

# CHAPEL HILL LITERARY GAZETTE

PER ANNUM,

Without or with offence to friends or foes,  
We sketch the world exactly as it goes.

IN ADVANCE.

DEVOTED TO LITERATURE, FOREIGN AND LOCAL INTELLIGENCE, THE MARKETS, AGRICULTURE, &C.

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## The Tory Massacre.

### PLYES DEFEAT, 1781.

The Fayetteville Observer of the 12th ult., fills one of its broad columns with an account of "The Tory Massacre" by Richard Everett, which seems to call for some notice at our hands.

The writer opens with the remark that two months ago he made a tour of the Southern States, "and tarried a while at the little village of Hillsborough." "A short distance" from which "in his memorable retreat across North Carolina in February, 1781, the ragged but gallant army of General Greene forded the river Haw." "Not far from Hillsborough we were shown the scene of a terrible massacre of Tories by the troops of Lee's Legion." Hillsborough, "our readers need scarcely be informed, is on the river Eno, in the County of Orange, not nearer than eighteen miles to the ford of Haw river, crossed by Pickett and Lee in pursuit of Tarleton." General Greene, in his rapid retreat, did not cross the river at all. The scene of Pyle's discomfiture is in the vicinity of Graham, in the County of Alamance, distant some twenty-five miles from Hillsborough.

The writer is not more precise and accurate in the statement of the number and character of the American forces who participated in the combat than in his designation of the battlefield. "As a preliminary step to the movement of the whole army, Greene sent Col. Henry Lee with his legion of cavalry, and two companies of Maryland militia to harass the British force, and disperse the bands of Tories which were organizing throughout the Carolinas."

"Col. Lee had formed a squadron of cavalry, uniformed and armed precisely after the fashion of Tarleton's celebrated corps, and no man in the American service was more dreaded by the foe than Legion Harry."

Mr. Everett having thus stated the number and character of our forces, proceeds with an interesting but not very accurate account of the circumstances under which the Tories were entrapped and vanquished. There is no intimation, however, that General Pickett, at the head of thirty or forty gallant men from Georgia and South Carolina, and more than six hundred militia from Mecklenburg and Rowan were present and quite as conspicuous in the fray as the Virginia troops.

"Accidental circumstances to which we feel at liberty to refer, in connection with this narrative, have rendered us peculiarly sensitive to the injustice done by this writer—Lee was a brave man, a polished gentleman, a skilful soldier, and an elegant writer. The union of his and Pickett's legion presented an array of leaders and men, probably no where equalled by the same number in any revolutionary battle-field; and the foe whom they pursued when the fortune of war placed Pyle within their power, and lost them Tarleton, was worthy of their steel. We think we are fully sustained, however, by the evidence before us, in the opinion that man for man, Pickett and his legion were more than equal to the troops led by either Lee or Tarleton.

In the autumn of 1832 we spent a few days at the house of David Mebane, nine miles West of Hillsborough. He died an octogenarian, a few years thereafter, on the plantation where he was born. He

pointed out the road around the farm which was taken by Pickett and Lee in pursuit of Tarleton, a short time before they encountered Pyle, described minutely the appearance of the troops as they pressed on in their hurried march, and especially of Col. Polk who particularly attracted his attention. A few weeks after this interview, we spent a day with General Graham, and about the same time, held repeated conversations with Col. Polk in relation to revolutionary events, and especially with reference to Pyle's defeat.

Col. Polk entered the revolutionary army in 1777. He was in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown, and was with Gen. Nash when the thigh of the latter was crushed by a cannon ball. He had two molar teeth extracted by a musket ball, and amid the wounded and dying, was the immediate witness of the agonies endured by Nash during the terrible night which succeeded the battle. He was the aid of Gen. Davidson, and at his side when he fell beneath the rifle of the Tory Hager at Cowan's Ford. At Eutaw, on the 8th September, 1781, while in rapid pursuit of a Tory officer, the latter suddenly wheeled and planted a rifle ball in his left shoulder which disabled him for life. The arm was almost severed from the body, and yet so little did it affect the appearance of the erect and stalwart soldier, that it was never, until domiciled with him, during a visit to the University in 1832, when we found him unable to put on his coat without assistance, that any suspicion was entertained of the extent and severity of the wound. He was confined for several months after the battle, and when he rose from his bed, his hair which he wore long in a queue according to the fashion of the times, formed a mat, in which, to use his own language, "every hair stood for itself." It became necessary to remove it, and the young woman who personated the barber on the occasion, clipped it off with her scissors in a solid fleece. Lee and Eggleston who were with him at Pyle's defeat, fought with him at Eutaw; but no one of the trying scenes he had witnessed, seemed to affect him so deeply as the terrible carnage of the deluded and unresisting Tories under Pyle.

