

From Cane Creek to Kings Mountain

— A Collection of First-Person Narratives of the Events Before, During, and After the Battles of Cane Creek and the Battle of Kings Mountain

By W.F. Brown, III

Much has been written about the Kings Mountain Campaign and battle over the past two hundred plus years, with Lyman C. Draper's work being the primary source of information. Along with what has been written, many "local historical folklore stories" have woven their way into the narrative and, as a result, those stories have become so imbedded into the narrative of Kings Mountain it is hard to separate fact from fiction. As historians, we should always strive to go to first-person primary source documentation whenever telling and retelling the story of Kings Mountain.

The following excerpts are from the book, "Narrative of the Battle of Kings Mountain" by Captain David Vance. These excerpts provide a rather detailed accounting of the events and actions prior to the Battle of Kings Mountain (7 October 1780). The book itself is a rather long read, but I believe it is well worth the time to have the insight from two very influential individuals, Joseph McDowell (Johns River) and David Vance who were there and who wrote of the events cited less than 20 years from when they actually occurred. To fully understand the significance of the quotes from McDowell and Vance, some background information is needed.

In 1799, the General Assembly of North Carolina made an agreement with that of Tennessee to run and mark the boundary line between the two States. North Carolina appointed Joseph McDowell and David Vance as commissioners on the part of North Carolina, and John Strother and Robert Henry as surveyors. During the course of the survey expedition, there were many questions relating to the Kings Mountain Campaign of the Fall of 1780. David Vance, in consultation with Joseph McDowell, penned in his own hand, a narrative of the actions that transpired prior to and during the battle. The quotes below are those recorded by David Vance in consultation with Joseph McDowell.

David Vance gives some background information:

As I have in some measure to depend on my memory, I will begin with Col. Shelby's retreat after his defeating the British at Ennoree. Col. Charles McDowell had detached Shelby, Sevier, &c., with a party to go round where Ferguson was camped—who defeated the British and Tories at Ennoree. When Col. McDowell received intelligence of Gate's defeat, and sent an express to Col. Shelby to retreat, Gen. Joseph McDowell was then Major, and I was Captain. Col. Shelby called a council of all his officers to know what was best to do. It was agreed that we must make a wood's trip to get round Ferguson and join Col. C. McDowell, carrying the prisoners alternately on horseback, and running on foot short distances. After going some distance, found that Col. C. McDowell had left his camp, and was retreating towards Gilbert Town, we altered our course and overtook him and the main army.

David Vance describes the plans to attack Ferguson:

After joining Col. C. McDowell, it was proposed by Cols. Shelby and Sevier that they thought an army of volunteers could be raised to defeat Ferguson, stating that Ferguson's main business was to kill the Whig stock; that he would be at the heads of Broad River, and then go to the head of Catawba to execute that purpose, which would give time to raise an army of volunteers over the mountains, and in Wilkes and Surry counties. All the officers, and some of the privates were consulted, and all agreed that it was right to make the trial to raise an army. It was then agreed that the prisoners should be sent to Virginia; that Cols. Shelby and Sevier and their men should immediately go over the Mountains home and procure volunteers; that Col. Chas. McDowell should send an express to Cols. Cleveland and Herndon in Wilkes for them to raise volunteers; and that Col. C. McDowell should provide some way to preserve the Whig stock on the head of Catawba, and provide some way also to give intelligence of Ferguson's movements.

David Vance describes the way information was shared between the militia commanders:

James Jack and Archibald Nail were appointed to be news-bearers over the Yellow Mountains to Shelby and were to be passing continually—that they were to receive the news in the Turkey Cove relative to Ferguson's movements. That Joseph Dobson and James McKay were to be bearers of the like news to Cols. Cleveland and Herndon, and that they were to receive their news at the Montgomery place, afterwards Joseph Dobson's place. Col. Ben. Cleveland appointed his brother, Robert Cleveland and Gideon Lewis, our pilot, to be news-bearers from B. Cleveland to Shelby. Thus the news went the rounds as fast as horses could carry their riders.

David Vance describes the plans for the meeting of the various militias:

The news was on its passage to Shelby and Cleveland as soon as the breath left Ferguson's mouth—it did not stop day or night—it was soon at the place of destination. Immediately Shelby directed Campbell and his men to meet him at a given time at Wautaga and Sevier to meet him and Campbell at ten o'clock on a given day at the Spring in the Bald Ground, on the Yellow Mountain, at the side of Bright's path—all of which were done with great exactness. He issued orders for Cleveland and Herndon to meet him on a given day on Silver Creek, in Burke county; and ordered D. Smith, J. McDowell, Lytle, Patton, and those who had taken protection, to meet him at Wm. Nail's by a given night, which was the night next after the meeting on the Yellow Mountain.

David Vance relates that Col. Charles McDowell was sent to deliver an express to Gen. Gates requesting an officer be appointed to lead the combined militias on their campaign to attack Ferguson:

When the officers met at the Spring on the Yellow Mountain, it was quickly agreed that they would send Col. Charles McDowell with an express to Gen. Gates, for him to send an experienced officer to conduct them in a battle with Ferguson, and as soon as Chas. McDowell, with his silver-mounted Tom. Simpson rifle, had disappeared, steering for the path on the Linville Ridge, the army descended the Mountain on Bright's path and went to Wm. Nail's that night where they met Daniel Smith, Thomas Lytle, Joseph McDowell and Robert Patton, the persons who had driven the whig stock into the coves under the eave of the Black Mountains, and also those who had taken protection. When it was agreed, that D. Smith, T. Lytle and J. McDowell should remain at the head of the river, as they were considered equal to a small army against Indians; and that the Indians were expected to fall on the frontiers as soon as Ferguson left it; and that they should have those who had taken protection to assist them. It was agreed that Joseph McDowell, (now Gen.) should take twenty men with him, and follow Ferguson's trail for fear of surprise—who at the head of Silver Creek, near the Pilot Mountain, came on a squad of Tories who were designing to follow Ferguson, and killed some of them and put the rest to flight and returned to the army in the morning after staying the night at Wm. Nail's.ⁱ

David Vance describes the place where all the combined militias were to meet:

The army marched in to Silver Creek, and at the place appointed met Cols. Cleveland and Herndon so exactly that it scarcely occasioned a halt—proceeding on to Cane Creek of Broad River at a place afterwards called Probit's place.

