

SYCAMORE SHOALS CELEBRATION
Johnson City, TN
Sep. 16 – 18, 2009

From Sycamore Shoals, they rode their horses over the mountains until they met up with Lt. Col. Frederick Hambright, leader of the Lincoln Co., N.C. militia at Cowpens, SC, along with other groups from Virginia, Georgia, Virginia and South Carolina. From the 1,100 some men, the leaders selected just over 900 men with the best horses for the Oct. 7, 1780 attack of Ferguson, who was dug in atop Kings Mountain. They rode for 36 straight hours, then entered the battle immediately upon their arrival at Kings Mountain. Their victory was the turning point in the American Revolutionary War.

We were here to commemorate these brave Over The Mountain Men. Ronnie Lail was Chairman. In addition to the 20 some color guardsmen, most of whom were dressed as backwoodsmen, there was a 10 man fife and drum corps. There were about 60 participants in the grand stands. It was a bright sunny day. After the formalities were over, I was introduced. Before I gave my remarks, I presented a Meritorious Service Medal to to John Echerd. My remarks were as follows:

It is a pleasure to return to my original home state. Just a few miles from here on the banks of the Watauga River is the town of Butler. Although my direct Butler ancestors migrated directly from Montgomery Co., NC, my collateral ancestors settled this nearby community.

To talk about the events we commemorate today, we must examine what had been going on. The patriots suffered a huge defeat at Charleston, only to be followed by another English victory at Camden. Many patriots had felt so down trodden they surrendered their arms and took parole from the king's troops. The minor victory at Musgrave's Mill gave the Over The Mountain Men hope that they could win. Shelby and Sevier sent out word for all men of fighting age to meet here on Sept. 25, 1780. It was a hard ride over the mountains to Cowpens, where they met up with Lt. Col. Frederick Hambright, leader of the Lincoln Co., NC Militia, and other units from Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina. Divided into 8 fighting groups, they surrounded King's Mountain and defeated Ferguson in about an hour.

Who were these Over The Mountain Men? It is interesting to understand their background.

Certainly, they were strong willed individuals. The king had ordered that no colonists should attempt to settle lands over the Allegheny Mountains. These men, in search for land, disregarded the king's injunction to make a home on the Watauga River.

They were very independent. With only a few weapons and some basic tools, they carved homesteads out of the wilderness. The men were able to live off the land.

In order to eat they had to be skilled marksmen. They ate deer, elk, bear and small game. Since they were frequently attacked by savage Indians, they had to be good shots for self preservation.

These men and women were very strong. They cleared trees, built cabins, planted and harvested crops, and labored from before sunup until long after sundown..

They had to be brave to constantly face the savage Indians and wild beasts. They did not hesitate to go after the British troops, who threatened their livelihood and freedom. Many of these pioneers were also statesmen. The Watauga Settlement had its own democratic government. Others who fought at King's Mountain, like Frederick Hambright, were members of the Committees of Safety and provisional governments formed by those seeking independence.

Clearly, they were all volunteers, and all of them were patriots.

The second question to be answered is what was their background before arriving in what is now East Tennessee? If you look at the Shenandoah Valley, through which many of these men traveled, you see Scottish communities, German towns, Irish settlements, and English areas. The churches tell the tale: Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist and Anglican. The Wataugans were also a mixture of cultures, who had learned to live together and respect other cultures.

Who were they to become?

Davy Crockett's father, John, fought under Col. Hambright at King's Mountain. Davy became a Tennessee Congressman, and a legend. John Sevier, first Governor of Tennessee, became a powerful leader, as did Shelby, the first Governor of Kentucky, Davidson, who settled Nashville, and others. If we compare the roster of the Over The Mountain Men, with the list of 95 counties in Tennessee, we see that many of the counties were named after these heroes. Many Tennessee cities were also named after these fighting men. These men became the leaders in Tennessee in city, county and state government.

Many of their descendants fought for Texas independence, some of whom fought and died at the Alamo.

Finally, I want to talk about the women of the Watauga Settlement. None of the books about the Battle of King's Mountain or the Over The Mountain Men give much lip service to the women. Just to live on the frontier, the women had to be tough. Many worked as hard as a mule, side by side with their men. In addition, they cooked, washed and tended to the children. They were the fabric that kept the family together. When defending against the Indians, they loaded the rifles, tended the wounded and passed around water. One woman produced 500 pounds of gun powder for the Kings Mountain battle. So, historians need to recognize the contribution of the women on the frontier. There were Molly Pitchers in every campaign.

Thank you for inviting Robin and I to participate in this ceremony. I am impressed by the pageantry. I am proud to assist in honoring our ancestors for this historic event.