Graham and Polk never fought alone, and their followers were Mecklenburg men. Their own blood flowed in copious streams, and in every battle-field their swords drank blood.

It is a little remarkable that while this narrative of Mr. Everett seems destined to a wide circulation in North Carolina, the graphic and authentic account by General Graham which appeared in this Magazine in May, 1856, found its way into the North Carolina Argus and one of the Salisbury papers, and we believe, no others.

The following letters from Judge Murphy to Gen. Graham, which appeared in this Magazine in December, 1854, and the letter from Gen. Graham to Judge Murphy in the No. of the preceding month, were never copied by any of our newspaper editors; and as that volume of our Magazine is nearly out of print, we have determined to reproduce them in our own pages, with the hope, peradventure, they may yet find favor elsewhere.

HAW RIVER,  
July 20th, 1821.

DEAR GENERAL:—On yesterday I received your letter of the 14th inst. I must beg your pardon for not before acknowledging the receipt of the packet directed to me at Salisbury. A continued series of afflictions in my family, added to a great pressure of business, had

"Perceiving the surprise which the extent of his wound occasioned, he remarked that when the first Act of Congress was passed allowing pensions to wounded and invalid soldiers, Judge Setgreaves proposed to make out a certificate for him. The Colonel declined, with the intimation that there was no Judge in the State less an invalid than he."

At the time of his death, Colonel Polk was the surviving field officer of the North Carolina line—Judge Setgreaves was one of the aids of Cornwall at the battle of Camden.

withdrawn my mind until lately from the subject of your communication. They now engage my attention almost exclusively, and will continue to do so, for eight or ten days. I entreat you to continue your narrative, and give to it all the detail your memory will enable you to give; and notwithstanding you have filled 20 sheets, fill 20 more. I am in correspondence with several gentlemen on these subjects, as well as other parts of the history of North Carolina; but from none have I received communications so circumstantial, connected, and interesting as from you. I wish you to progress through the Revolutionary war, and I will submit to you *hints* for a further narrative, embracing the prominent points of our history since 1783.

Your letter to Col. Conner, first suggested to me the plan of a work, which I will execute if I live. It is a work on the history, soil, climate, legislation, civil institutions, literature, &c., of this State. Soon after reading your letter, I turned my attention to the subject, in the few hours which I could snatch from business, and I was surprised to find what abundant materials, could, with care and diligence, be collected; materials which, if well disposed, would furnish matter for one of the most interesting works that has been published in this country. We want such a work. We neither know ourselves, nor are we known to others. Such a work well executed, would add very much to our standing in the Union, and make our State respectable in our own eyes. Amidst the cares and anxieties which surround me, I cannot cherish a hope, that I could do more than merely guide the labours of some man who would take up the work after me, and prosecute it to perfection. I love North Carolina, and love her fine more, because so much injustice has been done to her. We want pride. We want independence. We want magnanimity. Knowing nothing of ourselves, we have nothing in our history to which we can turn with feelings of conscious pride. We know nothing of our State, and care nothing about it.

It adds to one's mortification on this subject, that the printers of this State are so little minded, that one will not copy from another any article of public interest, which is communicated. If papers were sent for publication to New York, they would be published from the New York papers in all the papers of this State; yet, if sent to Raleigh, Hillsborough, Salisbury, &c., they will be found in only that paper to which they are sent. The editors at Fayetteville form an honorable exception. They search out and give place to everything they can find respecting North Carolina—a man can't write for every paper, and no one paper has a general circulation—much more would be written, if all the papers would give it publicity, because more information would be thereby distributed through the community. We want some great stimulus to put us all in motion, and induce us to waive little jealousies and combine in one general march to our great purpose.