Contained within Vance's narrative is the statement by Joseph McDowell (of Johns River) summarizing the Kings Mountain Campaign and Battle. In the words of Joseph McDowell:

At the time when the news of Gates' defeat reached Col. Charles McDowell, he had detached Cols. Shelby and Sevier to go round Ferguson's camp to dislodge some British and Tories on the Ennoree, near to Ninety-Six. He then sent an express to Shelby to take care of himself, for Gates was defeated. Whereupon Shelby made the best of his way round Ferguson, and fell in with Charles McDowell and the main body, retreating towards Gilbert Town. Then it was suggested by Shelby, that a sufficient force could be raised over the Mountains, with the assistance from Wilkes and Surry counties, to defeat Ferguson. This was agreed to by all the officers present. The troops were raised without Government orders; each man had to furnish his own provisions, arms, ammunition, horse, and all his equipage, without the value of a gun flint from the public; without pay, or expectation of pay or reward, even to the amount of a Continental dollar depreciated to eight hundred to one. They were all volunteers; they were under no compulsion to go, but each man in advance consulted his own courage, well knowing he was going to fight before his return. They started in a rainy, inclement season of the year, without baggage wagon, pack-horse, or tent cloth, across the most rugged bar of mountains in the State, and almost pathless, having only a hunter's trail to travel, followed Ferguson through all his windings; at length over took him at King's Mountain, where he boasted the morning of the battle, that "he was on King's Mountain, and that he was king of that Mountain, and that God Almighty could not drive him from it." There we over-hauled him, fought him two to one—hence their fire was double that of ours; yet we killed 287 of them, to 143 they killed of us. Yet the fate of nations and of battles turn on a pivot. Ferguson, a prudent officer, finding himself beset and surrounded on all sides, ordered his regulars, who had muskets and bayonets, to charge bayonets on Major Chronicle's South Fork boys: The regulars having discharged their muskets at a short distance with effect, in turn the Fork Boys discharged their rifles with fatal effect, and retreated, keeping before the points of the bayonets about twenty feet, until they loaded again, when they discharged their rifles, each man dropping his man. This was treatment that British courage could not stand; they in turn retreated with precipitation; then the flag was hoisted, and all was over.

First-Person Descriptions of the Battle of Cane Creek and the Route Taken From the Cane Creek Battle to the Watauga

From the Diary of Captain Alexander Chesney. excerpted from “King's Mountain Battle, as Seen by a British Officer,” by Samuel G. Williams, as printed in the “Tennessee Historical Magazine” (edition of April, 1921), comes the following interesting information about an action that occurred along the Catawba River in Burke County immediately following the Battle of Cane Creek.

This diary entry is the first I've heard of any battle (“action” would be a more appropriate description) that took place between the British/Loyalist forces and the Patriot Militia other than the Cane Creek battle. From the description Capt. Chesney gives, it would appear this action on the Catawba with the rear guard of McDowell would have been in the general vicinity of where the North Fork enters the Catawba (near present-day Black Bear Cove). I've read reference to “an affair at Allen's place” that took place about the same time as the Cane Creek battle. Could this possibly be the same action or is it something different? Chesney begins with a brief description of the Cane Creek battle that took place on 12 September 1780, then goes on to describe an action with McDowell's rear guard.

From Capt. Alexander Chesney's diary:

Col. Ferguson soon afterwards got intelligence that Col. McDole [McDowell] was encamped on Cane and Silver Creeks, on which we marched toward the enemy, crossed the winding creek 23 times found the rebels strongly posted toward the head of it toward the mountain. We attacked them instantly, and after a determined resistance defeated them, and made many prisoners. The rest fled towards Turkey Cove in order to cross the mountains and get to the Holston settlements.

On this occasion I commanded a division and took the person prisoner, who was the keeper of the records of the county which I sent to my fathers as a place of safety. We then fortified Coll. Walker's house as a protection to the wounded, and proceeded in pursuit of the rebels to the mountains on Cataba river, sending out detachments to search the country and caves.

A fight happened in the neighborhood between a detachment of ours and the Americans who were posted on a broken hill not accessible to horses, which obliged us to dismount, and leave our horses behind. Whilst employed in dislodging the Americans, another party of them got around and took all the horses, mine among the rest; but it was returned by the person who was my prisoner in the last affairs; about a week before he was released, as was usual at this time with prisoners.

From the “Diary of Lieut. Anthony Allaire of Ferguson's Corps” comes the following information. The diary is reprinted in Draper's book “Kings Mountain and its Heroes” and gives a first-person account of the actions preceding (and following) the Battle of Kings Mountain. The diary entries for 13 September 1780 to 19 September 1780, copied below, provide some very interesting information about our local area. The entry for 12 September is an accounting of the battle at Cane Creek between Ferguson's forces and the Burke County Militia under command of Col. Charles McDowell. Allaire wrote:

***Tuesday, 12th.* Maj. Ferguson, with forty American Volunteers and one hundred militia, got in motion at two o'clock in the morning, and marched fourteen miles through the mountains to the head of Cane creek, in Burke County, in order to surprise a party of Rebels we heard lay there. Unfortunately for us, they had by some means got intelligence of our coming, in consequence of which, Mr. McDowell, with three hundred infamous villains like himself, thought it highly necessary to remove their quarters. However, we were lucky enough to take a different route from what they expected, and met them on their way, and to appearance one would have thought they meant sincerely to fight us, as they drew up on an eminence for action. On our approach they fired and gave way. We totally routed them, killed one private, wounded a Capt. White, took seventeen prisoners, twelve horses, all their ammunition, which was only twenty pounds of powder, after which we marched to their encampment, and found it abandoned by those Congress heroes. Our**

loss was two wounded and one killed. Among the wounded was Capt. Dunlap, who received two slight wounds. After the skirmish we returned to one Allen's to refresh ourselves. We got in motion about four o'clock in the afternoon, and countermarched about six miles to a Rebel Mr. Jones', where we halted all night.

