

# Moore's Creek battle turning point

By DON McLEOD  
Associated Press Writer

In any revolution there is an element of civil war, of dissenters struggling against the tide of history. Providence makes one side winners and patriots, the other losers and villains.

Many Americans in 1776 had doubts about revolution and defiance of the British king. They believed in freedom, but they thought it was possible under the English Constitution rather than in revolution.

Some of them were willing to fight for a tradition which had kept them and their principles safe for generations. But to the consternation of the British, they never rose in sufficient wrath and number to quench the insurrection.

One of the main reasons was a strange campaign that took place in the damp and chill of a North Carolina winter and reached a climax 200 years ago this week at a little bridge over Widow Moore's Creek.

It began in the summer of 1775 when two British officers in civilian garb slipped ashore at New Bern. They were quickly spotted and carried before the Committee of Safety.

"They were suspected of some sinister designs," it was reported, "and questioned by the provincials concerning their business."

Donald McDonald, an elderly gentleman, and his young friend, Donald McLeod, confessed to being British officers, but said they had been wounded at Bunker Hill and left the army with a desire to settle among their friends.

The Carolina back country was full of McDonalds, McLeods, McLeans and McArthurs and a most likely refuge for two Scots officers who said they had seen enough war. The strangers were so convincing they were allowed to go on their way after taking an oath of loyalty to the colony and promising to cause no mischief.

McDonald, a lieutenant colonel, and McLeod, a captain, had, in truth, fought at Bunker Hill, but they were not looking for retirement. They were secret agents sent to raise a Tory army.

Loyalists enlisted in the backwoods would march to the sea, link with British regulars and a war fleet and bring North Carolina back under control. The combined force then would take Charleston and secure South Carolina, Georgia, considered the weakest link in the rebellion, would fall in line.

Maybe even whiggish Virginia would be overawed, the neutralist forces in the middle colonies strengthened, the rebels of New England isolated and the war won quickly.

On Jan. 10, 1776, Gov. Josiah Martin, from the safety of a British ship, issued a proclamation beseeching loyal subjects "to repair to the Royal banner."

Sir Henry Clinton sailed with a force from Boston on Jan. 20. Gen. Charles Cornwallis sailed from Ireland Feb. 13 with 2,500 troops in a fleet commanded by Vice Adm. Sir Peter Parker.

On Feb. 5 McDonald, who had recruited well among his country cousins, called for a gathering of the clans at Cross Hill, now Fayetteville, N.C. A thousand Highlanders answered the call in kilts and tarlans, and swinging their claymores, the ancient broadsword of the Scots.

They were joined by remnants of the Regulators, frontiersmen who had risen against the domination of the seaboard elite and had been beaten in the battle of Alamance in 1771.

The rebels, meantime, had not been idle. Two regiments were being readied for the Continental Line, and Col. James Moore, the senior officer, took to the field as soon as he learned of the Tory buildup.

From the countryside streamed militia and musketeers, fiddles screeching to rival any bagpipe, ragged and unarmored but numerous and effective.

"They indeed made a most unarmored appearance," said an observer. "But the worst figure there can show from behind a bush and kill even a General Wolfe."

Seeing the rebels gathering strength around him, McDonald gave the order to march.

They made only four miles before running into Moore's force blocking the bridge over Rockfish Creek. And two companies, fearing McDonald might attack, "ran off with their arms very early that night."

The wily McDonald sent a messenger into the enemy camp with the stern warning that unless they stopped this rebellious nonsense, "I must consider you as enemies and take the necessary steps for the support of legal authority."

The astonished rebels took a whole day to answer this affront.

"We consider ourselves engaged in a cause the most glorious and honorable in the world," Moore said, "the defense of the liberties of mankind, in support of which we are determined to hazard everything dear and valuable."

Meanwhile, McDonald was slipping upstream, where he crossed the northwest branch of Cape Fear River, burned the boats to prevent pursuit and

headed back toward the coast. When Moore realized at last he had been outfoxed, he began laying a trap with more care this time. Col. Richard Caswell, approaching from New Bern with 800 militiamen, was ordered to the next crucial crossing, at Corbett's ferry on the Black River.

Cols. James Martin and James Thackston, closing in from the west with up-country militia, were directed to seize the Tory base camp and cut off retreat.

Colonels John Lillington, with 150 men, and John Ashe, with 100, were sent to reinforce Caswell before dawn. But if this failed, they were to "take possession of Moore's Creek Bridge," the next crossing after the Black River.

Caswell reached the Black River ahead of the Tories, who were edging cautiously eastward, fearing ambush at every turn.

Finding his way blocked once more, McDonald turned again to a ruse. Sending "a few men and a drum and a pipe to amuse Caswell," he moved upstream and crossed on a hastily built bridge.

Caswell's troops stayed pinned down for three days by the random firing and music of a handful of decoys while McDonald escaped.

But Lillington was already dug in at the bridge over Moore's Creek, and a blushing Caswell, taking a more direct route, raced to the crossing ahead of McDonald.