The events of the years 1780 and 1781, will fill a large octavo volume, and I will exert myself to complete it during the ensuing winter. You have entered upon the subject with more zeal than any other man, and I beg a continuance of your labors. Extracts from the works, as first written, without corrections, will be published in the Recorder. I directed this paper to be sent to you, and I am sorry the account of the battle at Ramsour's has not reached you. I will get a paper and send it to you. Have you received the papers containing the remarks on the history of North Carolina? This was the first published, in January last. Have you received the account of the first Revolutionary movements? The printer made a mistake and said, "in the United

States," instead of "in this State." This was in March.

I will publish another paper shortly. \* \* \* \* It would give me great pleasure to see you, and I hope you will come to Salisbury.—In the meantime prevail on your brother to lend his aid to the work, and draw up an account of the expeditions in which he took a part, and from which you were absent. I hope providence will spare your life till something can be done for the honor and glory of North Carolina.

Yours truly,  
A. D. MURPHY.

GEN. JOS. GRAHAM.

Request your brother to give a minute detail of Rutherford's campaign against the Cherokees, in 1776. The number of troops?—the rendezvous; the causes of the war with the Cherokees; the march of Rutherford; the preparations of the Cherokees; their chief's names, and characters; their place of abode; operations of the army; force of the Cherokees; route of the army over the mountains; Cherokee towns taken and burnt; anecdotes of the campaign; the treaty; the commissioners, both on the part of the Indians and the whites for making the treaty; miscellaneous particulars; return of the troops; their being disbanded; where and when; how paid, and how much, &c.; also, similar account of the campaign under Caswell in 1776; request him to go into every detail.

A. D. M.

We have now the pleasure of presenting in the subjoined letter, to the late Judge Murphy, a correction of various misstatements which have found a place in history, in relation to events which occurred within our borders, during the memorable invasions of Lord Cornwallis, in 1780—81.

The facts that the troops which gained so much distinction, under the command of General Pickett, were from North Carolina, and mainly from Mecklenburg and the adjoining counties, had until very recently, like the Mecklenburg Declaration, escaped the attention of our best historical writers. For the preservation of this and other interesting events in our revolutionary history, we are indebted entirely to the careful pen of General Graham. For a detailed account of the leading incidents which mark the history of his long, eventful, and useful life, our readers may turn to the 2d vol. of Wheeler's Historical Sketches p. 282.

VESUVIUS FERNACE,  
20th of December, 1827.

DEAR SIR: Some time past, I forwarded you certain sketches relative to occurrences in the Revolutionary War in the Western part of North Carolina. I have since perused Johnson's History, of the life of Gen. Greene, and strictures on it, by Lee, Jr., and would beg leave to correct some errors into which they have fallen.

1. It is stated, not only by these Historians, but by most others, that after Lord Cornwallis arrived in Charlotte he attempted marching to Salisbury. Tarleton's legion, and a battalion of infantry, after they had dislodged Col. Davies' command in the village, pursued six or seven miles, to Sassafras fields, (where I was wounded,) and returned the same evening. After this, no part of the British army went two miles on the Salisbury road, until they retreated from Charlotte, upon hearing of the disaster at King's Mountain.

2. It is stated, by the historians generally, that about, and on, the first of February, 1781, the Catawba river was swollen, and that this was the reason, why Lord Cornwallis did not pursue Gen. Morgan more closely. The statement is erroneous. During the three days immediately preceding the 1st of February, my command of cavalry or portions of it, crossed the river at different fords; and it was not

\* Revolutionary Hist. N. C., 106.

flusher of water than is usual at that season of the year, until the rain, which fell, on the evening of the first of February.\* This, did occasion a rise in the Yadkin, which intercepted the British after Greene's army had passed, on the third of February.