Wednesday, 13th. Got in motion about eight o'clock in the morning and continued countermarching to a Rebel Col. Walker's plantation where we met Capt. Ryerson and Lieut. Fletcher with the remainder of the American Volunteers and militia. Here we took up our ground, very much fatigued with our enterprise.

Thursday, 14th. Lay still at Col. Walker's. The poor, deluded people of this Province begin to be sensible of their error, and come in very fast. Maj. Ferguson, with thirty American Volunteers, and three hundred militia, got in motion at six o'clock, and marched to the head of Cane creek, and halted at one Wilson's.

Friday, 15th. Capt. DePeyster and I, who remained at Col. Walker's with the remainder of the American Volunteers and militia, got in motion at six o'clock in the morning, and marched twelve miles to one Bowman's, near the head of Cane creek, and halted. This creek is so amazingly crooked that we were obliged to cross it nineteen times in marching four miles. Mrs. Bowman is an exceedingly obliging woman. She had a child about four years old, who had smoked tobacco almost three years. At four o'clock in the afternoon got in motion, and marched a mile and a half to Wilson's, where we joined Maj. Ferguson. At ten o'clock in the evening we got in motion, with the American Volunteers and five hundred militia, leaving Capt. Ryerson and Lieut. Fletcher, with two hundred militia, to guard the baggage, and marched fifteen miles to one John Forsyth's, on the banks of the Catawba, to surprise Col. McDowell. We arrived there about six o'clock in the morning of the 16th. Col. McDowell had left this place the 14th. We countermarched to one Devore's, and halted to refresh ourselves. At three o'clock got in motion; marched to Pleasant Garden Ford, Catawba river; forded it, and continued our march to one George Cathy's plantation, about a mile and a half from Devore's. Pleasant Garden is a very handsome place. I was surprised to see so beautiful a tract of land in the mountains. This settlement is composed of the most violent Rebels I ever saw, particularly the young ladies.

Sunday, 17th. Got in motion and marched two miles to Buck's creek, forded it, and continued our march two miles farther to a Rebel Maj. Davidson's plantation, and halted.

Monday, 18th. Got in motion, countermarched to Buck creek, forded it, and proceeded on five miles to Richey's Ford, on Catawba river, forded it, and marched to a Rebel Alexander Thompson's plantation, six miles farther, and halted.

Tuesday, 19th. Got in motion at five o'clock in the morning, and marched about eleven miles to a Rebel Mr. Hemphill's plantation, and halted. At seven o'clock in the evening, I went about a mile and joined Capt. Ryerson and the militia under his command.

Using other first-person period documentation sources (i.e. land grants, Revolutionary War pension statements), as well as information contained in Lyman Draper's book "Kings Mountain and Its Heroes", I have attempted to trace Lt. Allaire's route relative to present-day locations.

Allaire wrote:

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John Forsyth's, on the banks of the Catawba ... We countermarched to one Devore's, and halted to refresh ourselves. At three o'clock got in motion; marched to Pleasant Garden Ford, Catawba river; forded it, and continued our march to one George Cathy's plantation, about a mile and a half from Devore's. ... Sunday, 17th. Got in motion and marched two miles to Buck's creek, forded it, and continued our march two miles farther to a Rebel Maj. Davidson's plantation, and halted.

So, Which Way Did They Take From Watauga to Kings Mountain?

Sometimes you need to question history, or at least history as it has been recorded. Much of the history of the Revolutionary War era was written in the 1840s to 1880s period. Often the written history is colored by romanticized ideas. Local history was also a victim of romanization, as well as the heavy influence of outright folklore. However, as a partial defense of written history from that period, the availability and (reasonably) easy access to primary source documents was extremely lacking. We have a great advantage today of a tremendous amount of indexed, digitized, and searchable primary source documentation that was not available to the researchers and writers of over 100 to 150 plus years ago. The story of the route of the Overmountain Men from where they split their forces at Grassy Creek and the routes the two forces took after that split is a prime example.

Here are the points supported by primary source documentation:

1. Forces under Charles McDowell engaged with the forces of Patrick Ferguson under the command of James Dunlap at the head of Cane Creek on 12 September 1780.
2. Following the engagement on Cane Creek, McDowell withdrew to Watauga.
3. During McDowell's absence, Ferguson's forces operated up and down the Catawba River from Pleasant Gardens to Quaker Meadows.
4. After combining forces with Campbell, Shelby, Sevier, et al, McDowell began his return from across the mountains.
5. While at Grassy Creek, the Patriot forces split due to concerns that Ferguson may be on his way across the mountains, and it was unknown what route Ferguson may take. Part of the Patriot forces went into North Cove and eventually to Quaker Meadows and part of the Patriot forces went through Turkey Cove.

Here is where I have begun questioning the “accepted” history of the route of the Overmountain Men:

ACCORDING TO DRAPER, the part of the Patriot forces that went through Turkey Cove went down the North Fork of the Catawba to the Catawba River, then down the Catawba to the confluence of the Linville River where they met the Patriot forces that had gone across the mountain from North Cove. Then the reunited forces continued to Quaker Meadows.

