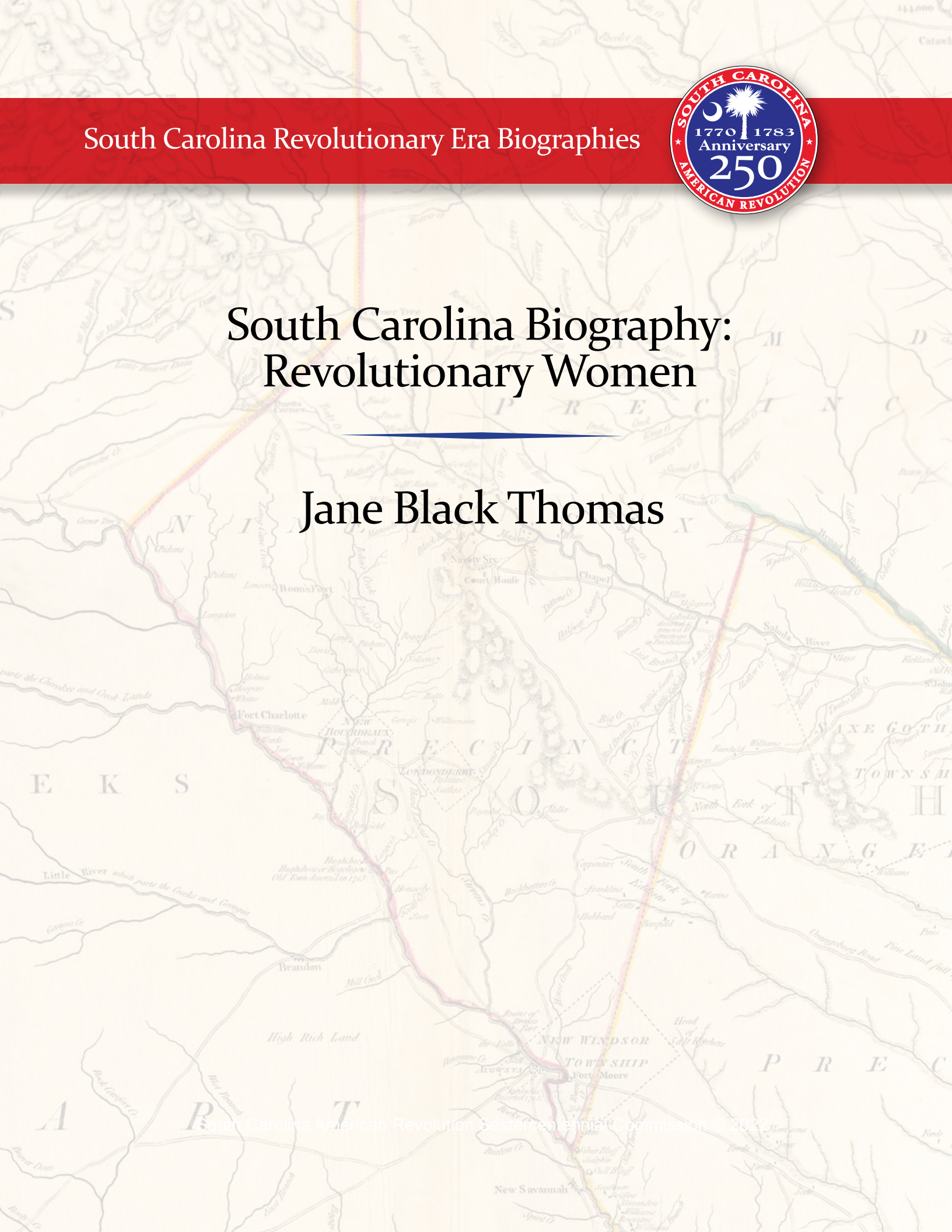




South Carolina Biography: Revolutionary Women

Jane Black Thomas



Jane Black Thomas

Sheila Ingle

Abigail Adams wrote, “It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed. . . . The habits of a vigorous mind are formed contending with difficulties. All History will convince you of this, and that wisdom and penetration are the fruit of experience, not the Lessons of retirement and leisure. Great necessities call out great virtues.”¹

During those eight long years of the Revolutionary War, the mettle of both men and women in America was daily tested. After the fall of Charleston to the British on May 12, 1780, a bloody civil war hit Carolina like a tsunami. In the backcountry, neighbors lined up against neighbors. General Sir Henry Clinton, British Commander in Chief, North America, left Lieutenant General Lord Charles Cornwallis with instructions to subdue and control Carolina.

In the family of John and Jane Black Thomas, both parents, and their nine children and spouses, all fought as Patriots. Their choices to actively defend their land allowed for no shirking in either resistance or protection of their homes; they were united in purpose.

Many have described the beauty of this backcountry. Its fertility in plants, fish, and game astounded the early settlers. Forests, grasslands, and canebrakes abounded with deer, buffalo, and fifty-pound turkeys. As Logan wrote, “deer were so numerous at this period in the upper-country, that large herds of them were scarcely ever out of sight of the pioneer, even while standing in his own cabin-door. . . . [I]t was no uncommon occurrence . . . to meet with herds of deer of sixty or seventy head.”²

The Thomas land was lush and rich, and they were the guardians. As did the other settlers, they took their assignment seriously, for this “most delightful, as well as the most fertile in the world.”³ Presbyterian historian George Howe declared the forest “a beautiful valley . . . lofty trees . . . a meandering stream. . . . The rays of the declining sun shed their departing beams on the tree-tops that waved . . . in the evening breeze.”⁴ Remarked one of the first emigrants, James McIlwaine, upon first laying sight on the area, “What a fair forest this!”⁵

Jane Black was born in 1720 in Pennsylvania to parents Robert and Annabelle Waters Black. The family lived in Chester County. John Newcastle Thomas was born in Wales and immigrated with his family to Pennsylvania. Nothing is known of their early years, but the two young people married in 1740.⁶

The Chester County Historic Preservation Network describes this section of the colony as a place where neighbor worked with neighbor to build homes and lay out roads for the purpose of traveling to meeting, mill,

and market. Communities formed around water where gristmills, sawmills, and wheelwrights constructed their businesses. There were one-room schools and meeting houses for Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers. Land was plentiful, and buying it from William Penn or his descendants was simple.⁷

John's first military action was during the French and Indian War where he served under General Edward Braddock. In July 1755, he fought in the Battle of the Monongahela, where the Indians and French defeated the English ten miles south of French-held Fort Duquesne. Braddock's defeat and death was a shocking loss for the British Army and gave the French control of the Ohio River Valley.⁸

Because of the inundation of settlers, land in Pennsylvania began to be scarce and more costly during the mid-1700s. This lack of land for families and for future generations compelled some settlers, like John and Jane, to look elsewhere.

John, Jane, and their children, along with other families, left for a new life in South Carolina. They traveled on the Great Wagon Road from Pennsylvania to the open South Carolina backcountry.