3. Much is stated, and contradictory accounts are given, as to the part Gen. Pickett's of S. C. acted, in the campaign. The facts are these: After the retreat from Cowan's Ford, on the 1st of February, Gen. Pickett with five or six South Carolina refugees, was in the rout of our troops, North Carolina Militia, on the same day, by Tarleton's Cavalry at Torrence's Tavern, six miles eastward of the river. Gen. Davidson, the commander of this force had fallen, and there were doubts and disputes among the field officers, as to who should succeed him. In this condition of affairs, while my cavalry were beyond the Shallow Ford of the Yadkin, languishing on the rear of the enemy, it was mutually agreed by the field officers to invest Gen. Pickett with the command of Davidson's troops, amounting to six or seven hundred men. This was about the 11th of February, and the South Carolina refugees might then amount to twenty or thirty men. James Jackson of the Georgia line, a Lieutenant, was appointed Brigade Major. He has since been a member of Congress and Governor of that State. After this organization, the Brigade proceeded, crossing the Shallow Ford of the Yadkin, through Salem, to Guilford Court House. Here intelligence was received of the movements of the enemy to Hillsborough—and we took that direction, more condensed and cautious than before. Hitherto, the march had been regulated by detachments for the convenience of procuring subsistence. Arrived at a mill, on Back or Stony Creek, some twelve or fifteen miles from Hillsborough, in the evening of the 17th of Feb., shortly after we had encamped, the Brigadier Major gave orders that Capt. Graham should furnish twenty dragoons, and Captain Simmons of Rowan, a like number of riflemen. As soon as these officers reported their quotas in readiness, General Pickett himself came and gave these two officers orders, as follows, viz: "You will proceed down the road towards Hillsborough with the greatest caution and circumspection. If you find any detachment of the enemy out, inferior to your own, attack them. If you discover a larger party beyond supporting distance from their main army, and you can keep yourselves concealed, give me notice, and I will come or send an additional force to assist you. But if you ascertain you are discovered by a larger party of the enemy return immediately. In any event, return early in the morning; for they will then hear of you from the inhabitants of the country. If I move from this place, you will find my trail up the west side of this creek and may join me by 10 o'clock to-morrow." There were four or five volunteers who went with the party besides those ordered; but none of them were present when the orders were given. Among others I recollect Major Micajah Lewis, (a continental officer who was killed a few days afterwards at Dickey's,) and his brother Joel, but though of superior rank, neither Major Lewis nor any other, assumed any command over the detachment, or the officers who had received the General's orders. The party set out between sunset and dark. After proceeding several miles on the Hillsborough road, and when it was fully dark, met Robert Fosset, (usually called, as I understood, mad Bob,) and another person, whose name is not remembered. They were direct from Hillsborough, and gave us the first information of a picket at Hart's Mill, supposed to be about thirty in number. We determined to attack them at light in the morning.

Gen. Pickett certainly knew nothing of this picket being at the mill when he detached us, although it is otherwise stated by Johnson.—Fosset at first thought we were a party of the enemy. We compelled him to be our pilot. If he is yet living, I would beg leave to refer you to him for subsequent events. In the morning, when we approached the picket, their sentry fired; and a sergeant and file of men came immediately to his support. Simmons and his riflemen dismounting and tying their horses, the sergeant and party fired in the direction of the noise, for they could not see us. Major Lewis, myself and six others crossed into the road leading towards Mebane's and charged down this road after the sergeant and party, who ran, until we came within sight of the picket. Major Lewis then suggested to me the advantage the riflemen might have, by passing to the right, under cover of the hill, until they should be masked by some out buildings, (I think a stable and smithshop.) We instantly returned and gave Capt. Simmons his instructions, and the cavalry moved off to the left, through an old field, above where buildings have since been erected, in order to attract the attention and fire of the enemy, until the riflemen should gain their destined position. The plan succeeded as we expected.—Owing to the great distance, the cavalry sustained no damage from the enemy's fire; and as soon as the riflemen, at the distance of only fifty or sixty yards, in their concealed position, had discharged their pieces at the picket, the cavalry charged, and the whole, consisting of twenty-seven men, were instantly killed or taken.

Now, Johnson states, that this party was under the command of Col. Hugh McCall, of South Carolina, and was of these who had been with him at the Cowpens. Some two or three volunteers were along, besides the Lewises as above mentioned. If Col. McCall was one of them, it is not remembered by me and others who were present, and of whom I have made inquiry, since the appearance of this statement. But if he was present, certain I am he had no part, either in planning, or in the execution of the capture of the picket referred to. Nor did we consult respecting it with any other person, except Maj. Lewis\* (who was a real soldier.) His counsels were deferred to by us, knowing, as we did, his past service and experience. But Captain Simmons and myself gave the orders, and felt the whole responsibility. If McCall was along, he was no more than a spectator. Several, yet living, can vouch for this. When the Brigade was organized west of the Yadkin, no officers from the South were recognized but General Pickett and Major Jackson. For we had over our proportion of field officers from North Carolina, and did not need them. When our party and prisoners arrived in camp, the Brigade immediately moved nearly a North course ten or twelve miles, and halted a forage, about mid afternoon, at a farm with high fences, having left a strong guard in the rear. In half an hour, there was an alarm by a man from the guard, who reported "Tarleton was coming." It being too late to retreat, a disposition was made for battle by lining the fences with men, and making gaps at suitable places for cavalry to move as circumstances might require. By the time these arrangements were made a part of the rear guard and Col. Lee's legion were in sight. Lee had come upon our trail a few miles back, and we were most agreeably disappointed in greeting him instead of Tarleton.

