

The British Invasion Of Duplin

Major Craig's Headquarters. General Kenan.

By A. T. OUTLAW
Kenansville, N. C.

You saw the oncoming might of the British Red Coats over the hill, the flag, the shot and shell, and company after company of the dragoons coming into Duplin on a tour of intimidation and destruction. And you saw Colonel Kenan's patriotic little band bravely trying to defend their own doorsteps but were powerless to keep out the invaders.

The Battle of Rockfish, a thrilling and spectacular scene in "The Duplin Story" drama of last year, was fought at a time when everything looked very gloomy for the American cause. Already, during that year, Lord Cornwallis had passed through the section on his march from Wilmington to Yorktown. The British forces had moved into this State from South Carolina. Major James H. Craig had taken possession of Wilmington, then a small town of about one thousand people, in the early part of the year. Near the town he set up what was called a "bull pen" for his captives and it is said that some were very harshly treated, including Thomas Burke, the Governor of the State. About the same time he established an outpost at Ruthersford's mill in what is now Pender County. He was very active in enlisting the natives, called Tories, and carried on a campaign of cruelty, plunder and destruction. In July he declared that all who failed to enlist under the British banner by the first day of August would be destroyed and their property taken. His numbers, supplies, arms and ammunition could not be successfully resisted. The result was general destruction throughout the section.

In the meantime Colonel James Kenan of Duplin, an able and experienced leader in the American cause, gathered all of his forces at Rockfish bridge, near the present town of Wallace. There he commenced preparation to prevent, if possible, any further invasion of eastern Carolina. He was joined by Major Griffen with about 150 men who were sent to his aid by order of General Caswell, making a total of about 400 men. Immediately following Major Craig's last day of grace for all men to join the British colors, he set out on a tour of subjugation and destruction, and his plans were very successful. He reached Rockfish bridge on the second day of August, 1781, and promptly opened the artillery on Colonel Kenan's breastworks. At the same time Kenan's men were completely surprised to

find themselves attacked in the rear by Captain Gordon, an experienced British cavalryman, with about 60 fast horsemen and two companies of artillery. In such a situation Kenan's officers and men acted with becoming bravery but there was no hope for holding back the invaders. Without an immediate escape, certain destruction would have been the result for the American soldiers. Only a small number of them were wounded, captured and made prisoners, and only two or three of the number were killed. Reports vary as to the number. Colonel William Dickson, then Clerk of the County Court, reported that he narrowly escaped being captured. Captain Thomas James received special mention from Colonel Kenan for bravery in action.

Major Craig proceeded on his march and spent several days in Duplin. In the Grove settlement (Kenansville) he selected the home of Colonel Thomas Routledge for his headquarters and during his stay the men were engaged in burning the homes of patriot leaders, destroying crops, stealing livestock and provisions, etc. The homes of Captain Gillespie and Lieutenant Houston were burned, and they even stole the rings from Mrs. William McGowen's fingers and forced her to give information concerning patriot leaders. Captain Gordon, who led the British horsemen at Rockfish, was killed on the march near New Beth.

Major Craig was considered one of the best of the British officers. Sometime after the war he was honored by his country with an appointment as Governor-General of the British Dominion of Canada.

At a point where the State highway crosses the old Wilmington road, a short distance from Rockfish bridge on the Duplin side, stands a State highway-historical marker designating the site of the Battle of Rockfish. It has been there several years.

The Kenans of Duplin have often been described as a race of gentlemen, highly esteemed, and always prominently identified with questions concerning the public welfare.

From the family name has come a long list of distinguished soldiers, legislators, statesmen, philanthropists, in North Carolina and in other States.

Thomas Kenan, the founder of this branch of the family in America, was a native of County Antrim, Ireland, and married Elizabeth Johnston, an English woman of noble ancestry, and they were among

the early settlers in Duplin. He was a man of considerable means and prominence and took an active part in public affairs. He was a member of Colonel Sampson's colonial militia and was in active service during the Spanish Alarm at Wilmington in September, 1748, and also served as a member of the County Court in company with Doctor Houston, Colonel Sampson, Captain Hicks, and other leading citizens of that time. He died during the year 1768 and his wife died in 1789.

General James Kenan, one of several sons of Thomas and Elizabeth Johnston Kenan, was an outstanding Revolutionary patriot whose name is familiar to most students of North Carolina's early history. Born September 23, 1740, and educated by private tutors, he was elected Sheriff of his County when only 22 years of age and served from 1762 to 1766 and again in 1785 and 1786. He led a company of volunteers to Wilmington in 1765 to oppose enforcement of the British Stamp Act of that year, even though a very outstanding citizen of his home county, Dr. William Houston, had been appointed Stamp Master for North Carolina. He was a member of the Colonial Assembly and of the Provincial Congress at various times from 1773 to 1776, and served as a member of the Wilmington Safety Committee and as Chairman of the Duplin Committee. He participated actively in the Revolution as Colonel of the Duplin regiment and did conspicuous service in the vicinity of Fayetteville, Pee Dee (S. C.), Wilmington, Rockfish, and elsewhere. He has often been described as a brave and energetic leader. About the close of the War he was chosen Brigadier-General of State militia, Wilmington District, and was highly honored by the people of his County and State. At various times he was a member of the State House of Commons and of the State Senate and was a member of the State Constitutional Conventions of 1788 and 1789. He was also a Councillor of State and a Trustee of the State University, as well as one of the original trustees of the Grove Academy, the first established educational institution in Duplin. He was also the first Master of St. John's Lodge No. 13, the original Masonic lodge in Duplin.

