major role in luring the vice president here, and a number of other politicians were on the speaker's platform.

Rockefeller, guarded by a host of Secret Servicemen and accompanied by national newsmen, arrived in the Vice-Presidential helicopter. He viewed the large parade from the speaker's platform.

The 1976 celebration was dampened by rain. Kings Mountain National Military Park planned a big outdoor celebration at its new facilities, but the dedication ceremonies had to be moved indoors at B.N. Barnes Auditorium.

The Honorable Douglas P. Wheeler, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior, was the principal speaker, and other speakers included Gov. Holshouser of North Carolina and Gov. James Edwards of South Carolina.

The 199th anniversary a year ago was held at the park's amphitheatre and served as a kickoff for the bicentennial.

Dr. William Briggs, President of Limestone College in Gaffney, S.C., was the guest speaker.

A highlight of the event was the recognition of descendants of battle heroes. The two Carolinas, Georgia, Virginia and Tennessee were represented.

A special memorial award honoring Thomas M. Gray, a prime mover in the organization of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association, was presented by John H. Pitts.

Living history demonstrations were held, old friends reminisced and dreamed of the big 200th celebration, which is a reality today.



UNVEIL MONUMENT - Twins Miles and Ernest Mauney, holding flags on each end, Jim Herndon, second from left, and Virginia Hinnant, second from right, unveiled a monument to the memory of Col. Frederick Ham-

bright at the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain on October 7, 1930, at Kings Mountain National Military Park. President Herbert Hoover spoke at the celebration.