

THE REVOLUTION IN LOUISA COUNTY

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A bridge over the South Anna River: The stream below slips gently by with hardly a ripple, dark water hiding its depths. On it flows, endlessly it flows, a placid river that crooks and loops its way the length of Louisa County.

Today few people notice the small river, but in 1781, almost two hundred years ago, it loomed large in despatches from the adversaries of the American Revolution. Surely those dark waters paused in their relentless flow at the grand sight of the Marquis de Lafayette, resplendent in buff and blue? Surely even the river took note when the bold Redcoats rushed through Louisa!

The armies did not fail to notice the river: "Broke camp on South Anna River at four o'clock . . .," "The Queen's Rangers had advanced to South Anna Bridge and chased and took a patrol of the enemy . . .," "The whole of the cavalry preceded the march, till the detachment crossed the bridge over the South Anna . . .," "Main body of the enemy on the South Anna . . ."

By the dawn of 1781, all Virginia was weary of the struggle against Great Britain: the constant demands on the people for supplies, for arms, and for men to serve as soldiers. However, the worse was yet to come. Had Louisa County known what the future held in store, they could have considered themselves lucky. So far they had only heard of the British armies; they had not seen them.

At the beginning of the conflict Louisa listed 2,283 tithables and reported that 600 men were available to perform military duty. Their active cooperation with the effort for freedom began in 1775 when the Virginia Convention appointed twenty-one men to serve as a Committee of Safety for Louisa County:

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| Rev. Thomas Hall, Chairman | Rev. John Todd |
| Thomas Johnston (Major) | Charles Smith |
| Robert Armistead | Thomas Johnston (Sheriff) |
| Col. Richard Anderson | James Dabney |
| Charles Barrett | Col. William White |
| Thomas Johnston (Minor) | Waddy Thompson |
| Charles Yancey | George Meriweather |
| William Pettus | John Bullock |
| John Nelson | Garrett Minor |
| William Hughes | William Lipscomb |
| | Henry Garrett, Clerk |

The Revolution in Louisa County

The militia reorganized to meet the new regulations and on February 21, 1776 the Committee of Safety directed Louisa "to march their regular companies to Williamsburg as soon as reviewed."

In June of 1776 Louisa received another reminder of the conflict when Highland prisoners were sent to them to be housed and fed. These prisoners had been taken by Captain James and Richard Barron in the ship *Oxford*, and they were dispersed throughout Virginia. The County Lieutenant of Louisa was allotted ten prisoners and three women and two children.* The prisoners were "Bonnie Scots" with a burr in their speech and proud Highland names: Robert Whitepeper, Donald Urquard, John McDonald, Milles McMullen, James Fraser, William Falconer, John Grant, Junior, Roderick McDonald, Donald McKensie, and Alexander Marr.

As 1776 drew to a close, Governor Patrick Henry, who had lived in Louisa on Roundabout Creek just a few years before, issued a proclamation on the "critical situation of American affairs," and exhorted the several counties and other officials of the militia to "to use their utmost endeavors to associate volunteer companies for the most speedy method of putting an end to cruel ravages of a haughty and inveterate enemy."

On February 12, 1777 the Virginia Council ordered troops to form companies for the Continental army: "The fifth [Battalion] commanded by Colonel Charles Lewis . . . and the companies and parts of companies in Albemarle, Louisa, Goochland, Hanover, etc. Ordered that the companies are part of the troops to be raised by Act of Assembly for the better security and defence of the Country."

A month later, on March 15, the Governor ordered Colonel Lewis and the Fifth Battalion to join General Washington and the Continental Forces. (According to discharge records these companies fought at the battles of Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth.)

Just before Christmas of 1778 (December 23), the County Lieutenant of Louisa County was notified that he must send one hundred of his militia troops to help guard the 4,000 British and German prisoners being sent from Saratoga to Charlottesville. The Council ordered five other counties to send troops also, though the Council feared they would not be up to the task. They admitted "the Danger of committing the Business to raw Militia ill armed, half Clad, ignorant of Discipline . . ."