Families walked, rode horseback, and traveled in Conestoga wagons on the wagon road, which was little wider than an Indian trail. Drivers steered their herds of cattle and sheep to market. Ferries helped the travelers to cross rivers. Pack horses, laden with goods to sell, plodded to market along this eight-hundred-mile dirt path. Each mile of the rutted trail was full of activity.



Fig. 1 German and Swiss wagon builders living near the Conestoga River built these first wagons. Photograph by Ed Meskens of a painting completed in 1883 by Newbold Hough Trotter (1827–1898). Painting is in the State Museum of Pennsylvania.

John Thomas had received a land grant in 1754 in the Camden District of Carolina. On the south side of the Catawba River near a small creek, they settled on six hundred acres in what was then Anson County, North Carolina, but today is York County, South Carolina.⁹

They joined the Fishing Creek Presbyterian Church.¹⁰ Here on Fishing Creek, he and his family lived until about 1762, when they moved once again and settled on a place where the Kelsey and Fair Forest creeks came together—near Rich Hill in what is now Spartanburg County.

This couple was one of the founding members of the Fairforest Church, a Presbyterian congregation. Without a pastor, the members depended

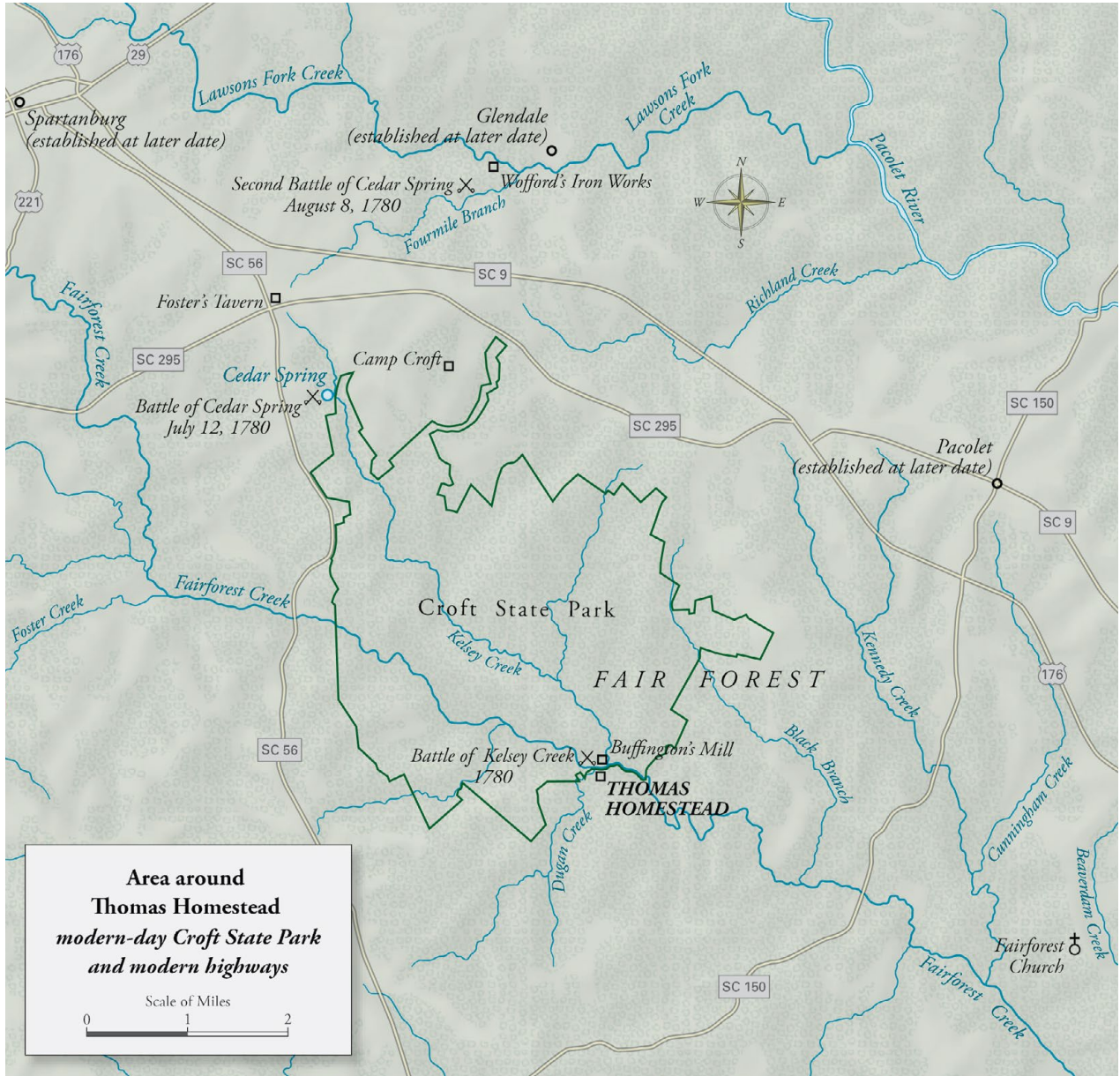


Fig. 2 The John and Jane Thomas Homestead. This map shows the area around their home, which includes the Battle of Cedar Spring. It also includes the present-day Croft State Park, as well as various towns and highways in the area. Map by George Stoll.

on occasional supply preachers. During the 1770s, the “church edifice at that time was a spacious log building.”¹¹ So much of the religious observance was in the home with daily Bible reading, the singing of

Psalms, the teaching of the catechism, and prayers. This simple piety also honored the Sabbath.¹²

Elizabeth Ellet writes, “Mrs. Thomas was much beloved and respected in that neighborhood” and “she continued as a zealous and efficient member as long as she resided within its bounds.”¹³

In his *History of Spartanburg County*, Landrum adds, Mrs. Thomas “was not only distinguished for her indomitable perseverance and ardent spirit of patriotism, but also for her eminent piety, discretion, and industry. She is described as rather below the ordinary stature, with brown eyes and hair, rounded and pleasing features, fair complexion, and countenance sprightly and expressive. The daughters also exhibited the same loveliness of character and beauty of person, whew they inherited from their mother.”¹⁴

James Bailey says that John was described as “industrious, intelligent, patriotic, and highly distinguished for his devotion to the public welfare. He held commissions from the Royal government as magistrate and captain of the militia” before he led militia forces to fight against England.¹⁵

From the observations of others, this couple lived out their beliefs with integrity for all to see, both then and now.

A picture is truly worth a thousand words, so included below are photos to help readers put themselves into this time in our country two hundred fifty years ago.

The winds of war swept through the colonies in 1775, with news of battles at Lexington and Bunker Hill. Then the first meeting of the Provincial Congress in Carolina met on June 3. Many colonists agreed that their rights were at stake.



Fig. 3 (Top photo) In the militia line are Jimmy Rhyne, Isaac Whitmore, Andrew Dixon, Noah Herr, Stephen McKee, and Matthew Gamble. Robert Rhyne is barely visible in the background. Photography by Robert Clay Photography. (Bottom row, left photo) The lady alone is Paige Elizabeth. (Bottom row, middle photo) Three men together are Isaac, Robert, and Jimmy. (Bottom row, right photo) Jerry Byerly is lighting a pipe. Other photos taken by cell phones and downloaded to Facebook.



