

JANE BROWN GASTON

In 1849 there was published a three-volume history titled *Women in the American Revolution*. The author was Mrs. Elizabeth Ellet, the wife of a professor at S. C. College (now USC). Most of the third volume dealt with South Carolina events and the courage displayed by women living on Fishing Creek in Chester County. Most of the details were given to Mrs. Ellet by Daniel Green Stinson, who knew the families involved.

A year after publication of Mrs. Ellet's work, one of the accounts was reprinted in the March 1950 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, a national magazine devoted to women's interests. Of the Fishing Creek women, the magazine chose to honor the bravery of Jane Gaston, nee Brown.

Jane Brown Gaston was born April 10, 1768 in Mecklenburg County, NC, the daughter of Walter and Margaret Brown, immigrants from County Antrim, Ireland. The Brown family moved to Chester when Jane was about one year old.

In May of 1780, when Jane was 12, Charleston fell to the British. The provincial government was disbanded and most of its members fled to North Carolina. British troops occupied the state including Camden, the courthouse town of what would later be seven counties including Chester, Lancaster and York.

The first Whigs, or Patriots, to organize in opposition to the British were led by John McClure of Fishing Creek. Jane's brother, John Brown, age 17, joined McClure's unit. The first battle, or skirmish, occurred at Beckhamville, Chester County; the second at Mobley's Meeting House in Fairfield County.

Capt. Christian Huck, who headed a company of Loyalist Provincial troops, was sent to put down the uprising. In every community it seems that there was at least one, maybe more, who remained loyal to the King. The British officers took advantage of this. Mrs. Ellet wrote, "Robbery, spoliation, and murder, were everywhere the order of the day. . . ."

Because John Brown was known to be in McClure's band, his parents' home was visited by gangs of robbers and Mr. Brown's life threatened. Like many other families, including Andrew Jackson and his mother, the Brown's, stripped of their possessions, fled on foot to the north.

According to Mrs. Ellet, the Brown family found shelter about 30 miles away in the home of David Haynes and wife Molly Caruth. The Haynes son, Alexander, was badly wounded in his face and was in a hospital in Charlotte. Jane helped the older women nurse the wounded men in the hospital. Mrs. Ellet described the soldiers there as "maimed and suffering; some having but one arm, some having lost a leg, and some deprived of both arms, or both legs."

When Cornwallis' troops got as far as Charlotte, the Browns moved further north and stayed with James Haynes, a brother of David, but it was not safe. The British raided the house, stole their corn meal and carried it away inside the bed ticks.

The Browns decided to go back to their original residence. They found their son, John, had survived but that many of their acquaintances had not. Some had fallen in battle, some died in prison, either in the Camden prison or on board a ship in Charleston harbor. John Brown was to become a Presbyterian minister, who at one point served Waxhaws Presbyterian church and was president of Franklin College in Georgia which later became the University of Georgia.

Jane Brown married Joseph Gaston, April 20, 1790. Joseph's father, a well-known judge and his mother were deceased. The couple moved into what had been his parents' home. They had two sons and four daughters.

Joseph Brown, highly respected in his community, died October 10, 1836. Jane Brown was still alive, aged 82, when interviewed by Daniel Stinson who described her as "of the medium size, inclining to stout, with a noble countenance, and combining great dignity with ease of manner; bearing, it is said, a striking resemblance to her brother, the Rev. J. Brown, D. D.."

Stinson added that when Jane Brown Gaston spoke of the Revolutionary days she had "fire in her eye" and described the actions "with graphic vividness."