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John Craig's story sheds light on Revolutionary War

John Craig, born in Ireland in 1761, was only 15 years old when he enlisted to fight in the Revolution in August of 1776. He was then living in present-day York County. Fortunately for us, Craig in later life wrote an extensive account of his service in the militia.

Craig's first tour was under Col. Thomas Neel of York. Neel was then with Gen. Williamson at Seneca Fort in what was later Pickens County, S.C.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

The first battle Craig participated in was against the Cherokee Indians, who were then allied with the French. Craig said the battle took place on the "waters of Hiwassee." His company lost 12 men.

Col. Neel and his men moved on to the Savannah River, still seeking the Cherokees but failing to find them. The army then moved on to Orangeburg and there received orders to rendezvous with Gen. William Moultrie. Craig ended up in Charleston, or Charles Town as it was known at that time.

More than three years later, in May 1780, Charleston fell to the British. Craig reenlisted and was at Rocky Mount, a fort close to the Catawba Falls, later called Great Falls. In 1854 the old veteran remembered that his captain was John McClure and that his two lieutenants were Hugh McClure and John Steel. At Rocky Mount Hugh McClure was wounded in the arm. His company took nine prisoners. "Our number at this time was 27 soldiers and the three officers, against a formidable force of 300 Tories. ... (We) put the Tories to flight."

That was May 24, 1780. Two days later Craig and his fellows

were fighting at Mobley's Meeting House, a battle won without the loss of a single man. The British were "enraged" at their defeats and turned to torching houses of Whig families and plundering the countryside. Craig got permission to go to present-day York County to recruit more men. Only seven of his fellow soldiers would agree to join him.

In York they found devastation and gloom. The small band went on into North Carolina, near Salisbury, in search of an English colonel named Brian. There they found that Brian had fled back into South Carolina but had no heart for battle. Craig's band of men then found and defeated a company of Tories at Ramsour's Mill in North Carolina.

Leaving North Carolina, they headed for the Nation Ford of the Catawba River. Crossing into present Fort Mill Township, they camped with Gen. Thomas Sumter's men and began to recruit over the countryside. Craig did not say how many men enlisted but he was heartened by an increase in numbers.

"Our next engagement was at Williamson's Lane, commanded by Cols. Andrew Neal, and Lacy, Bratton, Maj. Dickson, Capt. McClure, and Capt. Jameson." Craig remarked that Gen. Sumter stayed in the camp. Nowadays the skirmish at Williamson's Lane is usually referred to as Huck's Defeat (or Houk's Defeat). It happened on July 12, 1780.

Craig said the Whigs had 110 men who defeated 400 under the command of a Col. Floyd. The Americans killed Maj. Patrick Ferguson and Capt. Huck. They also took prisoners - 30 or 40 - with the loss of only one of their own men. After the skirmish at Williamson's Lane (close by Col. William Bratton's plantation), the soldiers went to General Sumter's camp.

Ten days later they were at Rocky Mount with Gen. Sumter

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in a devastating defeat that included the death of Col. Andrew Neal. A week later the battle of Hanging Rock in lower Lancaster County took place with considerable loss on both sides. At Hanging Rock Capt. McClure was severely wounded and later died from the wounds.

Craig and his fellow Whigs then went home and were not involved in any battles until February 1781 when they lay siege to Congaree Fort below Columbia. There they had a "goodly number" of wounded but no deaths. A few days later they met the British at the home place of a Col. Thompson, known as Thompson's Fort. There, Craig's company lost a man and had several more wounded.

Next Craig and his friends crossed the Savannah River and went to "Big Savannah." They soon celebrated the capture of seven wagons laden with clothing for three British regiments. In the process they killed 13 British and took 66 prisoners. But, the spoils were soon retaken by the British, who forced the Whigs to swim the river and march to Fort Watson.

At this point Craig ended his account of his Revolutionary War experiences which was printed in *The Chester Standard*, March 16, 1854, 12 years after his death on Feb. 10, 1842. Little is known about John's personal life. His wife was named Catherine, her maiden name not known. Some time after the war Craig moved from York to Pickens County.

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