General Kenan's wife was Sarah Love and their descendants have been conspicuous and outstanding for public service in the County, State and Nation. General Kenan died May 23, 1810, and his wife died March 22, 1819.

The name of the county seat town and a new memorial auditorium in Duplin, as well as a hand-



Some students of the Mary Morrison Kindergarten, Wallace, N. C.: Front row - reading from left to right - Jan Stout, Emily Sue Browder, Marshall Cain, Kay Sanderson, Edythe Sampson, and Grace Norris. Back row - A. J. Carter, Jr., George Finch, Jr., Robbie Lou Zibell, Tommie Rogers, Carey Caudell, Jr., and Mollie Lou Zibell.

Chinquapin, Grad Gets Scholarship

J. C. Wallace of Chinquapin, and a graduate of the Chinquapin High School, has been awarded a Sears,

Robuck Foundation Scholarship according to an announcement made today by N. E. Gresham, Principal, and will enter North Carolina State College this fall.

Wallace graduated from high school in the class of 1950. He was an excellent student and in addition was one of the school's best athletes. During his junior and senior years he played in almost all of the basketball games participated in by his school. Besides being a star athlete, he took part in many other extra-curricular activities, particularly dramatics. He is unusually popular with the younger set and has many friends throughout the county who will rejoice with him in the honor which has been conferred upon him. His parents are Mr. and Mrs. Adron Wallace and are descendants of one of Duplin County's oldest and most respected families.

The Sears, Robuck Scholarship has been made available this year to fourteen high school graduates

in North Carolina who will study Agriculture. It is valued at \$150 per year, renewable upon making required scholastic standards.

Mr. Wallace's Agriculture teacher, Prof. W. P. Hubbard was in a large way responsible for his obtaining the scholarship. In assisting Mr. Wallace in making application for it, Mr. Hubbard took occasion to present to the scholarship board not only the student's qualifications but mentioned the good that could be accomplished in this fine agricultural section by having a student to receive the award selected from this County.

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The spring of 1946 marked the beginning of the kindergarten operated by Mrs. Mary Morrison in Wallace. Since that time she has added private first grade work. The school begins October 1 and closes April 30. The teaching hours are from nine until twelve o'clock. These three hours are carefully divided so that many interesting projects are carried on. The children are taught to share, work and play together.

The following poem was sent in by Mrs. Morrison:

Reach Down Your Hand
Reach down your hand!
The little one who trudges by your side
Is striving to match your grown-up stride;
But, oh, his feet are very tiny yet,
His arm so short—I pray you, don't forget—
Reach down your hand!

Keep soft your voice!
For it was such a little while ago
This small one left the place where tones are low;
His voice still holds the cadence of that land
Where no one ever gave a stern command—
Keep soft your voice!
Lift up your heart!

The little child you struggle so to teach
Has resource far above the human reach;
Lift up your heart!
—Lucie Haskell Hill.

some stadium and a professorship in Chapel Hill, honor and perpetuate the family name.

A State highway-historical marker near Baltic on the highway between Warsaw and Clinton honors the name of General Kenan.

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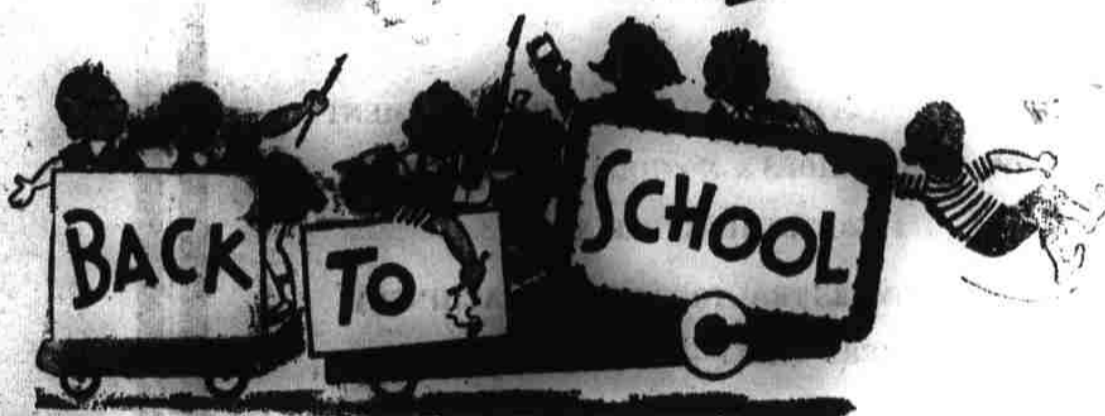
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