

Historical Sketches of Wilkes County

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led to Ninety Six and make money out of his capture. The terrified man, who had been made an unwilling history, was now released from Cleveland's grasp from a vice and the whole party with their prisoners and his servants were speedily mounted and hurried up New River. This stream, so near its source, was quite shallow, and the Tories traveled mostly in its bed to avoid being tracked, in case of pursuit.

After Riddle and his party had called at Curbirth's on their way down the river, young Daniel Curbirth and a youth named Walters, who were absent at the time returned, and encouraged by Mrs. Curbirth they resolved to take their guns, select a good spot, and Ambuscade Riddle on his return, and perhaps rescue whatever prisoners he might have. But on the return of the Tory party the next day, they made so much noise and gave so many military commands, that led the youthful ambuscaders to conclude that the Tories had received reinforcements, and that it would be rashness for two single-handed youths to undertake to cope with numbers so unequal. So Riddle and his party reached Curbirth's undisturbed and ordered dinner for himself, men, and prisoners. Riddle abused and even kicked one of the Curbirth's girls who did not willfully aid in preparing the dinner. After dinner they proceeded up New River, mostly along its bed, until they came to the mouth of Elk creek, up which they made their way in the same manner, Colonel Cleveland managed to break off overhanging twigs and drop them in the water to float down as a guide to his friends, who he knew would make early pursuit. From the head of the south fork of Elk they ascended up the mountain to what has since been known as Riddle Knob, in what is now Watauga and about 14 miles from Old Fields where he was captured; here they camped for the nights.

Early on the morning of Cleveland's capture Joseph Calloway and his brother-in-law, Berry Toney, wanting to see Cleveland on business, called at Duncan's and learned of the missing horses and the search for them; and at that moment they heard the report of the firing at the upper end of the plantation, and hastened in that direction, soon meeting Duncan and Shirley in rapid flight, who could only tell that Richard Calloway had fallen and that Cleveland was either killed or taken. It was at once agreed that Duncan, Shirley and Toney should notify the people of the scattered settlements to meet that afternoon at Old Fields, while Joseph Calloway should go to his father's close by, mount his horse and hasten to Captain Robert Cleveland's on Lewis Fork, a dozen miles distance. His brother, William Calloway, started up the river and soon came across Samuel McQueen and Benjamin Greer, who readily joined him; and all being good woodmen, they followed the Tory trail as best they could, till night overtook them some distance above the mouth of Elk creek and about ten miles from Old Fields. William Calloway suggested that he and McQueen would remain there while Greer should return to pilot up whatever men may have gathered to engage in the pursuit of the Tories.

By night-fall Captain Robert Cleveland and twenty or thirty others, good and tried men, who had served under Colonel Cleveland, had gathered at Old Fields, determined to rescue their old commander at every hazard, even though they had to follow the Tory to the gates of Ninety-Six. Greer made his appearance in good time and at once they were on the trail of the enemy. They reached William Calloway and McQueen a while before day; and as soon as light began to appear John Baker joined Calloway and McQueen to lead the advance as spies. A little after sunrise, having proceeded four miles, they discovered indications of the enemy's camp on the mountain. But little arrangement was made for the attack; nine men only were in readiness—the others seem to have been some distance behind. Only four or five or three were ordered to fire on the enemy, the others reserving their shots for a second volley, or any emergency that might happen—of these was William Calloway.

Part of the Tories had already breakfasted, while others were engaged preparing their morning meal. Cleveland was seated on a large log while Riddle had Cleveland's own pistol at him, also Zachariah Wells had his pistol pointed at Cleveland, forcing him to write out passes for the several members of Riddle's party certifying that each was a good Whig—to be used when in tight places, to help out of difficulty by asserting that they were patriots of the truest type. Cleveland's commendations were unquestioned along the borders of Virginia and the Carolina. But the Colonel had a strong suspicion that, since his

captors were in such haste for the passports, as soon as they were out of his hands his days would be numbered; and thus, naturally but a poor plan, he purposely refrained his task as much as possible, hoping to gain time for the expected relief, apologizing for his blunders and renewing his unwilling efforts. Several of the Tory party were now saddling their horses for an early start, and Cleveland was receiving threats if he did not hurry up the last passport.