Fig. 4 Typical inside of house with a summer dinner served at a colonial era log cabin. Downloaded cell photo on Facebook.



Fig. 5 Robert Rhyne shown in typical late 18th c. Carolina backcountry hunting clothing. Photo by unknown photographer using cell phone and downloaded to Facebook.



Fig. 6 Bethany Graybill and Jerry Byerly shown in period clothing and domestic setting in the log cabin. These would have represented successful settlers with glass window panes, a stone fire place, nice clothing and shoes, two chairs, a wooden chest, metal cooking items, and wood floors. On the table is a brazier, a small, portable firebox for cooking, but not using a fireplace. Photo downloaded on Facebook from cell phone.

The colony began to prepare itself for an armed clash with England.

Believing that all should be part of the same brotherhood and of like mind, Patriot leaders required all men to sign an instrument of agreement. Those who refused would be considered enemies of the state.¹⁶ In doing so, signers agreed to resist force by force and to be united in purpose to defend. And they promised to “be ready to sacrifice life and fortune to secure the freedom and safety of South Carolina, holding all persons inimical to the liberty of the colonies who shall refuse to subscribe to the association.”¹⁷

In late July, a delegation left Charles Town with copies of this document called the Articles of Association. William Henry Drayton led, with ministers Reverend Oliver Hart, a Baptist, and Reverend William Tennent, a Presbyterian. Their goal was simple: gain many signatures of support for the Association from the men in the backcountry.

From one farm to another, men gathered to listen and then make decisions. Would they fight for the British or against the British?

For weeks, family conversations, and sometimes arguments, circled around the dining tables. After church services, the men gathered outside and discussed the battles in the northern colonies. Smoke swirled from clay pipes as two or three watched the blacksmith replace shoes on their horses and talked. And the wives and mothers pondered and spoke of the specter of soldiers, with swords gleaming in the sunlight, riding horses up to their porches.



Fig. 7 William Henry Drayton drawn from the life by Du Simitier in Philadelphia; engraved in medallion by B. L. Prevost at Paris. Date created: 1781. (Library of Congress)

In the Thomas family, the exchanges continued daily. John Thomas had resigned his British positions as magistrate and militia captain. All of the members of their Fair Forest Church were for defending their land against Britain. There was no need for persuasion from Drayton or anyone else; the families in this part of the backcountry were already united.

A new militia was formed on August 21, 1775, at Wofford's Iron Works. This meeting of neighbors was quite the success. As William Henry Drayton described it in a letter,

I had this day a meeting with the people in this frontier. Many present were of the other party; but I have the pleasure to acquaint you that those became voluntary converts. Every person received satisfaction and departed with pleasure. I finished the day with a barbecued beef. . . . These people are active and spirited; they are staunch in our favor. . . . For these reasons and to enable them to act with vigor, I shall take the liberty of supplying them with a small quantity of ammunition; for they have not one ounce, when they shall be formed into regular companies.¹⁸

Fifty-seven-year-old Colonel John Thomas was appointed commander. He called for the Spartan Regiment's first muster at his home, and the men in his community showed up. Thomas had earned the respect of his neighbors. Those Patriots were willing to follow him, as were his three oldest sons and four sons-in-law. This was quite a tribute to his character.

The name of the Spartan Regiment is believed to have been the work of Drayton himself. It was a compliment to the men in the area to be compared to the warlike spirit of those ancient Greeks of Sparta.¹⁹ Before long, this group of volunteers became known as a "Flying Camp" because of the frequency of their mobility and action.²⁰

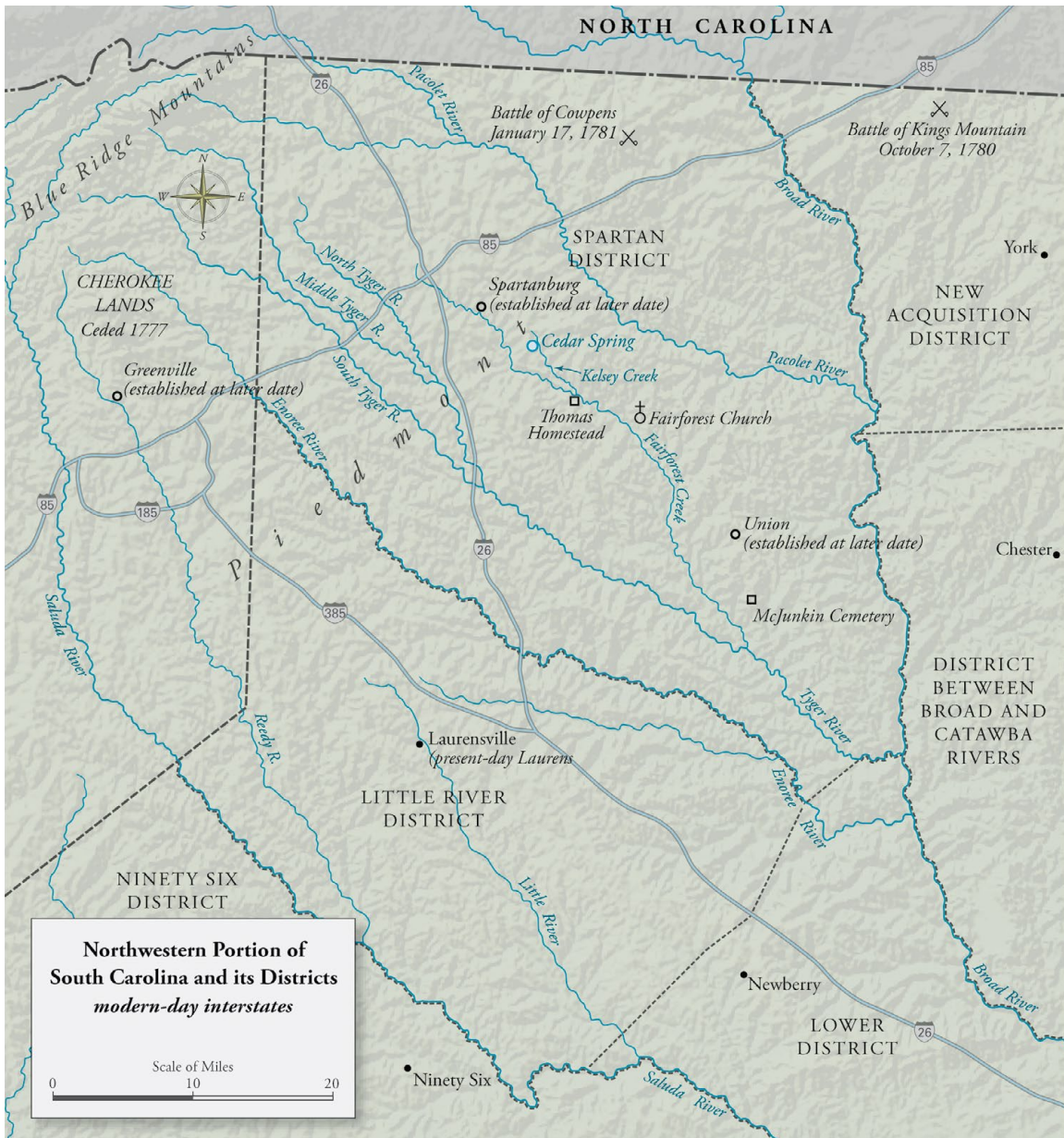


Fig. 8 The northwestern portion of SC and its districts in the 1770s. Additionally included are the modern interstates. Map by George Stoll.

