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Watson led in trying times

■ York County, Pa., transplant commanded Revolutionary War troops

One of the region's Revolutionary War heroes was Col. Samuel Watson, born in Ireland in 1731. Watson's family emigrated to York County, Pa., where it prospered. In 1871 Watson's grandson wrote that in Pennsylvania the Watsons had a "large brick dwelling house finished from cellar to garret."

Watson was probably part of the great migration southward of Pennsylvanians and Virginians at the time of Indian attacks on the frontiersmen during the French and Indian War, which ended in 1763. It is known that Watson was first in Mecklenburg County, N.C., where he married Elizabeth McDowell (1738-1817).

On April 6, 1765, Watson registered two plots of land totaling 760 acres, "whereon Watson now liveth," in "Mecklenburg on Rockey Allison's Creek. . . ." At this time, much of present-day York County was claimed by Mecklenburg County. Watson's house, like his Pennsylvania home, was built of brick. The house was about halfway between the town of York and the Catawba River on S.C. 49.

Whatever the date of his arrival, the Allison Creek land grant places Watson in the heart of the Bethel congregation, which was in the northeastern area of the part of York County, west of the Catawba. The Bethel congregation covered 10 miles in every direction. As a Bethel

elder, Watson became an influential member of the church and was highly respected in the community.

The Lyman Draper papers at the University of Wisconsin describe Watson as a man 5 feet 3, of compact build and genial in disposition. But like most Scotch-Irishmen of his time, he had no love for the English. When talk of rebellion became general, Watson quickly rose to the cause.

Watson was elected to the South Carolina Provincial Congress of 1775-1776, one of 46 delegates from the backcountry. In February 1776 Watson participated in the framing of South Carolina's first written constitution. The British, naturally, saw this constitution as defiance of their sovereignty. Watson volunteered his services to the South Carolina Regulars.

It was not long before the S.C. troops were made a part of the Continental Army of the new Continental Congress.

By 1778 Watson was a lieutenant colonel in Col. Thomas Neel's New Acquisition District Regiment of Horsemen, a part of Thomson's Regiment of Rangers. He went with Neel in what is called the Charleston Expedition in the summer of 1779. Neel was killed at Stono Ferry on June 20, 1779, and Watson took his place.

In June 1780, the British burned nearby Hill's Ironworks. The terrified workers fled to Watson's plantation, which quickly became a center of resistance. A commissary was set up there to issue supplies to any Whig who would carry a musket against the British.

At the Battle of Hanging Rock in lower Lancaster County, a musket ball hit Watson's

sword, breaking his ribs and knocking him off his horse. His grandson wrote to Draper that the family kept the prized sword with the ball half-buried in its metal along with Watson's giant musket which "kicked mightily."

Watson was also at the skirmish at Williamson Plantation near Brattonsville. The encounter is called the "Battle of Huck's Defeat" in some literature. Other battles in which Watson participated were Rocky Mount, Sumter's Defeat and Biggin Church.

Samuel Watson Jr., born Aug. 12, 1754 in York Co., Pa., also fought in the Revolution. He served as a lieutenant under Col. Thomas Neel and Andrew Pickens. He was with his father at Williamson Plantation and Rocky Mount. Sometime after the war he moved to Missouri.

(There was another Samuel Watson who participated in the Revolution who was apparently no kin to the subject of this article. This Samuel Watson was born in Virginia in 1740 and served as a lieutenant in the Rangers under Capt. Ezekiel Polk. He was at the battles of Kings Mountain and Blackstock and was killed in the battle of Cowpens.)

In his old age Samuel Watson Sr. was paralyzed. He died Nov. 25, 1810 at the age of 79 and is buried in Bethel Cemetery in York County.

The Catawba Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution erected a marker in honor of Watson at the site of his Allison Creek home.

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Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.



Nearby history

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