Just at this moment the relief party was silently creeping up; and the next moment several guns were fired and the Whigs rushed up, uttering their loudest yells. Colonel Cleveland, comprehending the situation, tumbled off behind the log, lest his friends might accidentally shoot him, and exclaiming at the top of his thundering voice, "Hurrah for Brother Bob! That's right, give 'em hell." Wells alone was shot as he was scampering away by William Calloway in hot pursuit, and supposed to be mortally wounded; he was left to his fate. The rest fled with the aid of their fresh horses, or such as they could secure at the moment, Riddle and his wife among the number. Cleveland's servant, a pack-horse for Tory plunder, was overjoyed at his sudden liberation. Cleveland and Ross were thus fortunately rescued; and having gained their purpose the happy whigs returned to their several homes. William Calloway was especially elated that he had shot Wells who had so badly wounded his brother, Richard Calloway, at the skirmish at Old Fields the morning before.

Riddle Captured and Hung

A short time after this occurrence, Captain Riddle ventured to make a night raid into the Yadkin Valley, where, on King's Creek, several miles above Wilkesboro, they surrounded the house where two of Cleveland's noted soldiers, David and John Witherspoon, resided with their parents. The two were taken prisoners and carried to the Tory camp on Watauga river, where both were sentenced to be shot—blindfolded, and men detailed to do the fatal work. It was then proposed, if they would take the oath of allegiance to the King, return to their home and speedily return with a certain noble animal belonging to David Witherspoon, known as the O'Neal mare, and join the Tory band, their lives would be spared. They gladly accepted the proposition—with such hesitation as they thought best to make. As soon as they reached home David Witherspoon mounted his fleet-footed mare and hastened to Col. Ben Herndon's several miles down the river, who quickly raised a party and piloted by the Witherspoons, they soon reached the Tory camp, taking it by surprise, capturing three and killing and dispersing others. The young Witherspoons fulfilled their promise of speedily returning to the Tory camp bringing the O'Neal mare, but under somewhat different circumstances from what the Tories expected.

The prisoners were Captain Riddle and two of his associates named Reeves and Goss. They were brought to Wilkesboro and tried by court martial and sentenced to be hung. But in order to gain favor with the Whigs or get them in a condition so that they might escape Riddle treated them freely to whiskey. Colonel Cleveland informed him that it was useless to be wasting his whiskey as he would be hung directly after breakfast. The three Tories were accordingly hung on the notorious oak that is yet standing in Wilkesboro. Mrs. Riddle, wife of the Tory leader, was present, and witnessed the execution of her husband and his comrades.

How The Tories Hated Him

Colonel Cleveland was the Tories' worst enemy in this section. He was determined to break up the Tory bands that infested the frontier. Cleveland and his regiment were known far and near for their courage. They were known among the Whigs as Cleveland's Heroes, or Cleveland's Bull Dogs, while the Tories denominated them "Cleveland's Devils." Cleveland himself rated each of his well tried followers as equal to five soldiers. It was not long until one of Cleveland's men captured Zachariah Wells, who had not yet recovered from the wounds received at Riddle Knob. He was taken to High's bottom about a mile below Cleveland's Round About residence. Here James Gwyn, a youth of thirteen, with a colored boy, was at work in the field, when Cleveland, who had joined those having the prisoner in charge, took the plow-lines from the horse with which to hang Wells, to a tree on the river bank. Young Gwyn, who knew nothing of the stern realities of war, was shocked at the thought of so summary an execution. Being well acquainted with Colonel Cleveland he begged him not to hang the poor fellow, who looked so pitiful and was suffering from his former wound. This excited the Colonel's sympathies, and he said, "Jimmie, my son, he is a

bad man; we must hang all such dangerous Tories, and get them out of their misery." Captain Robert Cleveland, who at present was cursing the wretched Tory at a vigorous rate. With tears coming down his cheeks, the Colonel adjusted the rope, regretting the necessity for hanging the trembling culprit—remembering very well the rough treatment he had received at the hands of Wells at the Perkins place at the Old Fields; and firmly convinced that the lives of the patriots of the Yadkin Valley would be safer, and their slumber all the more peaceful, when their suffering country was rid of all such vile desperadoes. Wells soon dangled from a convenient tree and his remains were buried in the sand on the bank of the river.

Other Tories See Trouble

Many other Tories fell into the hands of Cleveland's brave troopers and summary punishment was meted out to them in Cleveland's usual way. Once a Tory leader named Tate and eight others were captured and Cleveland and his men had them near old Richmond, in Surry county. When Cleveland was about to execute the leader, Colonel William Shepherd protested against such summary justice. "Why," said Cleveland, "Tate confessed that he has frequently laid in wait to kill you." "Is that so?" inquired Shepherd, turning to the Tory captain. Tate confessed, and Shepherd yielded to Cleveland's plan and soon Tate dangled from a limb. Tate's associates suffered only imprisonment as other prisoners of war.