*The presence of the women and children is hard to imagine. However, accounts of the care of prisoners taken mention women and children. When General Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga, there were women and children with the men who also became prisoners of war: "Stragglers behind came the women and children, more than 300 of them . . . children peeping thr' gridirons and other utensils, some very young infants who were born on the road . . ." When Lt. Col. Simcoe crossed Louisa to raid Point of Fork, he had women with him, for he states " . . . the baggage and women halted among the woods . . ."

The Revolution in Louisa County

Louisa folk continued to have minor alarms, as in 1779 when the Council feared an insurrection of the Convention troops at The Barracks in Charlottesville. They felt the militia lacked the arms "to oppose any attempt they might make to join the enemy." On April 5 the Lieutenant of Louisa was ordered "to discipline the militia in a particular manner and have them equipped and ready at a moment's notice."

As war came to Virginia in 1781 Louisa was asked to provide wagons and provisions, including forty-one suits for the soldiers. A "suit" included:

- 2 shirts of linen or cotton
- 1 pair overalls
- 1 pair shoes
- 1 wool furr (or felt) hat or leather cap
- Good in their kind & quality

On March 27 the Council advised Governor Jefferson to "call Sufficient number of Militia under proper officers" from nine counties, including Louisa, "to perform a tour of duty in relief of those from other Counties now below."

Louisa folk found their horses in great demand. Tarleton raided central Virginia to secure the finest horses possible to mount his cavalry. And on May 28 a Virginia executive order directed that a warrant be given "the Honorable Major General Marquis de Lafayette authorizing him to impress such horses as he may need for the use of the Army, in the counties contiguous to the march of the Enemy."

Many able generals and officers, British and American, were involved in the movements that led the troops westward to Louisa as the war intensified in Virginia in 1781. Sir Henry Clinton had sent that treasonous Arnold to Virginia with about 1600 men. To oppose Arnold, General Washington had in the Old Dominion the able Baron von Steuben, who had a three-fold mission: guard Virginia and its military stores against Arnold, train raw recruits and militia men, and keep open communications with Greene from the Carolinas to the North.

Arnold, after much useless burning and plundering, received word: "Return to New York;" and the poor British Major General William Phillips died. (It was reported that hard drink carried him away.) And then, oh, glorious news, the Marquis Lafayette was sent to the aid of Virginia! And Baron von Steuben was moving next door to Louisa, to the Point of Fork Arsenal at the Fork of the James River, gathering arms, training men.

But in this game of chance they called a war, the coin flipped, and there coming from the other side was Lord Cornwallis, as big and frightening as they had heard — bigger, indeed, for now he was *here*.

We will not say Cornwallis had retreated from General Greene in

North Carolina; let us just say he had made a strategic move into Virginia and was in Petersburg by the 20th of May, 1781. He began his campaign in Virginia with hope and vigor. For the moment "he saw things in rose color and drew wrong conclusions." He expected to find half the people Tories, and he also expected to find a state of chronic hostility between the slaves and their masters. On both counts he was quite mistaken. But having abandoned the Carolinas Cornwallis felt it incumbent upon him to do something spectacular.

Accounts of the number of troops available to each General for his projected maneuvers vary with each account one reads. Cornwallis had between 5,00 and 7,000 men. The size of Lafayette's Continental Army is stated as low as 1,000 and as high as 1800, "including militia with less than 100 disciplined cavalry." Sir Henry Clinton wrote Cornwallis, [Lafayette has] "a small body of ill-armed peasants, full as spiritless as the militia of the southern provinces, and without any service." Cornwallis believed that Baron von Steuben commanded about three or four hundred men, but later revised the number to 800 twelve-month men and raw militia.

Cornwallis controlled Virginia's eastern water courses, but he did not believe his army strong enough to conquer Virginia. For a decisive campaign he needed more men. He felt that if Virginia fell, so would the rest of the South, and he begged Clinton to abandon New York and come to Virginia. Clinton refused.

Clinton took a dim view of Cornwallis' maneuvers and wrote him early in June, 1781:

. . . experience ought to convince us, that there is no possibility of re-establishing order in any rebellious province on this continent without the hearty assistance of numerous [local] friends. These, my Lord, are not, I think, to be found in Virginia . . .