After giving this a lot of thought, I began asking myself why, if they thought Ferguson was still at Gilberttown, would the Patriots leave unchecked the exposed route from Cane Creek to Pleasant Gardens? After all, this was the route McDowell advanced to Cane Creek on and the route that Ferguson's forces used to go into Pleasant Gardens after McDowell retreated. If the Patriots were concerned about Ferguson crossing the mountains to the point that they split their forces at Grassy Creek, it just doesn't make sense they would completely ignore the route from Pleasant Gardens to Cane Creek.

Reading some of the correspondence that Draper had with Samuel McDowell Tate in 1880, it is apparent that Draper had at one time thought some of the Patriot forces did in fact go from Turkey Cove to Pleasant Gardens and then rendezvous with the larger Patriot forces that had continued to Quaker Meadows and joined with Cleveland and others. Why Draper eventually did not include this in his work on Kings Mountain is not known. Here is a sampling of Tate's correspondence to Draper:

... As to the route of Sevier. At first I concluded he started from the other side with the purpose of joining the other forces at Quaker Meadows, knowing the enemy was at Gilbertown. This would have been the most secure place to fix upon as a rendezvous in advance, and a good point from which to move upon the enemy whether he remained at Gilbertown or moved in any direction. But, if Sevier should have been late getting over and was pressed for time to reach McDowell & Campbell who had moved forward toward Gilbertown, then he would have crossed South from Wofford's. You can judge the way.¹

Tate goes on to further postulate the route the second column of Patriots may have taken:

I rather think the party came through Gillespie gap and down by Wofford's Fort crossing the Catawba at Pleasant Gardens and across to Bedford Hill. This would have been a direct route for them. Couriers could have kept all hands posted of movements of respective bodies till they got together - and they all knew that Ferguson was at Gilbert town.²

¹ Letter from Samuel McDowell Tate to Lyman C. Draper dated 29 September 1880

² Letter from Samuel McDowell Tate to Lyman C. Draper dated 29 September 1880

Here Are a Few First-Person Accounts that May Challenge the Often-told Story of the Route

Reading through some of the old pension application statements from the men who were there at the time, it would appear that there was a rendezvous of forces at the head of Cane Creek with the main group that met up at Quaker Meadows. Here is a sampling of those men's statements.

The Revolutionary War Pension Application statement of Abiud Fairchild (S15420) is one more "eyewitness" that suggests Campbell's forces may not have crossed the Catawba at Greenlee Ford (Quaker Meadows in Morganton), but might have crossed at Pleasant Gardens and continued down in the general vicinity of what is today's NC 226 to Cane Creek. In the words of Abiud Fairchild:

... joined his company at Wilkesboro in Wilkes County, on or about the 1st day of September, 1780. From Wilkesboro we marched on to Krider's Fort in Burke County, N. C. where we remained two or three weeks and then marched up and crossed the Catawba River at Greenleaf Ford [Greenlee's Ford], near Morgantown. From there we marched to the head of Cane Creek a branch of Little Broad River. Between Greenleaf Ford and the head of Cane Creek we fell in with the Virginia troops under command of Colonel Campbell.

Pension Application of Jonathan Fugate (R3825):

He entered the service as a volunteer from Roanoke [River] above the mouth of Dan River, State of Virginia about the 15 of Sept 1780 and joined the company of Capt. John Edmonson and marched to Gilberttown where I joined the main army where a force was collecting to oppose the Tories; from there we were marched to Kings Mountain where we had an engagement with the Tories who were commanded by Ferguson we were placed in three divisions; the division to which I belonged was commanded by Col. Campbell the other two Divisions if I recollect right were commanded by Colonels Cleveland and Shelby in this action we were the victors having completely defeated the enemy and take a great many prisoners. This happened sometime in Oct, 1780 the day of the month not now recollected; after this I was marched back through the country with a small detachment and discharged at Staunton some time between the middle and late December but of the day I have now no recollection ...

Actions Along the Catawba River and Linville River During the Kings Mountain Campaign

Here is an interesting account of actions that took place in Burke County during the summer and fall of 1780. The account given in the Pension Application of Johnson Womack (S32577) describes the mustering of Militia at Pleasant Gardens prior to the action at Cane Creek (12 September 1780), the retreat from Cane Creek, and the return across the mountains on the way to the Battle of Kings Mountain. Of special interest is Womack's description of encamping for several days in "Linville Cove" and then being dispatched up the Catawba River in search of a Tory party. From Womack's Pension statement:

...entered into the service of the United States a private in the volunteer militia company of Horse men or mounted Gun-men commanded by Captain Jonathan Kemp, at an old field Captain Kemp's muster ground, near Pleasant Gardens on the Catawba River in the County of Burke and State of North Carolina ... That from thence he proceeded in said company under command of Captain Kemp to Caney Creek a branch of Broad River near the County line of Rutherford County where said company rendezvoused and remained several days, and where, with other companies, comprehending in all about three hundred men, placed under command of Colonel Charles McDowell. Whilst at said rendezvous, receiving intelligence that Colonel Ferguson commanding a

superior force of British and Tories, was marching to attack us, we retreated in the direction of the Watauga River about five miles, where we were overtaken and fired on by a detachment from Ferguson's division commanded by Major Dunlap. We returned their fire, but being unable to contend with so superior a force, we retreated to the Powder Mills on a Creek near the Watauga River where we joined a Virginia Regiment commanded by Colonel Campbell. In this little engagement, we had one man killed (Peter Branks) and we took three prisoners, one a Dragoon, and the others private Tories. From the Powder Mills we proceeded under command of Colonels Campbell and McDowell southward, over a mountainous country to a place called Linville-Cove on the waters of the Catawba River where we encamped for some days. From Linville-Cove, Captain Kemp's company was detached up the Catawba in quest of a Tory party under Captain Branham; upon our approach Branham's party retreated and we rejoined Colonels Campbell and McDowell about forty miles from Linville Cove. In the meantime, receiving a large reinforcement, Colonels Campbell and McDowell no longer avoided an engagement with Ferguson; but marched in pursuit ...