I am confident that this was the first interview between Lee and Pickett, during the campaign, and my impression always has been, that previously to this time neither

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\*Major Lewis was of Surry County, and a near kinsman of the late Governor Jesse Franklin, who was a captain in this campaign. His grave, though neglected, is still recognized on Dickey's plantation, in Alamance.

General Greene nor Colonel Pickett knew anything about where Lee was, or what was his force—nor did Gen. Pickett know that any part of Greene's command had re-crossed the Dan.

4. As I anticipated in the introduction to the sketches I furnished you, the historians of that War have greatly failed to do justice to the troops of North Carolina. For example, every thing that was done by General Samter's force at Hanging Rock, Rocky Mount, &c., while he commanded North Carolinians in 1780, and by that of Pickett's, while he commanded Davidson's Brigade in 1781 as above related, is placed to the credit of South Carolina from the circumstances of those two Generals commanding. Judge Johnson even states that at the battle of Cowpens, Major Joe McDowell and his command from Burke county in this State were from S. Carolina.

5. Col. Lee having written his Memoirs upwards of thirty years, after the transactions he relates, has omitted to mention many things, and of others he must have forgotten the circumstances; though upon the whole, he is more correct as far as I had a personal knowledge, than any other historian I have read. You may recollect that in his memoirs he passes unnoticed the skirmish at Clapp's Mill, although he had command of the party engaged. Col. Otho Williams calls it, "the skirmish on the Alamance," and says we had but three killed. On the day after the action, Pickett and Lee detached me with a party to the battle ground, and I got the inhabitants to bury eight of our men, (all militia, and two of my own company.) I beg leave to refer you to what I have written before on this subject.

6. Johnson's History is the only one I have seen, which notices the fact that, on the second night after the affair at Clapp's Mill, on Alamance, a detachment of British cavalry fell in with a party of Tories on their march to join the British, and that mistaking each other for adversaries, a number of the Tories were killed or wounded, before the mistake was discovered. But he appears to know nothing of our party teasing the British in the afternoon; and at night charging and dispersing their patrol, and capturing its commander, and that these were the reasons why a large body of horse were dispatched up the Salisbury road, which met the Tories and occasioned the mishap he mentions. This you will find in the sketches.

7. Lee states that at Pyle's defeat, the action was commenced by the firing of the Tories on the Militia, in his rear. Whereas, the fact was, that I riding in front of the Militia dragoons, near to Capt. Eggleston who brought up Lee's rear, at the distance of forty or fifty yards, pointed out to him the strip of red cloth on the hats of Pyle's men, as the mark of Tories. Eggleston appeared to doubt this, until he came nearly opposite to the end of the line, when riding up to the man on their left, who appeared as an officer, he inquired, "Who do you belong to?" The answer was promptly given, "To King George," upon which Eggleston struck him on the head with his sword. Our dragoons well knew the red cloth on the hat to be the badge of Tories, but being under the immediate command of Lee, they had waited for orders. But seeing the example set by his officer, without waiting for further commands, they rushed upon them like a torrent. Lee's men, next to the rear, discovering this, reined in their horses to the right upon the Tory line, and in less than one minute the engagement was general. Colonel Lee being in front, and at the other end of the line, say forty poles, from where the action commenced, might have believed the Tories first attacked us. If, however, he had inquired of Capt. Eggleston, he could have informed him otherwise.

As to other events, to which I have a personal knowledge, there are misrepresentations, but it is not convenient for me to point out all of them.

I am, sir, very respectfully,  
Your most obedient,  
J. GRAHAM.  
The Hon. A. D. MURPHY.