They were only 17 miles from Wilmington and the sea. Another ruse and McDonald would reach his objective with his army untouched. But the younger officers demanded a fight, and the weary McDonald gave in. Too ill to lead the assault, he named Donald McLeod to command in his place.

About 1 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 27, 1776, the loyalists were

followed. Despite all their setbacks, the Tory rush had taken the rebels by surprise. Coming upon an abandoned trench, the Scots sensed a retreating enemy, "and in the most furious manner," reported Moore, "advanced within 30 paces of our breastworks and artillery."

"Where they met a very proper reception."

A volley of musketry cut through the Scots who had made it across, and the boom of two cannon swept away those still on the bridge.

Discovering Caswell's demolition, McLeod thrust his sword into the slippery logs and, using it for balance, worked his way across. Capt. John Campbell and his swordsmen followed.

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## Open house

The Community Mental Health Center, 146 North St., held an open house Sunday. The public was invited to come in and see the many projects which the center conducts during the course of a year and also view films and hear about the many programs available through the facility.

## New Webster's planned board to review proposal

A new restaurant is being planned on the site of the burned-out Webster Dairy Shop. The City Planning Board is scheduled to review plans for the restaurant at a 7:30 p.m. meeting Wednesday in Caucus Room 2, Cayuga County Office Building.

The new restaurant is being proposed by Webster's owner Richard Rustin. It will be on the old Webster's corner at Grant Avenue and Catlin Street, but it has not yet been announced whether it will have the same name.

Also on the agenda for consideration at the meeting are a sign request from McDonald's Restaurants, a proposed addition to Southside Manor

subdivision, and an apartment house conversion on East Genesee Street.

The McDonald's sign is to go at the chain's new location planned for West Genesee Street near the city line.

The planning board withheld approval on a McDonald's sign at its meeting last month, as members noted the sign was

larger and had more prominent display of the McDonald's distinctive "golden arches" than they expected.

The new sign proposal is smaller and shows the golden arches in miniaturized form as an identifying symbol on an eight-by-12-foot sign, according to Vijay Mital of the planning staff.

## We Hold These Truths... A Chronicle of America



**'Famous Quarrel':**  
Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, the pro-American French playwright: "The famous quarrel between America and England, which will soon divide the world... imposes on each power the necessity of examining closely to see how the coming of this separation will influence it for good or ill."

—By Ross MacKenzie & Jeff Machellye/1976. United Feature Syndicate.

## College Night set Tuesday at high school

More than 60 representatives from colleges, universities, technical schools and the Armed Forces plan to attend the Sixth Annual Cayuga County College Night from 7:30 to 9:30 Tuesday at the Auburn High School.

Students of grades 10 and 11 from all parts of Cayuga County are invited to meetings scheduled in individual classrooms and the cafeteria. Students will be able to talk with at least three representatives from institutions of higher education.

William Huther and Jack Palmer, co-chairmen, said the search for, and selection of, a college best suited to a student's ability, interests and needs is very important. They added that all factors in searching for a school should be considered.

"College Night" is sponsored

by the Auburn High School guidance department and the Cayuga County area counselors.

## Student art show at SCCS

"Center for Learning—Your School Library" will be theme of a student art show at the Southern Cayuga High School library this week.

Paintings, prints, sculpture and sketches will be on show in observance of School Library Media Week.

The week was so designated by Gov. Hugh Carey, and the public is invited to visit the SCCS show in Poplar Ridge

## Two hurt in crash serious

Two persons, injured in an accident Saturday night in Menz, remained in serious condition today at Auburn Memorial Hospital.

The two, both passengers in a car driven by John Donovan, Beet Plant Road, Monteruma, were identified as Archibald Clum Jr. of Port Byron and Jack Alfred of Owasco.

Hospital officials said both were listed in serious condition in the intensive care unit of the hospital. Donovan, according to Cayuga County Sheriff's deputies, was not injured seriously, but was treated for several cuts and bruises.

Deputies said Donovan was charged with driving while intoxicated and will appear before a Menz Town Justice at a later date.

## Boglione appointed chairman

Anthony J. Boglione of 27 Jarvis St., was appointed by Chairman of the Diocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting for the Rochester Diocese, this week Rev. Robert J. Winterkorn, Diocesan Scout Chaplain, announced the appointment on behalf of Bishop Joseph L. Hogan of the Rochester Diocese.

Boglione succeeds Paul S. VonBach Sr., of Rochester, named Northeast Region, Boy Scouts of America, chairman of the Catholic Committee.

Boglione will be responsible for coordinating the activities of the Catholic Committees of seven Boy Scout Councils in the Rochester Diocese as they relate to the religious, vocational and education aspects of Scouting. He will endeavor to make the program available to increasing number of boys in Catholic chartered units.

Boglione is a veteran adult Scout volunteer of the Cayuga County Council, Boy Scouts of America and on the Council's Executive Board and as Southern Area Commissioner

## VISION VIEW POINT

by Dr. Frank A. Succes, O.D.



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