

Whiskey, not blood, flowed at this 'battle'

2/8-57

They called it the Second Battle of Kings Mountain.

The first battle, which ended in a resounding defeat of the British army on Oct. 7, 1780, was termed the "turning point of the American Revolution."

The second battle happened in 1880 at the centennial celebration of the first battle. And it was not nearly so glorious.

The centennial had attracted a large number of people from both Carolinas. It had also attracted nearby distillers of moonshine, or "rot-gut whiskey" as the detractors called it. Raw whiskey flowed like water.

The night before their planned re-enactment of the first battle, two companies of militia were kept busy breaking up fights among the next day's drunken spectators. It was worse the night after the re-enactment of the 1780 battle (which had lasted less than an hour).

The survivors of the second battle (those able to stand), gathered up the hundred or so empty beer kegs (which had recently been filled with whiskey) and piled the kegs on the railroad track that ran close by. The next Air Line train (later known as Seaboard Air Line) smashed into the pile and nearly crashed.

A Charlotte newspaper, The Chronicle, as a part of a 1909 story about a celebration at Kings Mountain, observed: "The difference in the behavior of the people then and now represents the improvement in the morals of the people as time has passed by . . . it is due not alone to the suppression of free whiskey, but to the fact that the people themselves have become better."

In 1909 the roads were better maintained, but this does not mean it was easy to travel to the moun-



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tain by vehicle (there were a few buggies and many wagons).

A Mr. Roth reported that year that he left Yorkville at 6 in the morning riding a fast horse that was eager to pass every wagon and every horse in front of him. By the time he arrived at the battleground he had passed 81 buggies and wagons on his 15-mile journey. It took 2½ hours for Roth (which included stops for road jams), but for the vehicles the trip, at best, was made at a pace of 3 mph.

On the way back to Yorkville, the first watering place for the thirsty horses was at Clark's Fork in the Oates' bottoms. Each of hundreds of horses required "from a quarter- to a half-minute to drink; the result was another tremendous blockade of buggies and wagons that extended back for more than a mile."

And what had the people witnessed and heard on that fine October day in 1909?

The speakers were the governor of South Carolina, an N.C. senator and an S.C. senator; a congressman from each state; a founder of the Kings Mountain Academy; the presidents of USC and Wofford (Henry N. Snyder of Wofford was the "Speaker of the Day") and the president of the Yorkville Daughters of the American Revolution.

All of these spoke from the platform between 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., before the audience received the blessing of the benediction. That, in turn, was followed with a mad rush for the picnic baskets.