Meanwhile, with the forces at his disposal, Cornwallis had decided to begin by crushing Lafayette. His Lordship knew the Marquis' forces were inferior to his own and he wrote, "The boy cannot escape me." But in the margins of history we can hear Lafayette laugh up his blue-cuffed sleeve! "Trap me? Never!"

From Petersburg westward, Lafayette always stayed just ahead of the British, but kept quite busy capturing scouting parties and messengers, and took great care to keep Cornwallis confused enough so the British never knew quite where the Frenchman was, nor where he was next bound. Cornwallis retaliated by capturing any isolated details, destroying any stores the Americans did not move westward, and gloating over intercepted messages. Hide-and-go-seek across the rivers, peek-a-boo through the woodland, they approached Louisa.

Lafayette kept hoping, almost desperately, for reinforcements from General Wayne ("Mad Anthony Wayne"), and his Pennsylvani-

The Revolution in Louisa County

ans. With humor Lafayette wrote General Washington: "I am not strong enough even to be beaten." Again he wrote, "There is no fighting here unless you have a naval superiority or an army mounted upon race horses."

On Tuesday, May 8, the Council for Virginia, learning that the British had advanced up the James River as far as Brandon, consulted with Lafayette and ordered that all Louisa County men who could find arms must march out to join Lafayette.

Louisa folk knew the armies were moving westward and daily alarms were contagious as refugees from the east fled to the mountains. The Treasurer of the Commonwealth sought refuge for himself and his family in Louisa and almost ran into Tarleton. His daughter, sixteen-year-old Elizabeth Jaquelin Ambler wrote from Louisa Court House the first week of June, 1781:

. . . we were endeavoring to console ourselves that . . . we were in too solitary a situation to fear any danger; then when enjoying our frugal supper of Bonny Clabber, Honey, etc., a terrible clatter of horses set us all scampering. The British! Nothing but the word 'British' did we hear; upon opening the door, however, we soon discovered a parcel of miserable militia belonging to the neighborhood. They had called to give notice that the enemy were actually proceeding through the county. A consultation of our party was then held, and if we had one particle of our natural reason about us, we would have quietly staid where we were. But flight had so long been the word, that it was determined unanimously to be off in a moment.

They went on to a house in the Green Springs area, only to hear again that the British were near, so they returned to Louisa Court House.

The first troops to cross Louisa were those of the Marquis Lafayette. Finding he could not hold Richmond, he ordered the most valuable military stores moved westward up the James River, and he headed northwest. The young general must have felt that by moving north he could somehow hasten Wayne's march south!

Lafayette's movements were executed with a bravado aimed at rallying the flagging spirits of Virginia. He marched with drums, fifes and colors, his men clad in the uniforms he had bought or their own hunting shirts — but one observer sadly noted that there were not more than sixty men properly mounted. With him rode General Thomas Nelson, a neighbor of Louisa (who became Governor of Virginia two weeks later on June 12), and General Muhlenburg whose proper names appropriately included the name Gabriel — (When the Reverend John Peter Gabriel Muhlenburg sounded a trumpet call to arms, Virginians listened)!

On Monday, May 28, 1781 Lafayette wrote from the Gold Mine Creek, just over the Louisa line in Hanover, "Lord Cornwallis has

moved up some distance from Hanover and we have moved back the same proportion . . . ” His letter the next day to General Wayne bore the heading “South Anna River:” “ . . . A few hours may perhaps decide a great deal in the fate of this war and I shall not lose a moment to forward the movements of the Army . . . ” He left the South Anna Camp that afternoon at 4 o’clock, headed north-west across the corner of Louisa County.

On Wednesday, May 30, his army halted in a large field at Anderson’s Bridge on the North Anna for a midday meal. (According to the court road orders of Louisa County for that period, Anderson’s Bridge spanned the North Anna between Louisa and Spotsylvania counties.) Lafayette continued northward through Orange to Culpeper, but the impatient Frenchman had a long wait. He received his first reinforcements on June 7th.

One source states that Cornwallis sent a detail following Lafayette to frighten him and speed him northward, but had no desire to follow and force a battle.