On another occasion Colonel Cleveland visited Colonel Shepherd at Richmond, where he had two notorious horse-thieves in prison. Cleveland insisted on swinging them to the nearest tree

just they should make their escape and yet further endanger the community—at least one of them, whose crimes rendered him particularly obnoxious to the people. One end of a rope was fastened to his neck when he was mounted on a log and the other end tied to a limb; then the log rolled from under him and he dangled from a limb in plain view of the prison. The other culprit was shown his comrade swinging from the limb and he was given his choice, to take his place beside him or cut off both his own ears and leave the country forever. The Tory knew it would not do to meddle with old Round About, so he called for a knife. He was handed a case knife, and after whetting it on a brick he gritted his teeth and sawed off both ears. He was then liberated and he left with the blood streaming down both cheeks and was never heard of afterwards.

"I'll Show You Perpetual Motion"

John Doss was the Faithful overseer of Colonel Cleveland's plantation while the Colonel was absent from home during the Tory troubles in 1780-81. Bill Harrison, a noted leader in this region, with the aid of his followers, not only stole Cleveland's stock and destroyed his property, but arrested his overseer, took him to a hill-side, placed him on a log, fastened one end of a grape vine around his neck and the other end was fastened to the prong of a stooping dogwood; then one of the party went up the hill so as to gain sufficient propelling power, then rushed down headlong, butting Doss off the log into eternity. It was not long until Harrison was caught and brought to Cleveland's home. Accompanied by his servant Bill and one or two others Cleveland

led Harrison to the same dogwood on which he had hung poor Doss.

"I hope you are not going to hang me, Colonel," muttered the trembling wretch. "Why not?" "Because," said the Tory, "you know I am a useful man in the neighborhood—a good mechanic—have worked for you in peaceful days, and cannot well be spared; besides I have invented perpetual motions; and if I am now suddenly out off, the world will lose the benefit of my discovery. I, too, have heard you curse Fanning and other Loyalist leaders for putting prisoners to death—where are your principles—where your conscience?" "Where is my conscience," retorted Cleveland; "where are my horses and cattle you have stolen; my barn fences you have wantonly burned—and where is poor Jack Doss?" "Pore God I will do this deed and justify myself before high Heaven and my country! Run up the hill, Bill, and but him off the log—I'll show him perpetual motion!"

The Boys Hang A Tory

On one occasion when Colonel Cleveland was away from home, a Tory horse-thief was captured and brought and turned over to Cleveland's sons, to await their father's return. The Colonel, not returning as soon as expected, and fearing if they should undertake to keep the prisoner over night he might escape or give them trouble, they appealed to their mother what was best to do under the circumstances. Mrs. Cleveland said to the boys, "What would your father do in such a case?" The boys promptly replied, "Hang him." "Well then," said the old lady, "You must hang him," and the thief was accordingly hung at the gate.

Cleveland's Generosity

The reader must not suppose that Colonel Cleveland was as well as well. Eleven miles above Wilkesboro on the north bank of the Yadkin lived one Bishop, one of a class who tried to shirk the responsibility of the war, and was wanting in patriotism and energy of character. At heart he was thought to be a Tory. Fanning Bishop's on one of his excursions, Cleveland observed that his corn, from neglect, presented a very sorry appearance. He called Bishop out and asked if he had been sick. He said that he had not. "Have you been fighting for your country then?" "No," said the neutral, "I have not been fighting on either side." "In times like these," remarked Cleveland, "men who are not fighting, and are able to work, must not be allowed to have their crops as foul as yours." The indolent man had to "Thumb the Notch" and receive the lashes as a penalty for his negligence. It is not necessary to say that Bishop's corn was, from that time on, in as good condition as any man's in the country.

His Last Military Service

Cleveland was "all things to all people." His love for the American cause was unbounded. His numerous friends loved and admired him for his bold and fearless simplicity, while his enemies hated him for the same reason that his friends loved him. But the war was now rapidly drawing to a close. In the autumn of 1781, Colonel Cleveland performed his last military service—a three months' tour of duty on the waters of the Little Pedee, in the south-eastern part of the State, under General Rutherford. At this time the British Colonel Craig was confined to

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