Pension application of Mathew Kuykendall (S30518):

... he volunteered under Capt. Joseph McDowell of the Burke County Militia, where he resided, and served until after the battle of Kings Mountain, as a private, but does not recollect the day. That he served in said company under Col. Charles McDowell (afterwards General) and joined him at the head of Cane Creek, in Burke County – where he was in an engagement with a party of British and Tories under Dunlap and was defeated by them. That after the defeat, he marched up Catawba River, to Catha's where he remained a few days, until they heard of the British and Tories under Ferguson being in pursuit, when he crossed the Blue Ridge to Yellow Mountain, and thence to Watauga River – where he remained until joined by the troops of Cols. Campbell, Shelby and Sevier and then marched back across Catawba River to Kings Mountain, where Ferguson was defeated, but was not in the engagement in consequence of having gotten leave of absence to see his family as he passed through the county, and as he returned to rejoin his company, he met Col. Charles McDowell, who informed him that he need not proceed, as there would be no fighting until his return. He, Col. McDowell, was then on his way to see Gen. Rutherford to procure an appointment for one of the said Colonels to command the expedition, but in his absence they attacked and defeated Ferguson at Kings Mountain – about eight miles from which place, and after the battle, he re-joined his company under Capt. Joseph McDowell. That he marched with the prisoners through Burke County to Wilkes County, where some of the Tories were hanged, and others paroled – when the troops were disbanded, he having served about four months ...

Pension application of Alexander Kelso (W9493):

This declarant says he volunteered on or about the first of September in the year not recollected the battle was at Kings Mountain; that he marched under the command of Colonel Isaac Shelby, the Major's name was Evan Shelby, the Captain's name was George Maxwell, Lieutenant and Ensign not recollected. We marched from Sullivan County in the boundary of North Carolina towards the mountains on to a River called Watauga where we lay one or two days and then we marched into the mountains and crossed the same where we went into what was called Ferguson's trail and then pursued after the British and continued to the Cowpens and continued to pursue until we overtook the British, it being the 7th day of October at a place called Kings Mountain at which place we had an engagement with the said British Army at which time and place they were defeated by the Americans in which battle the Americans wounded, killed and took prisoners all of the said British Army. That night we lay on the battleground it being nearly night when the battle was ended. The next morning it being Sabbath morning we marched with the prisoners up toward the mountains until we came to a place farm called Walker's, there we lay one or two days and the officers held a court-martial for the purpose of trying the Tories at which place and time the court condemned about 70 and hung about 9 or 10 of the Tories until they were dead. From thence we marched on with the prisoners until we came into a County called Wilkes in the State of North Carolina and there we lay one or two days with the prisoners and was then dismissed by the officers of the Army

Pension application of William Mitchell (S4221):

we heard that Major Ferguson had embodied about two thousand Tories. We also heard that Cols Campbell & Shelby with their regiments were coming across the mountain to join Col. Cleveland to attach Ferguson. Col. Williams' Regiment also marched forward to unite with them and in Oct. 1780 we all united near Galberton [sic, Gilberttown] an obscure village near the South Carolina line. We then made a forced march to overtake Ferguson at a place called the Fish dam ford where we understood he was encamped but when we arrived there we learned he had moved his camp for Kings Mountain. We then doubled our diligence because we learned he was aiming to join the main army at Charlotte. We arrived at the foot of Kings Mountain in sight of the enemy about two hours by sun in the morning and immediately surrounded. The mountain and the battle commenced & in which our Col. James Williams fell the result of the battle is known to the country by history and need not be here stated. The next day we took up our retreat in consequence of having learned that Tarlton was on his way to attack us. We made a powerful march in consequence of which we lost many of the prisoners. We then turned our course along the foot of the range of the Blue Ridge and recrossed the Yadkin [River] at the Shallow ford and took our prisoners to the Moravian Town where they were guarded for a long time & in consequence of Col. Campbell's, Shelby's & Sevier's Regiments had left us we were detained several weeks after the expiration of this tour designed for the expedition at first.

Pension application of Isaac Walker (S3446):

We marched from Wilkes County to Burke County N. C. where we remained several days, we then marched to Broad River North Carolina where we formed a Junction with Col Campbell who commanded the Western troops; from Broad River we marched to King's Mountain. I was in that Battle, we marched all night preceding the battle and made the attack about day break in the morning the battle continued I think two or three hours, we killed Col. Ferguson and took a great many prisoners both British regulars & Tories from King's Mountain we marched on through Burke County, delivered up the prisoners at the Moravian Town and was discharged at the Moravian Town, from this place every man the best of his way home.

Pension application of John Michael Smithpeter (W3730):

That he returned home & married & remained at home until the news of the approach of Ferguson & his army, when all the Militia was called upon & he was drafted to go on said expedition to intercept said Ferguson & was enrolled under Capt. Valentine Sevier, & was in the command of Col. Sevier & joined the army under Cols. Campbell from Virginia, Shelby from (what is now Sullivan) & Sevier's men at Gap Creek, and marched across the Yellow Mountain & passed through Burke & Rutherford & fell in with Cleveland's Militia & marched under Col. Campbell (who had the head command to Kings Mountain & there engaged the Army under Col. Ferguson drawn up on the top of the Mountain. which They surrounded the mountain and killed & captured the whole Army (Ferguson himself having fallen) after which he was marched home & discharged (verbally) by said Capt. Valentine Sevier, & was three months in said campaign.