Lt. Col. Simcoe, an officer in Cornwallis’ army, told it this way (Simcoe, in his *Journal*, refers to himself in the third person):

. . . The Queen’s Rangers had advanced to South Anna Bridge [May 30], and chased and took a patrol of the enemy. The next day they crossed the North Anna, patrolled for intelligence, and took a militia gentleman on his return from Lafayette’s army. The Army proceeded to Tile’s Ordinary on the 1st of June: Lt. Col. Simcoe crossed the North Anna, with his cavalry, with orders to get intelligence of Fayette’s march; and Capt. Dundas, of the guards, with the light company, was sent to a strong pose, a few miles over the river to support and cover his retreat. A rebel Commissary was chased and taken; and, after a long patrol, full information was obtained of Fayette’s march, and the party returned.

Surely Louisa folk must have seen Simcoe’s Rangers as they scouted about. He returned to headquarters in Hanover before again coming into Louisa, travelling southwest.

With Lafayette out of the way, Cornwallis stopped and made camp in western Hanover to plan his strategy. He concentrated on two objectives in Central Virginia: The Arsenal at Point of Fork, and the legislature and military stores in Charlottesville.

Later Cornwallis reported to Clinton on these activities:

From what I could learn of the present state of Hunter’s Iron Manufactory [Fredericksburg], it did not appear of so much importance as the stores on the other side of the County, and it was impossible to prevent the junction between the Marquis & Wayne; I therefore took the advantage of the Marquis’s passing the Rappahannock, and detached . . . Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton to disturb the Assembly, then sitting at Charlottesville, and to destroy the Stores there.

The Revolution in Louisa County

In the same letter Cornwallis states that he dispatched Lieutenant-Colonel Simcoe to the Point of Fork Arsenal in Fluvanna. He also states that he ordered the stores at Old Albemarle Court House (Scottsville) be destroyed, but he does not say which Lieutenant-Colonel was to do the destruction there. The two detachments left western Hanover at about the same time, and Cornwallis and the infantry moved to Elk Hill, at the junction of the Byrd Creek and the James River (Goochland County) to await a junction with the two raiders. (Elk Hill was a plantation belonging to Thomas Jefferson, a plantation the British left, on June 13, a total ruin.)

On June 2 Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe and his Queen's Rangers began their march to Fluvanna County to destroy the Point of Fork Arsenal. Simcoe's Queen's Rangers were American Tories, and were his special pride, for when he came to America, he requested the command of these Loyalists. He outfitted them in green, for he distrusted the bright red British uniform for a scouting regiment which depended upon an element of surprise in its attacks upon the rebels.

As he gathered his Rangers for the Fluvanna raid, he noted his men "were so debilitated by the fatigues of the climate as to have scarcely more than two hundred infantry and one hundred cavalry fit for duty," and "the incessant marches . . . and their distance from their stores, had so worn out their shoes . . . it appeared that near fifty men were absolutely barefooted." Undaunted by bare feet and ragged uniforms, all agreed to march.

Cornwallis sent with Simcoe the 71st Regiment, consisting of 200 rank and file — wearing red uniforms. With the 71st Simcoe requested a cannon, a three pounder. He carefully arranged his cavalry and infantry for the march, determined to catch von Steuben by a surprise attack on the Arsenal.

One source states that Simcoe had 317 Queen's Rangers and 164 in the 71st Regiment. However, Simcoe gave a total of 500 men available for his raid, and Cornwallis had told him von Stueben had three or four hundred men at Point of Fork.

Simcoe told how he marched southwest across Louisa County:

Lt. Spencer, with twenty huzzars, formed the advance guard: these were chosen men, and mounted on the fleetest horses. Capt. Stenven-son, with the light infantry company, and the Hessian riflemen, under Lt. Beikel, followed: the 71st succeeded with the cannon, followed by Capt. Althouse with his riflemen, and those of the Queen's Rangers: the infantry and Capt. Shank, with the cavalry of the Ranger's closed the rear.

In case of attack, the battalion in front (and the two battalions marched there alternately) was directed to form in line: that which followed, to close up into column ready to march to which ever flank it was ordered, as the cavalry under Capt. Shank was to the order. The

The Revolution in Louisa County

whole of the cavalry preceded the march, till the detachment crossed the bridge over the South Anna: . . . At night the corps lay upon their arms, in the strongest position which could be conveniently found, on the principle of making a front each way; and having a strong reserve of infantry, as well as cavalry, within the circle, ready to support any part which might be attacked, and to sally from it if ordered: the guards and sentinels were, as usual, in ambuscade.