John Thomas Sr. had served as militia captain under Captain Thomas Fletchall. This company was responsible for the land between the Broad and Saluda Rivers. When Drayton spoke to members of Colonel

Thomas Fletchall's militia of about 250 at John Ford's farm on the Enoree, many men interrupted to denounce his views. After a passionate meeting, with no violence, Drayton left, but with obvious knowledge: those men would fight for England. But Drayton had also seen a group of men under Colonel John Thomas who were eager to take up arms against England.²¹

Drayton was sure that the Spartan Regiment was a trained group, and he vouched for them. The Council of Safety ordered that Patriot militia companies be kept in a state of readiness. To do this, they were ordered "that every Captain or commanding Officer of a company, shall assemble, muster, train and exercise his company once in every fortnight, under a penalty of twenty-five pounds currency for every default."²²

Two camps had clearly been formed in the backcountry, and the line in the sand had been drawn.

SPARTAN REGIMENT, SEPT. 11, 1775

TO THE HONORABLE WM. H. DRAYTON, ESQ.:

May it please Your Honor:—I this moment received Your Honor's favor of the 10 inst., and very fortunately, the command for this district was just assembled at my house in order to address the Council of Safety almost on the very purport of Your Honor's letter, as we had all the reason in the world (and still have) to believe from good information, that the malignants are forming the most hellish schemes to frustrate the measures of the Continental Congress, and to use all those who are willing to stand by those measures in the most cruel manner. Your Honor will be fully convinced of the truth of this by perusing the papers transmitted herewith, to which I refer Your Honor. I shall comply with your Honor's orders as far as is in my power; Your Honor must suppose it impossible to raise the whole regiment as several families and no man be left about the house. If they should be called away. I shall take as large a draft as possible from every company, and in short, do everything to the utmost of my powers, and when encamped shall transmit to Your Honor, as quickly as possible, an account of my proceedings.

JOHN THOMAS²³

In September, Thomas wrote this letter to William Henry Drayton. Men, women, and children in the backcountry continued to daily toil to carry on in this wilderness, where there were never any breaks in their labor, except for sickness. Survival by making a living from the land never ceased. Boys followed their fathers and learned their tasks in the fields, forests, and barns, while their sisters mimicked their mothers. All had jobs that lasted from daylight into dark. If the men were called to militia duty, the others in the family stepped up to take their places. There was little leisure time. John and Jane Thomas's family was no exception.

And the citizen soldiers of the Spartan Regiment were soon called to action. Maintaining the security of their homes meant they put down the axes and left with their rifles, joining their neighbors to fight against a common threat. In December 1775, they participated in the Snow Campaign. In his position, Thomas was not only in charge of taking care of the safety of his men, but also the protection of his community.

Though unknown to them at the time, years of fighting stretched out in front of them.

These supporters of the American Revolution were called Patriots or Whigs, and those who followed Fletchall and others were deemed Loyalists or Tories. These Loyalists considered themselves legally bound to King George III. Believing the King was appointed by God to rule from his throne, they had a duty to follow him, no matter the high taxes he put on them.

On the other hand, the Patriots considered the King to have betrayed them by not only the taxes on common goods, but also the lack of representation in the government. “No taxation without representation” had become a common cry and shout.

Little is known about the family life of Jane and John Thomas. What is definitive is that all were Patriots and fought together. Their sons and their sons-in-law fought with him against continued rule by George III and took this fight personally. “The protection of a long line of the frontier was entrusted to John Thomas and his men. With diligence, fidelity and zeal did he perform this duty; and retained his command till after the fall of Charles Town.”²⁴

The Thomas children included Abram, Robert, John, William, Jane, Martha, Ann, Letitia, and Esther. Abram, a captain in that same Spartan Regiment, was wounded at Ninety Six, taken prisoner, and died there. Robert was also a captain and was killed in Roebuck’s defeat at the Battle of Mudlick Creek in 1781. John Thomas Jr. first served with his father in the Spartan Regiment. In 1780, he became commander of this same regiment. William assisted his mother and sisters in defending their home from a group of Tories and was wounded at Mudlick Creek. Jane was the wife of Captain Joseph McCool. Martha married Captain Josiah Culbertson, who was known as the most effective scout and sharpshooter. Ann, the wife of Major Joseph McJunkin, greatly contributed to the success of the battles at Hanging Rock, Musgrove Mill, Blackstock’s Plantation, and the Cowpens. Letitia was

the wife of Major James Lusk who served in the Spartan Regiment as adjutant under colonels John Thomas and Thomas Brandon. Esther married Robert Carter, another Patriot.²⁵

Lest we believe all the battles were fought by men in the fields or forests, there are two well-documented stories about Jane Thomas.

Though the traditional role of women during this time was housekeeping, in this war, women quickly learned to adapt. With the men away from home with their militia for weeks and months at a time, their tasks on the farm were taken over by the wives and children. Added to the gardening, doing the laundry, cooking in an open fireplace, weaving, spinning, making clothes, milking cows and goats, and tending poultry were now more outdoor jobs like hunting, chopping wood, plowing, and shearing sheep. A day's work must have been overwhelming.

South Carolina Governor John Rutledge had sent a quantity of gunpowder to the house of Colonel Thomas, as well as other known Patriot homes in the backcountry (like the home of Colonel William Bratton), to help them defend themselves against Tories or British soldiers. Gunpowder, or the lack thereof, was essential to firing a rifle. Without powder in their powder horns, not one shot could be fired.

Though the powder was hidden on each property, word filtered out that it was concealed. At the Thomas house, the gunpowder was guarded by twenty-five militia from the Spartan Regiment, and the house was ready for an unexpected attack.²⁶

Josiah Culbertson was the only man that was there to defend the household and the arms; the other guards left the premises with as much as they could carry to safety. As a son-in-law of John and Jane, he chose to stay to defend the house, as well as his mother-in-law, his wife Martha, her two sisters, and younger brother William.

In his pension statement, Culbertson recounted his remembrance of this event.