Pension application of Obadiah M. Bengé (R743):

He resided when called into service in Surry County in the State of North Carolina. He remained under the said Captain Sheppard as a mounted man, scouting and ranging through the said County of Surry and the adjoining Country for the purpose of counteracting the operations of the Tories, until the fall of the same year, when he with his company was marched for Kings Mountain in the State of South Carolina, and on the way in Burke County in the State of North Carolina, they were joined by other troops for the same point, on meeting said troops in Burke County, he, was there by consent of the captains transferred to the company of Captain McDowell or Captain White, one being a Lieutenant and the other a Captain, but he is not now able to say which was Captain & which Lieutenant. This transfer was made on account of this declarant's having an older brother in the company to which he was transferred. Here his Colonel was Benjamin Cleveland, we were then

marched to Kings Mountain, which this Declarant thinks is in South Carolina, and on their approach to Kings Mountain they were joined by other troops under Colonel Shelby and Colonel Campbell, and in October or November, he under Colonel Cleveland, went into the Battle of Kings Mountain. He was in the front rank, marched up a Hollow towards the enemy and the Battle began, and when this Declarant had his gun to his face for the 3rd or 4th fire, he received a wound in his right arm which entered near the body on the inside and near the body, the ball ranged back under his shoulder blade where it yet remains, and from which he is to a great extent has ever since been a cripple, after the Battle was over and on the following day, his said brother being killed in the same, this Declarant was taken to the house of a distant relative about four miles distant from the Battleground where he remained about 3 months.

Pension application of John Scott (S32509):

in the Month of August we received orders to March for South Carolina in pursuit of Col Forgason a British commander having a large body of British & Torys under his command, and we marched into North Carolina (now the East end of Tennessee) and there incamped until Col Seveir & Col Isaac Shelby made up their troops & there they joined us & amduately [sic, immediately] we were marched passing over the mountains in and threw Rutherford County from thence into the South & down the South side of Broad River to the Cowpens & there receiving information that the Enmmoney [sic, enemy] was lying at the Cherrikee Ford on said River we tharefore marched for that place and continued our line of March all night but the enemy having removed we therefore without receiving any refreshments continued our line of March and on Kings Mountain we came up with the Ennemy and kild their commander & a number of his soldiers and made prisoners of the residue of them and took their waggons from them. This however was not done without some loss on our side there was twenty one or there about killed on our side, amongst the slain was Captain William Edmiston, Reece Bowen & John Baty & the wounded not recollected and after Berryng [sic, burying] our dead we employed those wagons to carry our wounded back to Col Walker's on Broad River to which place we were marched the prisoners and our officers there, holding a council it was thought proper, to burn the wagons, and having received proper Testamoney, against one Col. Mills (a Tory officer) and six of his adherents, they were adjudged guilty of Murder, and by us immediately hanged & heare we ware to leave our wounded, but a young man by the name of Israel Highter being shot through the thy he desired is taken along the Mountain until Dutch Gap as he could cross at and I with two others was appointed to this duty, all of which I promptly performed and the battle of King's Mountain being on the Sixth day of October 1780 [sic, October 7, 1780] I therefore was not able to reach home until the last of November, my way being impeded in cosiquence of danger, at times, and, the bad Situation of the wounded man, and my fellow soldiers started home at the same time I started with the young man and having returned home and previous to dismission, my before named Col. Campbell gave orders for two companies of his Mounted Volunteers to keep them Selves in readiness to march, I having all the while, and in all the before named services belonged to Captain Dysart's company of Mounted Volunteers and so I continued and we killed our Selves in readiness to march

Pension application of Joseph Dunn (S12811):

After remaining there sometime, expecting the arrival of Major Dunlap, a British officer, some of the light horse (having been on active service some time) was permitted to return home for a few days on parole. But the same evening Dunlap made his appearance, and instantly attacked McDowell & Hampton, and gained some advantage. Those permitted to return home, hearing of the affair, he immediately returned but not in time to aid in the conflict, which was on a stream called Caney [sic, Cane Creek]. After this we marched to the head of Holston, to join in the expedition against Col. Furguson who was conducting a British detachment through the Country. We joined Colonels Clark & Shelby on Holston, and marched into North Carolina. The horse separated from the Main Army just after passing the mountains and were to meet again at a given point, and at a certain time. This was so ordered by the commanding officers for certain purposes. However before the time appointed to meet, the Main Army finding it necessary to hasten the march to come up with Ferguson, passed

the place of meeting before the time, and came up with Ferguson at Kings Mountain, where an engagement was fought, and Ferguson killed, and many prisoners taken. The horse arrived in a short time after the action, and was ordered to take charge of some of the prisoners and conduct them to the Catawba River, which was done, and from thence they were carried Northward. This battle was fought in the fall of 1780 as well as he recollects.

The Revolutionary War Pension Application statement of Samuel Gray (W7574) appears to contradict the long-held belief that all the forces (or at least the majority of the forces) mustered at Quaker Meadows. At the time of his service, Samuel Gray was residing in Wilkes County, NC. In Gray's own words:

... I was drafted for three months and was attached to Captain Richard Allen's Company who was attached to Col. Cleveland's Regiment and were ordered to take up the line of march for Kings Mountain; we were joined at the Pleasant Gardens on our route to Kings Mountain by the Command of Colonel Campbell, from the head of Holston from which place we marched direct to meet Colonel Ferguson; my company was in the engagement, but I was on the morning of the engagement [October 7, 1780]1 detained with a few others on duty at Camp and did not join my Company until after the engagement was ended – from this place we were ordered to guard the prisoners that was taken at the Battle of Kings Mountain we took them to Salem or the Moravian Town where I remained as a guard until the expiration of my term of service where I was discharged.

The Pension Application statement of William Lenoir (S7137) provides some additional insight on the route of march to the Battle of Kings Mountain. Lenoir relates about the plan on the engagement at Little Johns Meeting House (in the present-day location of the community of Gamewell in Caldwell County, NC):

... then advanced considerably further into the County of Burke where they joined a Regiment from Virginia under Colonel Campbell and some militia from the North Western side of the Blue Ridge under the command of Cols Sevier and Shelby, together with the militia of the County of Burke under the command of Col Charles McDowell ...