Lt. Col. Simcoe then proceeded with the utmost despatch, by Bird's Ordinary [on the Louisa-Fluvanna line on the Three Notched Road], towards Napier's Ford [Fluvanna Court House] . . . not a person escaped who was in sight, and the advanced cavalry were so managed as totally to conceal the advance of the infantry . . .

Meanwhile, swiftly rode Tarleton's Legions across Louisa County to "disturb" as directed. We are told he let one detachment pause long enough to destroy twelve wagon loads of clothing destined for Greene in the Carolinas, and that he dawdled a bit at Castle Hill on the morning of June 4, but on the whole Tarleton travelled fast. And he travelled light.

Tarleton was in his favorite element. His legion was splendidly mounted with the best stock of the country. With 250 men, all but seventy his own dragoons, he rode at high speed — disregarding the summer heat — between the South Anna and the North Anna Rivers, the length of Louisa County. He "halted at noon," on the third of June, "just long enough to refresh men and horses, pressed forward again in the afternoon, halted at eleven, near Louisa Court House, and remained on a plentiful plantation till two o'clock in the morning, at which time he again resumed his march." Before dawn "he fell in with twelve wagons that were on their journey, under a small guard, from the upper parts of Virginia and Maryland, with arms and clothing for the continental troops in South Carolina. These were burned, to save time and avoid a detail for their escort." Several captures were made at private mansions, including two brothers of General Nelson. Tarleton imagined that a march of seventy miles in twenty-five hours, with the caution he had used, might give him the advantage of a surprise. (He did not realize that Jack Jouett had noted his march and guessed his destination.)

Tarleton made his gallop toward the Rivanna River, hoping for a *coup de grace*, but Jack Jouette's dashing ride from Cuckoo Tavern in Louisa to Monticello and Charlottesville to spread the alarm left Tarleton and his Legions only a *coup de theatre*. Governor Jefferson had gone down his mountain; most of the legislators had gone over the mountains.

Tarleton did not realize it, but as he crossed Louisa, his men destroyed medical supplies that were much needed by the Americans. On June 30, Dr. Pope wrote for needed medicines. "Have lost all our

The Revolution in Louisa County

medicine & stores; Col. Tarleton overtook them in Louisa & burnt both waggons and medicines." (While the troops under Lafayette were moving into Hanover from the East, sites in Louisa were considered for an army hospital, but it was finally located at Beaverdam Church in Hanover under Dr. Matthew Pope.)

Later Governor Nelson wrote General Washington:

. . . Tarleton by sudden excursions into these parts of the Country that he knew were not in arms has collected a number of Horses that have enabled him to run about patrolling citizens whom he has taken in their beds . . . That [the British] have done great injury both public and private is certain . . .

A study of the "Abstract of Losses During the Revolution" for Louisa County gives much information about the "depredations" of the troops under both Simcoe and Tarleton. Some folk lost tobacco stored in Page's Warehouse in Hanover, but John Yancey lists the most items taken. Could Mr. Yancey have been the owner of the "plentiful plantation" where Tarleton and his men "halted at eleven" on the night of June 3, 1781?

And what of the Marquis de Lafayette during all these British maneuvers? On Tuesday, June 5, he left Culpeper Church and proceeded to Raccoon Ford on the south branch of the Rappahannock River. From there he wrote General Wayne on Thursday, June 7, ". . . The movements of the enemy renders it of the Highest importance that we may soon come near to them . . ." On that day Lafayette at last received reinforcements and between then and June 11, the army grew to number more than 4,000 men.

By Saturday, June 9 they were camped in the Wilderness, Orange County. On Sunday June 10 Capt. John Davis wrote in his journal, "Camp in Louisa County, Virginia . . . marched at 5 o'clock, a thin poor country. Joined the Marquis this day."