A part of the ammunition was deposited at the house of Col. John Thomas before mentioned. In the Spring of '80 while the British besieged Charleston the ammunition which was all important to the American cause was guarded by the Deponent and twenty five men. The success of the British inspired the Tories and a Col. Moore with almost one hundred and fifty men determined to attack the house in which the ammunition was lodged and destroy it—Moore with his men approached—the guard being fearful of such odds, retreated although strongly remonstrated with by this deponent leaving no one to defend the house but deponent and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Thomas. The house was a log house and the rest of the guard having retreated as determined great as the hazard was rather than give it up to defend it himself against the besiegers. He accordingly loaded his guns and

while his mother-in-law was employed in running him a supply of bullets kept up such a fire upon the Tories from the house that they believing the whole guard was there, retreated leaving himself, his mother-in-law and the ammunition safe. The destruction of the ammunition would have been a serious loss to the Americans and the same was afterwards made use of by Sumpter at his fight on the Rocky mountain [sic, Rocky Mount, July 30, 1780] and at the battle of the Hanging Rock [August 6, 1780].²⁷

Matthew Patton, who was one of the twenty-five guards at the Thomas house, relates this same story in his pension statement.

Col. Thomas hearing this and under expectation that his house would be attacked by them sent word to this deponent by a young lady, his daughter, Letty Thomas who came four miles in the night to give the information and that he and his aged father with what few they could collect went immediately to the aid [of] Thomas; in a few minutes after they arrived there it was announced that the Tories were approaching. They were hailed but would not answer and immediately fired and killed one of Col. Thomas' egroes. And that while Samuel Clouney [sic, Samuel Clowney] and this deponent were engaged in the house running bullets the most of their company,

he believes all but one Isaiah Culbertson, fled from the house. Mrs. Thomas then came running in and urged them also to fly for their lives as the Tories were near the house. They took up their guns and cocked and presented them threatening to shoot and retiring or retreating at the same [time?], and by the use of some address they both made their escape when Isaiah Culbertson whom they had left upstairs in the house commenced firing on the Tories whom he supposed to have been about two hundred in number, who took fright at the fire from the house and fled from the house and then Culbertson also got off safely having kept possession of the house.²⁸

These Patriots, behind the walls of a home, were truly outnumbered by their enemies. Culbertson was the only soldier left to defend the gunpowder and the family. Culbertson makes it clear in his statement that the others loaded and he fired, like an assembly line, as he went from one perch to another.

During this time in our history, the Thomas women and the twelve-year-old William would have been able to accurately load and fire a rifle. An expert could load in two minutes.

Obviously, no one paid any attention to a Tory demand to leave the house. Appearances of many shooters belied the facts from inside; the resistance was fierce. The fire from the upstairs was fast and furious.

Suddenly the barred door opened, and into her yard marched Jane Thomas. Blackened from the smoke from all the firing, cap falling off her head, clothes awry, smelling like burnt powder, and waving a sword above her head, Jane loudly dared the enemy to continue its attack. What a spectacle! The enemy slowly retreated.

The length of the home attack is unknown, but in the end, the Tories left. And they left without any gunpowder.

Even though the details which would lend to the excitement of this attack are lacking, it is known that only five family members sent the Tory invaders on their way. The enemy was unable to storm and take the Thomas home, and the odds were more than favorable for their side. Instead, the Tories ran. A record of this remarkable battle is also found on the tombstone of Jane's daughter, Ann McJunkin, wife of Major Joseph McJunkin.

Skirmishes between the Tory militia and the Whig militia continued all over Carolina. Savannah fell to the British, and the enemy set its sights on Charles Town. It was Spring 1780, and on May 12, 1780, Major General Benjamin Lincoln surrendered his forces to the British. Now, there was no Continental army in the South. Weeks later, Sir Henry Clinton bragged, "I may venture to assert, that there are few men in South Carolina who are not either our prisoners, or in arms with us."²⁹

How wrong he was in this assertion.



Fig. 9 Tombstone of Ann McJunkin, wife of Major Joseph McJunkin. The couple's graves are marked in the McJunkin Cemetery on the Sartor farm in Union County, five miles south of Union on US Highway 176. Photo by Tammy Griffin.³⁰

After the fall of Charles Town, the fight for the freedom of America's families now began in earnest in Carolina. "The only thing a man could trust was his best friend, his rifle."³¹ Sir Henry Clinton forced the issue of being the conqueror. His proclamation of surrender included that all men declare his allegiance to the King, and Loyalists could treat them accordingly as "rebels and enemies to their country."³² This was the choice given Thomas, his sons, and sons-in-law, as well as all

the Whig militiamen across the colony. John Thomas Sr. took the protection offered.

Decisions had to be made, both individually and as Whig regiments. On Sunday, June 4, at a secret location, Colonel John Thomas, along with two other Whig commanders Colonels Thomas Brandon and John Lysle (also spelled Lisle), met with their men. All knew their choices. Their united decision was to defend and protect the community. They chose to combine their small bands at a camp on Fair Forest Creek.³³ They did not trust their Tory neighbors.

On June 12, men met again at Bullock's Creek; they could now be called refugees. John Thomas Jr. and the Spartan Regiment were there.

Captain John Thomas Jr. reiterated their past struggles and victories. Raising his voice, he said these words:

*Our cause must now be determined. Shall we join the British or strive like men for the noble end for which we have done and spent so much? Shall we declare ourselves cowards and traitors, or shall we fight for liberty as long as we have life? As for me, 'give me liberty or give me death.'*³⁴

Throwing their hats into the air and clapping their hands, all the men declared themselves together in the fight for freedom. They would defy England—and anyone who was not a friend to liberty.³⁵

The mantle of leadership was passed from father to son. A new commander now led the Spartan Regiment; Colonel John Thomas Jr. had learned well the meaning of patriotism from his parents.

John Buchanan describes the next few years in Carolina with these poignant words.

When small numbers are involved, a few deaths have as much impact as hundreds or thousands when armies clash, and the significance is magnified when those involved are friends and neighbors and kin, some on one side, some on the other. This kind of fighting would go on for almost two years, and not all were small fights—some backwoods encounters would involve hundreds of men on each side.³⁶

Whig women and children were left without clothes and food. Enemy horses trampled crops. Tories burned barns and stole livestock. Families ran for shelter and safety from those troops. For neither man nor beast was there any protection.

Lawlessness reigned.

One of the congenial co-operators in these plans of the British commander, was Colonel [Patrick] Ferguson. He encouraged the loyalists to take arms, and led them to desolate the homes of their neighbors.

About the last of June, he came into that part of the country where the family of Colonel Thomas lived, and caused great distress by the pillage and devastation of the bands of Tories who hung around his camp. The Whigs were robbed of their negroes, horses, cattle, clothing, bedding, and every article of property of sufficient value to take away. These depredations were frequent, the expeditions for plunder being sometimes weekly; and were continued as long as the Tories could venture to show their faces. In this state of things, while whole families suffered, female courage and fortitude were called into active exercise; and Mrs. Thomas showed herself a bright example of boldness, spirit and determination.³⁷

In the midst of this turmoil, Colonel Thomas Sr. and his two sons, Abram and Robert, were captured by Tories and imprisoned at the British jail at Ninety Six.

