

# Clems Branch's Heyday

## Stream Site Of Important Revolutionary Camp

July 22 1990

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 larger tributaries because of the role it played in the American Revolution.

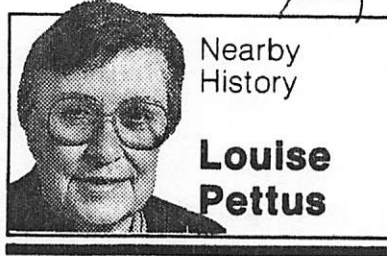
In June and July 1780, Thomas Sumter and about 300 men used a clearing on John Culp's land as a place to recuperate.

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, 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.)

Sumter's men needed badly to recover and procure more lead and



Nearby  
History

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powder.

A description of the camp ground was written by a native of upper Lancaster County in 1873 in response to questions from Lyman Draper, a Wisconsin historian.

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 Creek two miles north to Twelve Mile Creek south.

"There was no spring that I know of. . . . The size of the camp ground was two or three acres (and) was on gradually rising ground."

There were blacksmiths making and repairing rifles and manufacturing swords. 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.

"An interesting affair," as one Sumter biographer termed it, occurred when the officers returned from Ransour's Mill battle and set up camp at Clems Branch.

John Rosser says that in the 1820s and '30s, the old Sumter camp was used as a busy farmer's camping ground for market and trading wagons.

Today there is nothing, no sign or marker, to remind us of Clems Branch campground and its small but significant role in our region's history.

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