

# Clems Branch campground played vital role in history

A small, clear stream known as Clems Branch meanders across the North Carolina/South Carolina state line and eventually reaches Sugar Creek in the Indian Land section of Lancaster County.

It may be small, but Clems Branch has an importance exceeding many large tributaries because of the role it played in the American Revolution.

In June and July 1780, Gen. Thomas Sumter and about 300 men used a clearing on John Culp's land as a place to recuperate. They had been camping in Fort Mill township at Hagler's Hill, originally a Catawba Indian village.

Sumter was responsible for all of that fan-shaped territory from the junction of the Broad and Catawba rivers up to the North Carolina line.

Charles Town had fallen in May and British Gen. Cornwallis must have considered that, for all practical purposes, he had taken South Carolina. In time, he would push through the Carolinas and end it all. So it seemed.

Sumter's army was in disarray. Christian Huck, a Philadelphia lawyer turned Tory, was terrorizing eastern York County. (He destroyed Col. William Hill's iron works right after Sumter set up his Clems Branch camp.)

A description of the campground was written by John Rosser, a native of Indian Land, in 1873 in response to questions from Lyman Draper, a Wisconsin historian. Rosser's father, Isaac, a Revolutionary War veteran, is buried in Six Mile Cemetery in the Belair community. John Rosser went on to become mayor of Camden, S.C., and also mayor of Memphis, Tenn.

Draper, whose manuscripts are a gold mine of information about the Revolution, wrote every descendant of every officer who served under Sumter that he could locate.

In answer to Draper's penetrating questions, John Rosser wrote about Clems Branch: "It was a constant stream, and the only stream from McAlpine's

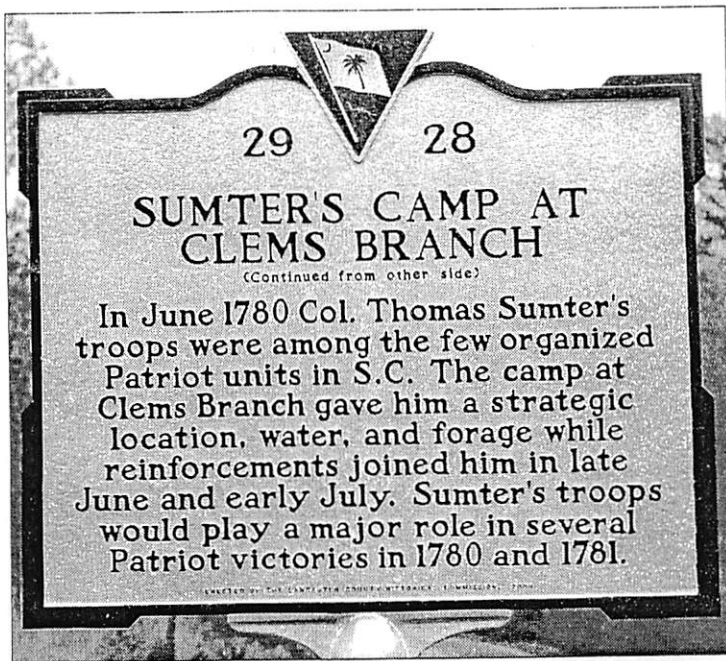


photo courtesy of JIM WILLIAMS

This new historical marker is at the Clems Branch bridge on Harrisburg Road. The campsite is half a mile upstream from the bridge.

## PANHANDLE PAST



Indian Land native Louise Pettus is an area historian.

Creek two miles north to Twelve Mile south. There was no spring that I know of . . . The size of the campground was two or three acres (and) was on gradually rising ground."

In Sumter's time, there were blacksmiths making and repairing rifles and manufacturing swords in the camp. Leather workers practiced their craft. Foragers gathered the necessary foodstuffs for the coming campaign.

Capt. John McClure, who headed a company of mounted riflemen, was out trying to recruit more men and to urge the despondent frontier people that not all was lost. McClure was soon to die after being wounded at Hanging Rock.

John Rosser says that in the 1820s and '30s, the Sumter Clems Branch camp was used as a busy farmer's camping ground for market and trading wagons. There are references to

the camp as a mule market. (George Washington introduced the mule to America after the Revolutionary War when he received a donkey as a present from the king of Spain.)

The Lancaster County Historical Commission recently installed a historical marker at the Clems Branch campground, sanctioned by the S.C. Department of Archives and History. The new marker came about as a result of a campaign spearheaded by Bill Anderson of the Providence section of Mecklenburg County, who not only got the history right, but also raised \$1,600 to pay for it.

*Louise Pettus' Panhandle Past column runs once a month. If you have a question about Indian Land's past, call (803) 283-1154 or e-mail your question to [cgnews@thelancasternews.com](mailto:cgnews@thelancasternews.com).*