The brick jail had been built in 1774, and it had two stories, four windows with one on each side, and a shingled roof. Chains and irons kept intractable prisoners in place, and the rest roamed free in the one large room on the second floor. Four grates, or barred windows, were kept open all the time. In 1780, there were about forty Patriots imprisoned. The building had a cellar for storage and was surrounded by a fortification ditch.³⁸

“A brick jail in the backcountry was a symbol of power and permanence

at a time when most residents lived in one-room wooden houses with dirt floors. It was thirty-four by forty feet with a fireplace and chimney at each end. In excavation, cattle and pig bones have been found, which tell the story of what was cooked and eaten.”³⁹ As to the prisoners’ situation in this eighteenth century confinement, there was rampant disease, little and poor food, no medical treatment, and ongoing verbal abuse from their captors.

Along with other Whig militia, Abram Thomas died in the Ninety Six jail; Robert survived, and then John Thomas Sr. was transferred to the Charles Town jail. In fact, the elder Thomas served fourteen months under British captivity in those two jails.

One concession the British at Ninety Six allowed was the visit and care of wives to their prisoners. Perhaps the men watched for these visits through those open grates in the crowded room.

While taking supplies to her husband and sons on July 11, 1780, Jane Thomas overheard a conversation between two Tory women. They were talking about a surprise attack that was planned against a Rebel camp at Cedar Springs for the following night.⁴⁰

Jane knew that Rebel camp well. It was the meeting site for the Spartan Regiment, led now by her son, John. She sprang into action to protect these sixty men. Her horse ride to encourage her imprisoned husband and two sons at Ninety Six was now a rescue plan for another son.

In the words of historian and archivist Lyman Draper,

*Cedar Spring derived its name from a large cedar tree that formerly ornamented the banks of this fine spring, which is about fifty feet in circumference. It has three principal fountains or sources of supply, which force the water from the bowels of the earth, forming a beautiful basin three feet deep.*⁴¹

Before the opening photograph for Conner Runyan’s “Did the First Cedar Springs Skirmish Really Happen?” in the *Journal of the American Revolution* is a recent photograph of the beautiful Cedar Spring taken by the author. The sun-dappled water is an invitation for a picnic, not a war game meeting of citizen soldiers, as it was in July 1780.⁴²



Fig 10 A 2016 photograph of Cedar Spring. Photo taken by Conner Runyan.

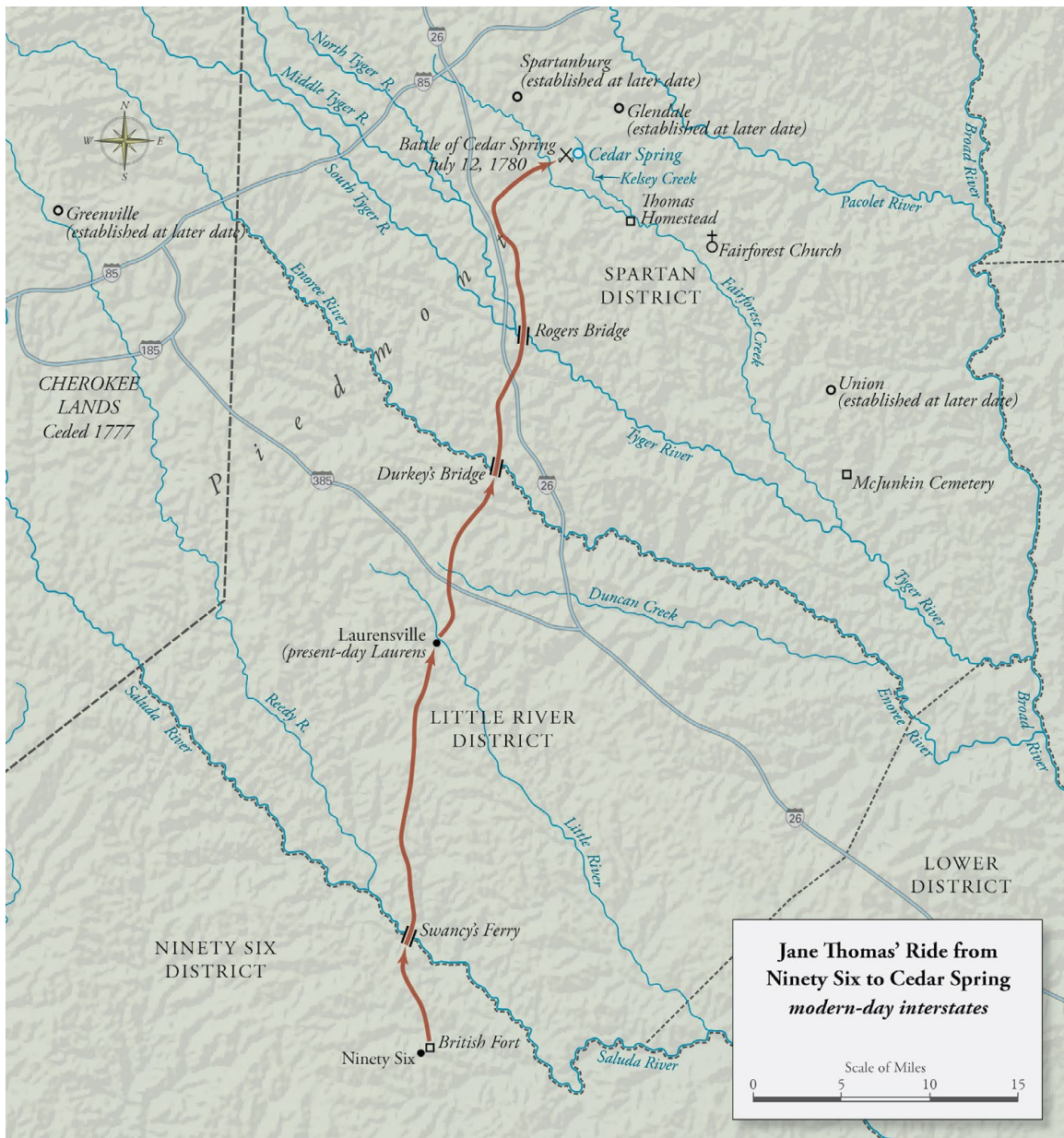


Fig. 11 Jane Thomas's ride from the fort at Ninety Six to the Cedar Spring. This urgent sixty-mile ride was a rescue mission to warn her son and the Spartan Regiment of a Tory attack. Map by George Stoll.

Another sixty-mile ride on horseback was Jane's plan for the next day. Leaving early in the morning would give her time to not wear out her horse. This determined mother and grandmother knew she could warn her son of the danger before the British attackers arrived.⁴³ After a grueling horseback ride, probably bareback, Jane delivered her message and then left for home. She had done her best to alert them and save lives.

She must have been exhausted, but even more grateful, that she had been in the right place and time to hear the Tory plans of attack and be able to intervene for the safety of her family and other friends of liberty.

The younger Colonel Thomas quickly laid out a surprise for the British that night. He set his campfires for the look of a camp asleep. The soldier volunteers rolled up their blankets to appear as a sleeping roll. Silence covered the camp, and then the militia sneaked away. They hid in the woods and waited. Rifles were primed for signs of the enemy.

Before long, around 150 Loyalists quietly jumped off their horses on the outskirts of the Whig camp and quietly made their way toward the dim light of the banked fires.

The hidden Whig soldiers saw the enemy's shadows, and the first volley fired. Looking into the dark from the camp, the Tories could see nothing.