On Monday, June 11, more of the American Army crossed the North Anna at Brock's Bridge and marched southward to the South Anna River. Tuesday, June 12 found them at Boswell's Tavern on the South Anna. By Wednesday they were in Fluvanna County at Allegre's Tavern on the Three Notched Road, at the fork of Mechunk Creek. According to tradition Lafayette's men opened an old road between Boswell's and Allegre's Taverns that later bore the name "The Marquis Road." (Eight years earlier the Court road orders for Louisa noted "the Road that leads from Boswell's Ordinary to the 3 Notched Road.")

Lafayette had rushed to this position on the Three Notched Road because he feared the British would once again turn westward and try to destroy the stores left in Albemarle. Some sources state these stores were still at Scotts Ferry (Scottsville) and Henderson's on the Rivanna,

The Revolution in Louisa County

while others state the military supplies were moved to Charlottesville after Tarleton left there. However, Tarleton and Simcoe, after marching through Fluvanna and destroying the arsenal at Point of Fork, joined Cornwallis in Goochland by June 6. They continued to make raids through the countryside, but when Tarleton again started west on the Three Notched Road, he heard that the American Army was moving east, so he followed close behind Cornwallis when the British left central Virginia on June 13.

- Tarleton marched east on the Three Notched Road which looped back and forth across the southern Louisa line, bound for Richmond, and Louisa County saw the armies no more. They were on the road to Yorktown.

The armies were gone, but the war was not quite over for Louisa. The County still had to supply men and food, wagons and supplies for the war effort. On June 13, Major John Pryor, Commissary General, Military Stores, reported that riflemen had joined Lafayette and they needed lead, which was scarce. He sent out expresses "to every probably house, within forty miles extent along the Southwest Mountains, to collect what can be found in windows & elsewhere." (Lead was used in fixing panes of glass in sashes at this time and before introduction of putty.)

On July 14, the War Office directed the County Lieutenant of Louisa "to keep one-fourth part of their militia in the field under command of the Marquis Lafayette taking care to relieve them once in two months." The militia companies were to report "to camp properly officered."

Major John Pryor, in his letter of July 15, 1781 told about his searches for needed supplies for the army: "If it was to save life, waggons could not be procured within a week — I am sick of the whole world."

On September 11, 1781 Richard Anderson, Jr. sent Colonel William Davies, Quartermaster, his "register of estrays" (cattle that had strayed on the Commons and had not been claimed) for Louisa and a list of persons employed in collecting and driving cattle. Anderson was required to procure in Louisa as much wheat as would make 1000 barrels of wheat, but reported that unless exemption from military duty could be given the workmen, he would not be able to get the barrels made.

Again on October 1 Louisa was asked to send provisions for the armies. To add to their trouble, smallpox had erupted on many plantations. There were misunderstandings, stores were overlooked — there was always confusion in the commissary orders. Two wagon loads of that scarce commodity — flour — was stored in the mill belonging to the Reverend John Todd that hectic fall of 1781, and he

The Revolution in Louisa County

“could never prevail on Commissaries to take it away.” Seven months later he was still asking that it be removed before it spoiled. Two wagon loads! When John Scott was saying he had sent seven barrels of corn and 107 bushels of oats to Point of Fork from Louisa, “which is all the forage in that County!”

That fall of 1781 was a time of privation. Capt. Henry Greer wrote to Colonel William Davis, Commissary, “I am taking the liberty to inform you me and my men is Almost neaked for want of clothing . . . which renders it more disagreeable . . . I can assure you they are almost neaked and constantly mermering for there pay as they have not rec'd Any this Eightmonths.”

And in Louisa there was poor Mary Sanders who was lonesome for her husband and asked that he be allowed to come home. He had been condemned to work in the Lead Mines in Montgomery County in 1780 . . .

No wonder Cornwallis reported that he found the people of central Virginia “thoroughly hostile!” Hungry, ragged, without arms and equipment, they rallied and rid themselves of the British. Supplies were hard to find, the difficulties almost unsurmountable. But the British had their troubles too. Lord Germain stated the facts:

Another thing which clearly proves that the affairs of the English have been badly conducted in America, is that the American loyalists alone were superior in number to the rebels. How then has it come to pass that the troops double in numbers, well paid, and wanting in nothing, aided besides by a German army, have failed in opposing the partisans of liberty, who badly paid and equipped, often lacked everything . . .

Everything but a love of freedom.

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