

Mattie Bell, Revolutionary

Not many wore uniforms. Fewer still were found on the battlefields. Yet countless women served valiantly during the Revolution.

One whose service was invaluable was Mattie Bell, nurse, midwife, lifesaver, spy. Born in 1735 in Orange County, now Alamance, she married Col. John McGee in 1766, a wealthy landowner and widower with two children. McGee died about the beginning of the Revolution, leaving Martha with five young children and the richest widow in Randolph County.

William Bell, widower, won over the other bachelors and widowers who eagerly sought Martha McFarlene Bell's hand, and they were wed May 6, 1779.

I don't know if Mattie Bell was one of our ancestors or not (my mother's maiden name is Bell) but was interested in this heroine of the Revolution and Grace J. Rohrer, Secretary to the Department of Cultural Resources, supplied me with her story.

From the earliest, Mattie supported the Patriot cause. Her heroism and acts of bravery were not merely brief incidents, but covered the entire Revolution "from the day of open hostilities until peace settled on the ramparts of Yorktown."

It was said that Mattie "feared her Maker and nothing on earth" so it was not unexpected that she took an active part throughout her life in attending to the needs of the sick and needy, going even great distances when called. When war came she did not flinch at the unsettled conditions of the area, the bad roads, or highwaymen and renegades from the various armies. She was well known among the Tories for her Patriot activities, and her death or capture would have removed a thorn from Tories' sides.

Often she was accosted by deserters. At one time, it is said that one of Fanning's men blocked her way on the narrow road, grabbed her bridle and ordered her to dismount. At that, Mattie pulled her pistol and threatened to shoot him dead if he advanced an inch. She took the man prisoner and drove him home at gunpoint, but he later escaped.

In 1781, following the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, Gen. Charles Cornwallis camped for two days at the Bell Plantation. He demanded the use of Martha's entire plantation for headquarters and planned to use her mill for grinding corn for his army. As he set forth his demands, Mattie asked if he intended to burn her house and mill after he no longer had use for them.

The Womans

LIB

By

Elizabeth Stewart



"Why do you ask?" the general questioned. "Just answer, and then I'll explain," the defiant Martha continued.

When Cornwallis assured her he did not intend to apply the torch to her property, she explained that she was fully prepared to burn it herself, then and there, to deny him the use of it.

During their stay the soldiers plundered the farm, seizing her grain, cattle and whatever else they chose. Later, as one particularly insulting fellow passed her door she wished "his horse would throw him and break his neck." A few minutes later her wish came true as the horse bolted, hurling the soldier down an embankment, where his head was crushed on the rocks.

When the army retreated to a neighboring farm, Martha found an excuse to follow them, asking questions of every household along the way. Riding boldly into their camp, wearing her husband's uniform, she complained bitterly of the depredations of the soldiers at her plantation, discovered, she said, "only after they'd left." The information on troop strength and position she'd gained on her ride was invaluable to Gen. Nathanael Greene.

Another time, she rode all night with a Whig to

determine Tories' movement, and the information led to Col. Light Horse Harry Lee's successful raid the following night.

Her husband feared to stay at his home at night and her own activities kept her in constant danger. Once, Tories burned her barn and its contents, wounded one son and threatened to shoot another because they complained.

Tories once threatened the life of Martha's aged father, then visiting. As they approached the elderly man with drawn swords, Martha quickly seized a broadaxe, raised it over her head and declared angrily, "If one of you touches him, I'll split you down with this axe. Touch him if you dare!"

Overawed by her bravery and defiance, the soldiers fled the house, and left her father unharmed.

In the fall of 1781, Bell, returning from a trip, attempted to sleep under his own roof. Watching Tories, aware of his movements, appeared promptly to hang him.

They arrived, found the house securely closed, and decided to burn it. Bell leaned out the window to fire upon them and was immediately knocked unconscious by a Tory blow to his head.

Martha aroused their teenaged sons from their beds upstairs and told them to shoot from above, and in a loud voice ordered a servant to rush to the neighbor's to summon "him and the light horse, for the Tories are here."

The neighbor had a troop of men at his command, but Mrs. Bell was completely ignorant of their whereabouts. However, her bluff was successful — the Tories decided retreat was the wiser course, and once again Martha had saved her family and her home.

After peace was declared, Martha continued her career of helping the sick and wounded. She died Sept. 9, 1820, confident she'd helped her country in countless ways.

Tribute to

KINGS MOUNTAIN BATTLEGROUND

The following ode was first read at the 1880 Celebration of the

Here upon this lonely height
Born in storm and bred in strife:
Nursed by nature's secret might
Freedom was the boon of life!
Song of bird and call of pine
Fluttering leaf on every tree.
Every murmur of the wind
Impulse gave to liberty!

Battle of Kings Mountain.
Then she blew a bugle blast,
Summoned all her yeomen leal.
"Friends! the despot's hour is past—
Let him now our vengeance feel!"
Rose they in heroic might—
Bondsmen fated to be free.
Drew the sword of honor bright
Struck by God and Liberty!

Come, ye sons of patriot sires
Who the tyrant's power in threw
Here, where burned their beacon fires,
Light your torches all anew!
Till this mountain's glowing crest
Signaling from sea to sea
Shall proclaim from East to West
Union, Peace and Liberty!

(Mrs. Clare Dargan MacLean
York, S. C.)

FIRST FEDERAL SAVINGS & LOAN ASSOCIATION OF KINGS MOUNTAIN



While we are celebrating
The
200th ANNIVERSARY
Of The
Battle Of
Kings Mountain

LET US NOT FORGET THE HARDSHIPS OUR FOREFATHERS ENDURED
IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT ENJOY THE FREEDOMS WE KNOW TODAY
FOR 73 YEARS FIRST FEDERAL SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATION
HAS BEEN A PART OF THIS AREA AND WE ARE PROUD TO HAVE
HAD A PART IN SEEING IT GROW INTO THE THRIVING
COMMUNITY IT IS TODAY

FIRST FEDERAL SAVINGS & LOAN ASSOCIATION

Of Kings Mountain
300 West Mountain Street