Rather than catching snoring rebels rolled up in their blankets, a hidden force of shrill rifles greeted the British. There was a sudden and quick retreat. They ran in panic.⁴⁴

Celebration was in the air, as these Patriots saw their enemy run from them, not toward them. Their resistance and win against Ferguson's forces was the boost they needed, as did the backcountry Whigs—all because of the warning by Jane Thomas.

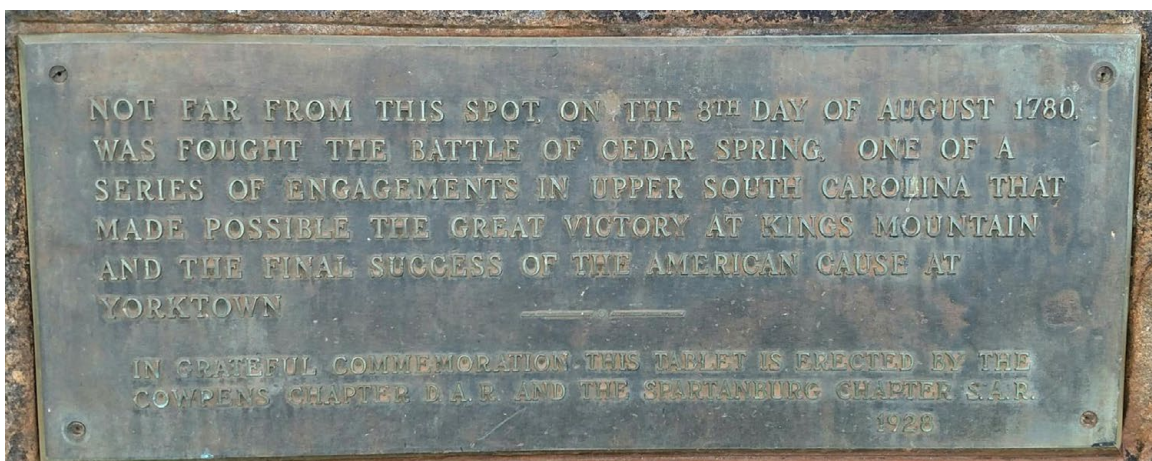


Fig 12 Kelsey Creek at Cedar Spring. Photograph by Conner Runyan.

About fifty miles away on the same day, another battle, called Huck's Defeat, was won by the Whigs. It was another surprise attack, and the Tory leader was killed. A resurgence of hope by the Patriots was in the air. "While these may have been small military victories, they were nonetheless very desperately needed psychological boosts for the Patriots."⁴⁵

And the Revolutionary War in the South switched victors with each step of those citizen soldiers. The year 1780 concluded with the rout of Patrick Ferguson at Kings Mountain, and 1781 began with Daniel Morgan's men chasing the British Banastre Tarleton from the field. The last major battle fought in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War was Eutaw Springs on September 8, 1781.

For John and Jane Thomas, the next facts revolve around their move to Greenville County, after the war, in 1785. This amazing couple remained there until their deaths in 1811; she was 91, and John reached the age of 93.

For eight years, their lives were centered on war. Striving for liberty and freedom took over their days and nights. Defending her hearth and home was behind every decision that Jane Thomas made. She was steadfast and dependable; Jane was relentless in preserving her family.

Printed in the Charleston newspaper *Carolina Gazette*, on May 25, 1811, was Jane's obituary, which gives us more clues about her personality and what others knew of this remarkable woman.

DIED, on the 16th of April, in the 91st year of her age, Mrs. Jane Thomas, wife of Col. John Thomas. She was descended from respectable parents of the name of Black, in the state of Pennsylvania, was an useful member of society, and a pious christian of the Presbyterian persuasion, The husband of her youth is left, dove like, to lament his irreparable loss, and though old and decriped, he feels it most sensibly-- Her children, grand-children and great- grand children, are very numerous; while they lament their loss, they are consoled with the hope that she is gone to the friend of sinners Jesus Christ. She was a sincere and spirited whig. In the year 1779, when the tories attacked the house of her husband, to get at a magazine kept there, she cooperated with her son and son-in-law in guarding it. While they fired on the assailants, she advanced in front of them, with a sword in her hand and dared them to come

on. They were intimidated and retired. She steadily refused to drink any tea after the revolutionary war commenced, saying “it was the blood of some of the poor men who first fell in the war.” She enjoyed good health throughout her long life, lived on a spare diet, with frequent draughts of butter-milk but never took any physic.

It is obvious from these words of respect that Jane Thomas lived out the words from Leviticus inscribed on the Liberty Bell, “Proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof.”⁴⁶

On March 31, 1776, Abigail Adams wrote a letter to her husband, John Adams. She said, “I desire you would Remember the Ladies.”⁴⁷

Jane Black Thomas should certainly be remembered as a Revolutionary War heroine of South Carolina.

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- 14 Landrum, *History of Spartanburg County*, 188.
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- 40 Buchanan, *The Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 112
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- 46 Lev. 25:10.
- 47 "Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0241>.

APPENDIX A

The Rifle of John Thomas Sr.

In the Royal Collection Trust is the rifle of John Thomas Sr. This is how they describe this treasure that was crafted and made for this South Carolina Revolutionary War hero in Spartanburg County.

The description reads that it is an “octagonal steel barrel and brass mounts and engraved patch box, the box engraved “D Egg.” Curly maple stock engraved with inscription UNITED STATES WE ARE ONE” and a silver escutcheon plate engraved “JT” for Colonel John Thomas, American Rifleman.”¹

Continuing with the provenance, it says, “Belonged to Colonel John Thomas, Commander of the Spartan Regiment of militia in South Carolina. His son Captain Robert Thomas had the rifle at the Battle of Mudlick Creek, 2nd March, 1781. It was subsequently refurbished in London by the gunsmith Durs Egg and presented to George IV by Major George Hangar.”²

Its measurements are 154.0 x 16.0 cm and is considered a long rifle.

J. D. Lewis in the Carolana writes that after Colonel Thomas was imprisoned, his son Robert became the proud owner of it. Robert served in the Roebuck’s Battalion of the Spartan Regiment. He carried it at Kings Mountain and led one of the companies at Mud Lick Creek in Newberry County.³

Visiting the Museum of the American Revolution in Yorktown, Virginia, several years ago, John and I saw this rifle. It was on loan from the Royal Collection Trust for their opening.

Encircled by a glass cabinet, this antique rifle held us bemused for a bit. Knowing it was crafted by one of two brothers, Sanford or David Smith, who lived near the Thomas family, this outmoded firearm had helped members of our community to defend our land in Spartanburg County. Though it had been refurbished and reworked, the JT and the star connected our present to its past. We knew some of its story, and the men who had didn’t waste their shots in fighting for our freedom.

