

Memoirs, Traditions, History Rocky Mount And Vicinity

This is the fifth installment of "Memoirs, Traditions, and History of Rocky Mount and Vicinity" by the late L. M. Ford. We are printing the history in installments as space permits.

Revolutionary Times

Richard Gaither migrated from Maryland some years prior to the Revolution and settled on Little Rocky Creek, Chester County, but spent the greater part of his life in the vicinity of Rocky Creek, where he accumulated a considerable estate of lands and some slaves. Much of the land is still in the possession of his descendants. He died in 1835 at more than 90 years of age.

Richard Gaither was a Whig soldier in the Revolution. Very little is now known of his soldier life or military record. At one time he was confined by the British in Camden until he was nearly eaten by vermin. He was condemned to die and the day of his execution was set and near at hand, when a British officer intervened and his life was spared. It is regretted that the name of this officer has not been preserved in the family. The crime for which he was to die was that he loved his country and fought against the King.

His daughter Rachel obtained permission to carry some clothing to take the place of that infested with vermin. After accomplishing her mission, she and a neighboring lady, Mrs. Ben Land who had accompanied her, started on their way home, a distance of 40 miles through an unbroken forest. They had not traveled more than half the distance when a party of mounted Tories commanded the weary travellers to halt. As soon as Miss Rachel ascertained that they wanted her horses, she bestrided the back of her fleet-footed animal and used her whip to good advantage. After racing several miles, she made good her escape while her more timid friend gave up her horse and trudged her way home on foot.

On another occasion, a squad of Tories came to her father's house and ordered a meal for themselves. Rachel informed them that nothing could be kept on account of the British and Tories. After she was threatened her mother told her where she could find some coarse meal, and to prepare some bread and milk for them. When it was ready, she set the milk before them in an old pewter basin. After they had partaken of the bread and milk, Rachel said to them: "If the basin was melted and poured down your throats it would be the dessert of all others that I desire you should have."

This lady had descendants, Bradshaw and others, in York County.

William Lewis came from Virginia before the War of Independence and settled in the vi-

cinity of Rocky Mount where he continued to reside until his death in the thirties at an advanced age, probably more than 90 years. He was twice married and left a large family of children.

The record of Mr. Lewis in the Revolutionary War was excellent although little of it is now known. He was at Gates' defeat near Camden, Rocky Mount, Sumter's surprise at Fishing Creek, Hanging Rock, and other places.

Some Tories stole a number of horses and encamped on Big Wateree Creek in the plantation now known as LaGrange and belonging to John G. Mobley. They

had divested themselves of all their clothing save their shirts and had them hanging around rousing fires to dry them. The night was very dark. Mr. Lewis and a few others charged upon and completely surprised them and captured their horses. But the Tories jumped in the creek in their denuded condition and betook themselves to the woods.

On another occasion he chased a Tory and captured his horse and two sides of bacon which he had stolen from a poor woman.

Reuben and John Pickett came from Virginia and settled on Wateree Creek. They often aided William Lewis in his raids and skirmishes.

A Tory was killed at the spring near the present residence of William S. Sibley and another was shot and killed climbing the fence on the roadside near the house now occupied by Robert Meeks, colored. These were cold-blooded acts and were probably done to exercise some former offense against the Whigs.

Samuel McCrary, Fishing Creek, was an ardent patriot and did much service against the British and Tories around Rocky Mount. When hostilities ended he secluded himself from his neighbors and friends for ten years. He then joined the Baptist ministry and served his church faithfully until his death. He was the pastor of Mount Zion for many years. Mentally he was much above mediocrity. His arguments in favor of the tenets and doctrines of his church were considered the best advanced in his sermons and brought delight to the Christians and terror to the sinner.

These are all the Revolutionary incidents we have been able to gather.

Grimkeville

On the crest of a hill west of Rocky Mount ferry, the town of Grimkeville was surveyed in 1792. The two main streets, which ran northerly and southerly, were

called Washington and Pinckney. The cross streets were Blanding, Manigault, Izzard, Cripps, Barnett, Laughton, Davis, Kean, and Allen.

Among the first lot owners, and probably residents, were J. F. Grimke, L. Smith, Allen Smith, Manigault, John D. Maxwell, William Houston, and Hugh McMillan. The hill on which this town was built is the true and original Rocky Mount. Lots were reserved for a seminary, parsonage, church, and cemetery. The residence of John G. Johnson stands upon the church lot.

The town was named in honor of J. F. Grimke, prominent in South Carolina affairs in his day. Judge J. F. Grimke owned much land along the west bank of the river. The legislature passed an act December 18, 1817, to purchase these lands, which purchase was consummated May 1, 1818. The price paid was \$19,258. This purchase was probably made preparatory to digging the canal.

This once populous and growing town bade fair to increase in size, population and importance. It was situated at the head of flat boat navigation, and the bugle blast announcing the arrival and departure of boats was often heard. It was surrounded

by fields of fertile soil, cultivated by thrifty and energetic husbandmen, and a considerable trade was carried on in it.

Now the town is desolate and forsaken. No boat now comes or goes. Those who walked to and fro on the streets have passed and their habitations have moulden into dust. The streets have been obliterated by the plough share. The lowing of cattle on the hill side and the ploughman's phrases in the cotton field take the place of the bustle and hum of business on the crowded streets.

(To be continued)

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