Lenoir's statement "considerably further into the County of Burke" should be looked at closely, as it is not "considerably further" from Little Johns to Quaker Meadows where tradition holds the big mustering of troops took place. The entire statement from Lenoir relative to Kings Mountain is quoted below:

In the month of August or September 1780, this declarant was ordered by Colonel Benjamin Cleveland to march with his company southwardly against the British & Tories who were harassing the people in that quarter to great extremities. In the County of Burke (an adjacent County) Colonel Cleveland on receiving information that a body of about 100 Tories were in camp at Little John's Meeting House, a few miles in advance of his troops, ordered this declarant to select 75 men well mounted and approach the Tory camp until they could fire upon them and with a strict injunction to retreat without returning the fire in order to draw them into an ambushade which he (Col C.) would form for that purpose. This order however was subsequently countermanded by sending an express after the party before they had reached the Tory camp and with an additional order that all the men should return except five, to be chosen by this declarant, with whom he should proceed and execute the original orders. Upon arriving at the camp, however, this declarant found it entirely abandoned. They then pursued their march until they advanced considerably further into the County of Burke where they joined a Regiment from Virginia under Colonel Campbell and some militia from the North Western side of the Blue Ridge under the command of Cols Sevier and Shelby, together with the militia of the County of Burke under the command of Col Charles McDowell. With these reinforcements they all continued their line of march southwardly, and when they had proceeded into Rutherford County, they received information of the progress and advance of a large body of British and Tories under the command of Col Ferguson. Upon receiving this information, orders were immediately given for every man that had, or could procure, a suitable horse to be ready to march at sunrise the next morning to oppose Col Ferguson. There being no regular officer, or even soldier

except two, belonging to the troops (and they having joined as militia men) nor no militia officer above the grade of Colonel, it was agreed that Col Campbell of Virginia should command the whole detachment. They accordingly took up the line of march at the appointed time (leaving behind all those who had been unable to procure horses) and on the way were joined by some militia from South Carolina under the command of Col. Williams, which augmented their number to about 700 according to the best calculation which this declarant can make (the footmen who were left behind amounting to about 1500); they continued their march all that day and all night, it being very dark and rainy and on the next day (being the 7th of October 1780) attacked Col Ferguson on Kings Mountain near the line between North & South Carolina, and after a hot engagement which lasted about three quarters of an hour, resulted in the total defeat of Col Ferguson and his whole Army, every man of which who was in camp at the commencement of the action being either killed or taken; the killed on the side of the enemy being estimated at two hundred & fifty, and on the side of the Whigs at Thirty two. The remainder of the Army amounting to nine hundred & thirty seven according to the best estimate which could be made from the papers of the commander were detained as prisoners of war. In this action this declarant received to wound from bullets, one in his side, and the other in his arm, and a third bullet passed through his hair above where it was tied. The next day the American army set out upon their return with the prisoners (seven hundred twenty-five of which as counted by this declarant, being able bodied men, exclusive of Officers, wounded, sick &c, were compelled to carry the guns which had been taken, many of them taking two guns each) and proceeded on until they met with the foot men which they had left behind as before mentioned, who were turned about and after a few days march, the Army halted in Rutherford County where a Court martial composed of field officers selected about thirty-two of the most abusive of the Tories who had been taken, and ordered them to be hung. The execution of this order was proceeded in by hanging three at a time until nine were executed when the remainder were respited. The Army then proceeded on their march with the prisoners as far as the Moravian Towns in the County of Stokes, where they were stationed for a considerable time guarding the prisoners and until they were relieved by the substitution of other troops when this declarant with his company returned home. This tour of duty was generally estimated at three months but according to the best recollection of this declarant he was in actual service but Eighty-five days.

The Pension Application statement of Joseph Culton (S16742) gives a somewhat different account and specifically says that there was a mustering of troops at Burke Courthouse. Culton stated he was living in Montgomery County, VA at the time he volunteered for service. In Culton's own words:

Thence they marched across the Yellow Mountain into the State of North Carolina and joined the several regiments commanded by Colonel Isaac Shelby, Colonel John Sevier, Colonel Cleveland, Colonel Williams & Colonel McDowell at Burke Court house. Thence they marched to Kings Mountain and immediately after their arrival there, he was engaged in the memorable battle of Kings Mountain, which he believes was fought on the 7th of October 1780 and the next day after the said battle he assisted in taking the prisoners to the Moravian towns and soon after their arrival at said towns was discharged from Service, and returned home.

Pension application of James Furgason (S1816):

Some time in the summer or fall of 1780, volunteered for three months in a horse Company in Lincoln County North Carolina under Captain Isaac White and Colonel William Grayham: marched to Gilbert town in Rutherford County; there joined the troop from the other side of the mountain and was put under the command of Colonel Williams and marched to Kings Mountain where we overtook Major Ferguson and captured his whole Army.

Pension application of Thomas May (R7057):

That he was born in the year 1755 in Caroline County in the State of Virginia and from said State, I moved to Surry County in the State of North Carolina, and that about the first of September 1780 as well as recollected I entered the service of the United States as a Volunteer under the command of Captain Jesse Franklin who was commanded by Colonel Cleveland and marched from Surry County to near the forks of Broad River and joined Col Campbell and Col Shelby and from thence to the Cowpens, thence to Kings Mountain and was in the Battle of Kings Mountain ...

