Page 8A



Members of the OVTA in period dress fire a commemorative volley with period weapons over the graves of 15 Revolutionary War soldiers buried at a cemetery along the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, 2014. Photograph by Randell Jones

## This is America at its best

It was a bold idea, but the time had come. It was 1975. As America was preparing to celebrate

its 200th anniversary of independence, the country had bicentennial fever. Catching



that excitement and celebrating its own centennial was the City of Kings Mountain, the namesake of the one battle which Thomas Jefferson had declared to be the "turning of the tide" in America's Revolutionary War. The city leaders decided to invite President Gerald Ford to come celebrate with them and to greet a special group of marchers.

In the fall of 1780, a thousand patriot militiamen from the overmountain regions of North Carolina and Virginia marched over the Appalachians to attack the advancing British forces before they could come over the mountains to "hang your leaders

with fire and sword" as British Major Patrick Ferguson had threatened to do. Those patriots were joined

and lay waste your country

in the effort by other backcountry militiamen including those from Wilkes, Surry, Rutherford, and Lincoln counties and from South Carolina and Georgia, too.

In 1975, a group of patriotic citizens wanted to do something special to commemorate that heroic event of yesteryear. They decided to walk in the footsteps of those backcountry patriots for nearly 200 miles during 12 days, and they did. They called it the Overmountain Victory Trail and they organized a walk that has been repeated every fall for the last four decades. Now, through the continuing efforts of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association (OVTA), nearly 10,000 students all along the official Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVNHT) hear "The Story" each fall and learn something remarkable about our country's early founding.

A send-off crowd of 400 turned out with patriotic

pride in 1975 when the march the 25th anniversary of Conbegan at Sycamore Shoals in Elizabethton, Tennessee. High school marching bands, Junior ROTC, army national guardsmen, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Marine Corps reserves all assembled to send off a handful of people determined to walk to Kings Mountain. They carried with them an old Bible, a hunting horn, and a scroll for collecting signatures. On the eastern leg at Lenoir, the marchers joined in a parade and feasted on a 156-lb. cake decorated as the Bennington flag with 13 sugary stripes and 13 frosted stars encircling "'76" in a blue field. In Morganton, a crowd gathered at the Burke County Fairgrounds, then located on what was Quaker Meadows, the plantation homes of Colonel Charles McDowell and his brother Major Joseph McDowell. That audience enjoyed some rousing bluegrass music and a square dance as they welcomed the marchers, among them then 13 determined to go the whole distance. 'Over the following

days," recounts A Volunteer Effort, written to celebrate gress designating the OVT a national historic trail in 1980, "the official marchers hiked, walked, shuffled, and eventually stumbled their way toward Kings Mountain as their legs and bodies began to tire from the relentless plodding along hard pavement. The weather was generally cooperative, but on the days when the historic militiamen had rain, so did the commemorative marchers.

"To complement their aching bodies, the marchers' fragile psyches were beset by a string of disappointments. . . And the rumors began to circulate that President Ford's attendance at Kings Mountain was in question. He had, after all, in September suffered the indignation of two assassination attempts. His handlers were not letting him out of Washington. He offered in his stead a visit by Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller." Despite the doubts and disappointments, when the time came, the marchers and the marchers and thanked them Vice President made some local history of their own.

"On October 7, 1975, the commemorative marchers walked through Kings Mountain, North Carolina, to the cheers of some 20-25 thousand spectators," A Volunteer Effort continues. "Then they made their way into John Gamble Stadium where 6,000 were admitted to witness the proceedings. Governor Jim Holshouser was there along with Mayor John Henry Moss. U.S. Representatives James T. Broyhill and Jim Martin had flown by helicopter with the Vice President from Charlotte Douglas Airport. The presiding speaker acknowledged the marchers who had spent 12 days walking from Sycamore Shoals and Fort Defiance. When called upon, the marchers in turn presented the Bible, the horn and the scroll to Vice President Rockefeller. Signaling the end of one part of the march, Bob Harman blew the hunting horn one last time before handing it to the Vice President. . . . Rockefeller praised the for the mementos saying, "This is one of the luckiest days of my life. Frankly, ladies and gentlemen, this

is America at its best."

It was a bold idea, and it became a memorable day for the City of Kings Mountain. It was the beginning of a five-year effort to bring about the Congressional designation of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, a unit of the National Park Service, now celebrating its own centennial.

Learn more my taking the free Online Tour of the OVNHT accessible from www.OVTA.org. Also accessible at www.danielboonefootsteps.com.

(Randell Jones is a past president of the OVTA and author of A Volunteer Effort (2005) as well as the award winning book, Before They Were Heroes at King's Mountain (2011). His books are available at Eastern National book stores along the trail and at www.danielboonefootsteps.com. He will speak at the Old Burke County Courthouse in Morganton on Saturday, September 26, at 7:00pm as part of Historic Burke Foundation's Revolutionary War Week.)

## Inspections

**Cleveland County Health** Department conducted inspections of facilities Sept. 7-11, 2015 and included the following businesses that serve food: Holiday Inn Express, Woodlake Parkway, 98; Pho 98 Asian Cuisine, E. Gold Street, 94; Quality Inn · breakfast, York Rd., 97.5; and Sub Factory, S. Battleground ave., 99.

## **Museum program in Dallas, September 26**

Kristina L. Horton will talk about her new book, "Martyr of Loray Mill", the Legacy of Ella Mae Wiggins, her great-grandmother at the cen-

ter of the infamous Textile Worker's labor strike in 1929 in Gaston County, on Saturday, Sept. 26, from 1-2 p.m. at the Gaston County Museum

of Art & History, 130 W. Main St., Dallas. Artist Tammy Cantrell will talk briefly on her photographic series depicting old textile mills which is on

display in the museum. The program is free to the public. For reservations email jason. luker@gastongov.com or call 704-922-7681x105.

