

1870s minister had his own take on 1780 fight

He wrote about British ambush where not 1 revolutionary died

Historians find it interesting to compare the written accounts of great events over time. Eyewitness accounts are especially interesting and valuable but hardly objective. As time passes, we can discount the emotions involved, and we can collect many different viewpoints and compare them.

In 1874-76, the Rev. Robert Lathan, a minister at Yorkville and Tirzah for 25 years, published his history of Piedmont South Carolina with special emphasis on the American Revolution. He titled his centennial history "Historical Sketches of the Early Settlement of South Carolina."

The book came out in serial fashion in the Yorkville Enquirer.

In Lathan's eyes, the Revolution in this area was best explained as the story of "brave men, and no less brave women, (who) entered into the contest; not because they loved war, but because they hated oppression and loved liberty, without which, they rightly thought, there could be no peace."

Lathan's heroes were Maj. William Richardson Davie, native of the Waxhaws of Lancaster County; Col. William Hagins, head of the Mecklenburg militia, who lived on Tar Kill branch at the N.C.-S.C. state line; and Col.

NEARBY HISTORY

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Thomas Crawford of the Waxhaws, who had under his command 35 Catawba Indians led by Gen. New River, chief of the Catawba tribe.

About the troops of Davie, Hagins and Crawford, Lathan wrote something that a present-day historian would probably not mention: "Between the two Carolinas, there was the kindest feeling and the greatest concert of action. They had only one object in view, and that was to establish the independence of the colonies."

But Lathan did more than praise the leaders. He gave fine details.

For example, he tells what happened on the night of July 29, 1780, after the troops of Davie and Gen. Thomas Sumter separated on Waxhaw Creek.

Sumter crossed the Catawba River and headed for a known British force at a place called Rocky Mount, north of Great Falls. Davie moved into lower Lancaster and headed for Hanging Rock, below present-day Heath Springs. Hanging Rock, nearly 100 feet high and 25 feet in diameter, was a landmark the British had chosen to camp by.

Lathan described Hanging Rock this way: "Huge boulders are piled on top of each other, presenting to the beholder a most fantastic appearance. In substance, these rocks are small,

irregular, hexagonal flint stones, mixed with brilliant particles of matter, black and smooth. The whole is cemented together, forming a beautiful and wonderful conglomeration."

The British leader, Maj. Carden, had sent three companies of mounted infantry to plunder the countryside (food for man and beast and any valuables they happened on).

Davie found them at a "private house" and decided to direct his attention to them rather than at the main post.

He moved his cavalry to the lane that connected the plunderers and their camp. Then Davie sent his militia, mounted but all in civilian clothes, to charge the plundering British detachment.

The British sentinels misread the situation. Thinking Davie's men were Loyalists, they let them pass. Davie's men dismounted and poured a withering fire into the area around the house.

The Loyalists panicked and dashed toward the Hanging Rock camp. Davie's cavalry was waiting.

The remarkable thing is that this all happened in full view of the British camp but Davie's forces lost not a single man while capturing 65 horses, about 100 muskets and leaving most of the British detachment dead on the ground.

Lathan wrote, "There were few more brilliant exploits than this performed during the war."

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