

# War Hero Avoided Getting Scalped — The First Time

One of York County's Revolutionary War heroes was Maj. Frank Ross with the Whig militia in the Regiment headed by Col. Thomas Neel. Ross was with Neel in the "Snow Campaign" of 1775-1776 which was mounted against the Cherokees and called



Nearby History  
**Louise Pettus**

by that name because of the heavy snows the men struggled with in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

In the summer of 1776, Ross commanded a battalion that took part in the Keowee expedition, a second attempt to contain the Chero-

kees who were assisting the English armies. On their way to the "Block House" in Greenville County, the York battalion heard that Col. Height, a Whig Indian trader, had been killed by the Cherokees who had abducted Mrs. Height and two daughters. When a young son of Mrs. Height's attempted to follow and rescue them, he was murdered.

Ross and his men pressed on to the Keowee towns. The advance guard had 125 men with 25 Catawba Indians as scouts. The Catawbas, according to Maurice Moore, "would often pause in march and examine with the greatest care the bark of the tallest trees to ascertain if they had been recently ascended."

When the army entered a cove, the Catawbas halted them and pointed out that the fresh marks of many men trampling the wild pea vine and weeds. The Indians advised the men to wait until the main army came up before advancing any further.

The whites were too impatient and insisted on going ahead. Reluctantly, the Catawbas again led the way. They went into a small valley with a branch. The Indians saw more evidence, including a fresh footprint that the enemy was near. This time the Catawbas said they would go no further. For half an hour the whites intrigued them to move but they refused.

A young French officer, an aide to Gen. William Moultrie who was present, suddenly shouted, "I will lead, if the rest will follow!" The men fell behind him and he led them up a trail toward a bald mountain covered with wild pea vine as high as a man's head.

About 400 yards up the trail the crack of a rifle was heard and the Frenchmen were dead. Suddenly the Cherokees were everywhere. The Whigs tried to run and tangled themselves helplessly in the pea vines. The Cherokees, equipped only with tomahawks and scalping knives, had the advantage.

One of the attacked soldiers was Ross, who was 6 feet tall and weighed around 200 pounds, and was more muscular than his adversary.

Ross dropped his musket and grappled with the tomahawk-carrying Cherokee whose greased body made him difficult to hold. The tomahawk sliced into Ross' skull but before the Cherokee could strike again, one of Ross' men came to the rescue. Though bleeding heavily, Ross took the tomahawk and buried it in the Indian's brain.

The soldiers finally located Mrs. Height in an Indian village. She had been murdered. They buried her there but saw no sign of the two daughters. The two daughters were "sold from one tribe to another" and five years after first captured were on the banks of the Mississippi River where a French trader found them. He purchased them from the Indians, took them to New Orleans and got them

places on a boat for Charleston to rejoin their South Carolina relatives.

Three years after Ross was nearly scalped, he was back in Cherokee country. This time he was not so lucky. Gen. Joseph Graham of North Carolina wrote in his journal: "The brave Major Frank Ross died of his wounds the 31st of March, and was buried with military honors the 1st of April, in sight of, and opposite to, Augusta, on the Carolina side."

Ross was 35 years old and left a widow, Rachel, the daughter of Alexander and Margaret Moore Love. There were also three small sons, James, Alexander and William.

A Moore family history called Rachel Ross a "rather remarkable woman." It was said that the night before her husband was killed, Rachel Ross dreamed of his death and was not surprised when she received word. She died in 1790 and was buried in Turkey Creek Cemetery in York County.