Pension application of Samuel Vance (S1882):

He again volunteered under Captain Colville and joined Col. William Campbell and Colonel McDowell on Watauga River, who marched them over Yellow Mountain into North Carolina, crossed Broad River and by Cowpens on to King's Mountain where they surprised the British main guard who took them for Tories. They then dismounted and had a sanguinary battle of about one hour perhaps, in which they were completely victorious. This applicant was the officer of the guard of prisoners condemned to be hung, 52 were condemned he thinks but only 9 were hung. He was in that battle and acted at the battle of Kings Mountain as orderly Sergeant. He went with the prisoners taken in this battle as far as Wilkes County N. C. where he was verbally discharged by Colonel Campbell. He was out in that Campaign about from three to five months he thinks.

Pension application of Samuel Macke (W7385):

... he again entered the service aforesaid under Captain Woods as a volunteer and was under Major McDowell & was marched to the head of Cane Creek [September 12, 1780] where we were defeated by the British & Tories & retreated to the head of Catawba River North Carolina, from thence over the Mountain & joined Colonels Campbell, Shelby & Sevier, thence returned to head of Catawba & was joined by Colonel Cleveland & was marched to Kings Mountain and was in that battle ...

Pension application of Abel Pearson (S3661):

This applicant again entered the service of his country as a Volunteer under Captain Jacob Brown, he thinks in September in the year 1780, and marched to the Greasy Cove on Chucky River where Colonel Campbell, Sevier & Shelby met, they marched across the Allegheny Mountain, fell in with Colonel Cleveland on the way and overtook the British and Tories on Kings Mountain, and on the seventh day of October in that year it is believed, the enemy were defeated ...

NOTE: The following quote is interesting, as it may be reflective of where the forces split. As "Montgomery" is mentioned and was ordered to watch a gap in the mountains, it should be noted that John Montgomery lived in Burke County near where the North Fork of the Catawba and the Catawba River intersect. This is defiantly one of the roads taken by the Patriot forces (and is one leg of today's OVNHT). This may also possibly a reference to "Linville Cove" mentioned in another pension statement. If this was the location of the split in forces, it would contradict the often-told story that the split in forces took place at Grassy Creek.

Pension application of William Humphreys (S21307):

In the fall of 1780, he was drafted for three months under Captain James Montgomery, under Colonel William Campbell to go to the South against the British and Tories. After marching on a quarter part of the way to Kings Mountain Applicant with perhaps nine others was ordered to go and watch a gap in the Mountain to prevent Tories and English from coming in upon the settlement while the men were all gone. There they stayed till the troops went on and were at the battle of Kings Mountain; and saw Colonel Campbell no more that campaign. The company was soon discharged, after the battle ...

Pension application of Samuel Handly (S1911):

October in the year 1780 he went under the command of Col John Sevier – in company with Col William Campbell and Col Isaac Shelby crossing over the [indecipherable word, looks like “bauld” could be “bald”] mountain into Burke County North Carolina and there joined Col Cleveland, Col Williams and Col Joseph McDowell in the whole six regiments under the immediate command of Col William Campbell, thence on through Rutherford County by the way of Gilbert town and so on into South Carolina – at which time the battle was fought on Kings Mountain

Pension application of William Brimer (W336):

Again, in Washington County NC now included in Tennessee, he thinks in September 1780 he volunteered under Captain Vol. Sevier [Valentine Sevier] and Colonel John Sevier, marched to John's River near the head of Catawba River, thence to Kings mountain was in the battle of Kings Mountain General William Campbell commanded we killed and took prisoner the greater part of the Tories and British that was there, thence marched back to Catawba River and through Burke, Wilkes and Surry Counties with the prisoners ...

Pension Application of Robert Carson (S3207):

About as he now believes the middle of September in 1780 there was a call made by Col William Campbell in Washington County in the State of Virginia for volunteers to march against the British & Tories under the Command of Major Furguson in North Carolina applicant volunteered into the service in the County aforesaid and about the time above stated, he joined a company commanded by Captain Andrew Colville, rendezvoused at Abingdon in the State of Virginia and was attached to a Regiment commanded by Col William Campbell & Major (formerly Capt) James Dasart. and were immediately marched to the Watauga River where they were joined by several other regiments under the command of Cols. McDowell, Shelby & others from there they marched and crossed the Yellow Mountain about the head waters as he thinks of the Catawba river and were shortly after joined by an other and perhaps more than a regiment of men from South Carolina, they were then marched near to Gelbert Town in North Carolina. upon their arival at this place they ascertained that Furguson had decamped, it was determined by the officers in council to pursue him with the Cavaldry, and leave the solders on foot to follow on of which number applicant was one viz of the foot. the day before the battle at the Kings Mountain the Cavaldry left them in pursuit of Furguson, they the foot followed on but did not reach them before the battle they were the next morning after the battle met by those who were engaged in it a few miles from the Battle ground. in this Touer he served at least one month & a half and was paid for the time. he then with his company returned to his residence in Washington County in the State of Virginia where about the last of October in 1780 he was in writing discharged by his Captain Andrew Colville this ended his military service

NOTE: The following quotes are two of the (apparent) few that specifically mention meeting at Quaker Meadows.

Pension application of Robert Kell (S32355):

In the same year about August as well as he now recollects he volunteered under Capt. McMullen of Col. Williams' Regt. stated to S. Carolina got to the Quaker Meadows on the Catawba River there they met the Troops from over the mountains, Col. Campbell & Genl. Stephens & joined them & went to King's Mountain & was with them in that Battle. Col. Williams was killed there & Col. Campbell then commanded the company he was in & ordered them back to guard the prisoners to the Moravian Town—from there he was marched to Hillsboro—in this tour he served out Fully Three Months in all he served twelve months except eight days. He also hired a man to do a tour of three months duty he was drafted and could not leave home.

Pension application of William Walton (S17184):

“In the month of September 1780 in Wilkes County North Carolina I volunteered with my father in Captain John Brown's company of mounted Rifle men Joined Colonel Cleveland's Regiment at the Quaker Meadow on the Catawba River ...”