APPENDIX A

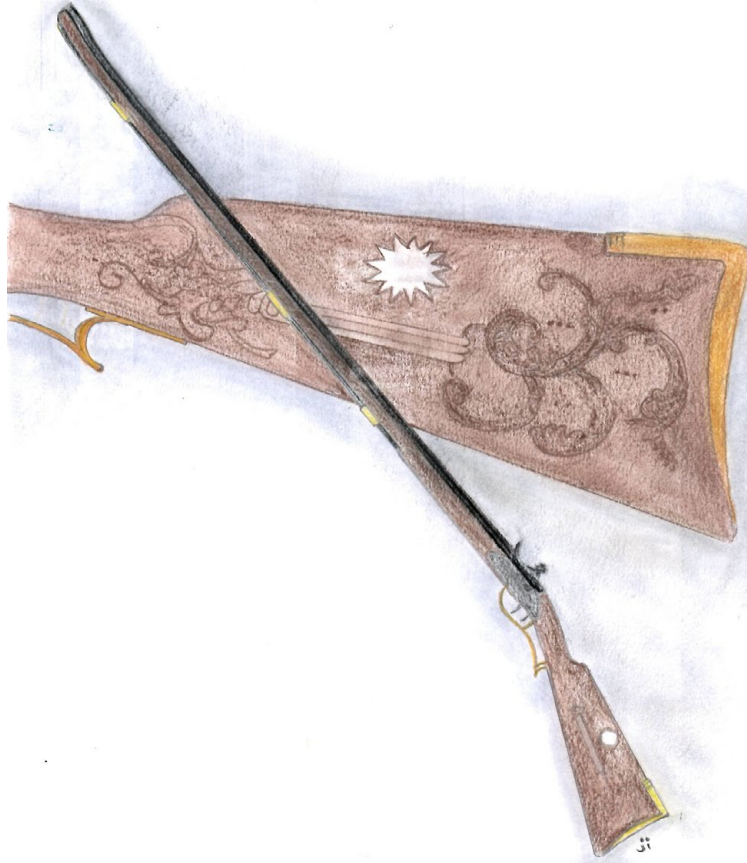


Fig 13 John Ingle painted this rifle from the photo he took. Encircled by a glass cabinet, this antique rifle held us bemused for a bit. Knowing it was crafted by one of two brothers, Sanford or David Smith, who lived near the Thomas family, this outmoded firearm had helped members of our community to defend our land in Spartanburg County. Though it had been refurbished and reworked, the JT and the star connected our present to its past. We knew some of its story, and the men who had didn't waste their shots in fighting for our freedom.

- 1 "Flintlock Rifle c. 1775–1803," Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 61069, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/61069/flintlock-rifle>. This site also has photos of the John Thomas rifle.
- 2 "Flintlock Rifle c. 1775–1803." Because of the wear and tear on this weapon of war, it needed work to hold it together.
- 3 J. D. Lewis, "Mud Lick Creek: March 2, 1781," *The American Revolution in South Carolina*, 2009, https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/revolution_mudlick_creek.html. Robert Thomas probably carried this rifle at the Battle of Cowpens, also.

APPENDIX B

Orchard Crest Cemetery Grave Marking

By Joe Glavitsch
President
Col. Robert Anderson Chapter

GREER — The Col. Robert Anderson Chapter SCSSAR with the Greenville Chapter Sons of the Revolution conducted a grave-marking commemoration Nov. 7 for three Patriots buried in the midst of this new home allotment. The cemetery was almost bulldozed into oblivion six years ago.

The patriots honored were Col. John Thomas, the first commander of the Spartan Regiment, his wife Jane, who was a courier and fought off Loyalists trying to take a magazine at her home, and a Continental Line Artilleryman, Pvt. Thomas Edwards of the 4th SC Regiment, Artillery.

Tombstones and markers were installed at the graves and more than 100 guests were present. SAR, DAR and SR chapters presented wreaths. The SC Independent Rangers and the 5th Co. 4th SC Regt., Art. were present for a musket salute and cannon volley.



From left: David Paul Reuwer, Tom Oblak and Tray Dunaway



Joe Glavitsch is interviewed by WYFF Channel 4



Chaplain Rev. Dr. John Vaughn delivers invocation.

“Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth.”

George Washington



Fig 14 Tom Hanson, editor of *The Palmetto Patriot*, the quarterly news magazine of the South Carolina Society Sons of the American Revolution, shared these photographs and write-up from the event held at Orchard Crest Cemetery, 819 John Thomas Way, Greer, SC, to celebrate the lives of John and Jane Thomas. The date was November 7, 2021.

APPENDIX B



Fig 15 Cannon fired to salute the couple by David Paul Reuwer, Tom Oblak, and Tray Dunaway.



Fig 16 The South Carolina Independent Rangers firing rifles as a salute.

APPENDIX B



Fig 17 Wreaths from SCDAR and SCSSAR chapters honor the Revolutionary War couple.

APPENDIX B



Fig 18 Col. John and Jane Thomas historical marker.

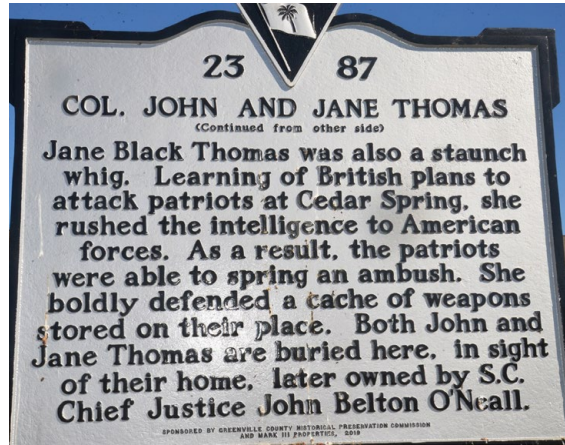


Fig 19 Col. John and Jane Thomas historical marker, continued from other side.



Fig 20 Jane Thomas's grave and grave marker in the Orchard Crest Cemetery.



Fig 21 Col. John and Jane Thomas's grave and grave marker in the Orchard Crest Cemetery.

APPENDIX B



Fig 22 Past SCSSAR President Tom Weidner with remarks.



Fig 23 Valerie Miller, officer in the Orchard Crest community HOA, bringing greetings.



Fig 24 Benediction at the end of the service.



Fig 25 Bob Cotter playing "Taps."

APPENDIX B



Fig 26 Painting of Cedar Spring, in watercolor and pastels, by John Ingle, based on John's walk around the spring in July 2022, 242 years after the battle was fought at that site.

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BIOGRAPHY

Sheila Collins Ingle

Retired educator and community volunteer, Sheila is the author of five books about South Carolina women. *Courageous Kate*, *Fearless Martha*, and *Brave Elizabeth* introduce readers to Revolutionary War heroines who helped their families fight for liberty in Carolina. *Walking with Eliza* shares a day in the life of sixteen-year-old Eliza Pinckney when she took over the management of her father's three plantations. In the twentieth century, textile mills in South Carolina took over the economy, and Appalachian families brought their traditions and lifestyles to become the work force. *Tales of a Cosmic Possum* shares eight stories of the women in John Ingle's family, as they labored in various cotton mills. An avid reader, baker of sourdough bread, and beach lover, Sheila enjoys sharing the stories of our state.