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More a Gentleman Than a Fighter

Henry Rugeley
Camden District Loyalist

Jim Piecuch, Ph.D.

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Cover art based excerpted from the Henry Mouzon survey map of North and South Carolina, 1775
Mouzon, Henry, and Robert Sayer And John Bennett. An accurate map of North and South Carolina with their
Indian frontiers, shewing in a distinct manner all the mountains, rivers, swamps, marshes, bays, creeks, harbours,
sandbanks and soundings on the coasts; with the roads and Indian paths; as well as the boundary or provincial lines,
the several townships and other divisions of the land in both the provinces. [London, Printed for Robt. Sayer and J
Bennett, 1775] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/74692527>.

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This work is dedicated to my good friend, the late Charles B. Baxley. Charles was always eager to learn more about Henry Rugeley (and all other aspects of the Revolution!) and frequently urged me to undertake this project. I believe I have exceeded his expectations in light of the amount of information I was able to find and the detail it provides.

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Introduction

In his study of loyalism in South Carolina, historian Robert Stansbury Lambert observed that “there is no more enigmatic figure ... than Henry Rugeley.”¹ Lambert was correct. Most studies of South Carolina Loyalists say little about Rugeley, and sometimes a significant amount of what they do say is wrong; for example, it is often supposed that he was born in America, though he was in fact of English birth, and he has also been confused with his brother Rowland. A typical account is that of Lorenzo Sabine, whose detailed, two-volume compilation of Loyalists’ biographies, first published in 1864, had little to say about Rugeley. Sabine wrote only that Rugeley’s plantation was called Clermont, described at greater length Rugeley’s disastrous encounter with American forces on December 1, 1780 (frequently misdated as December 4), briefly noted that British lieutenant colonel Francis, Lord Rawdon, had written him a letter about Rawdon’s Volunteers of Ireland regiment, and finally that the state of South Carolina confiscated Rugeley’s property in 1782.²

Rugeley’s political allegiance has also caused much confusion among historians, as it did with some of his contemporaries. “From the beginning of the war,” Robert W. Barnwell, Jr., noted, Rugeley “was known to have Loyalist sentiments. Yet he retained the respect of the Whigs.”³ This was highly unusual in South Carolina’s polarized political atmosphere following the British capture of Charleston in May 1780. The Revolutionaries (or Whigs) resorted to guerrilla warfare against the British and their Loyalist allies, as many of the latter sought revenge for the abuses they had earlier suffered when their opponents ruled. A brutal and bloody civil war that increased animosities on both sides was the result, and hatred between wartime enemies lingered long after the peace treaty was signed in 1783. The question of how Rugeley navigated this complex situation has been difficult to answer. Some, including British general Charles, Lord Cornwallis, eventually concluded that Rugeley was a traitor to the royal cause. Others point to his polite, even chivalrous behavior to his erstwhile Whig enemies; historian Warren Ripley in 1983 described Rugeley as “more a gentleman than a fighter.”⁴ More recently, Kenneth E. Lewis attributed Rugeley’s seemingly indecisive behavior to his desire to maintain his business connections with fellow merchants in the Wateree River Valley, even when those merchants were on the “enemy” side.⁵

The Rugeley Papers supply many details on the life of Henry Rugeley and his family, and though they do not provide a complete record, they can help to answer questions regarding Rugeley’s political beliefs and wartime behavior. Correspondence to, from, or relating to Henry is sparse for the 1760s, significantly more substantial for the 1770s and 1780s, and extensive for the 1790s, when he was almost constantly engaged in attempts to redeem his financial situation. These letters demonstrate that Rugeley was indeed a

1. Robert Stansbury Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 117.

2. Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution with an Historical Essay*, 2 vols., reprint ed. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1979), 2:242.

3. Robert W. Barnwell, Jr., “Loyalism in South Carolina, 1765-1785,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1941, 280.

4. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 51.

5. Kenneth E. Lewis, *The Carolina Backcountry Venture: Tradition, Capital, and Circumstance in the Development of Camden and the Wateree Valley, 1740-1810* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 205.

Loyalist, but that he was also burdened with heavy debts, largely incurred by his business partnership with his brother Rowland, who died in 1776. The Rugeleys had been far too generous in extending credit to their customers, and Henry's economic salvation depended upon remaining in business to generate income and obtain repayment from his debtors. He wished to follow the path dictated by his political allegiance, but he could not afford to burn his metaphorical financial bridges that linked him to the Whigs with whom he engaged in business.

Thus, Rugeley's loyalism, while genuine, was tempered by pragmatism. Unlike other South Carolina Loyalists such as Thomas Brown, Joseph Robinson, Euan McLaurin, and Richard Pearis, whose commitment to the royal cause took priority over all else, causing them to leave South Carolina for the British-held provinces of East and West Florida and become officers in military units, Rugeley remained quietly at his Clermont plantation during the early years of the Revolution. He operated his business, maintained his friendships and economic ties with prominent Whigs, and remained in good standing with them. He did not take any actions on behalf of the British until the king's troops occupied Camden in early June 1780, when he accepted a commission as colonel in the royal militia. Rugeley was active when ordered, though he proved far less energetic than many of his counterparts. He clearly did not wish to alienate anyone, regardless of their sentiments, if he could avoid doing so. In the end, his pragmatic loyalism allowed him to retain the respect of most Revolutionaries, though he found himself held in contempt by many of the British officers with whom he had served. Even worse in his mind, Rugeley failed to recoup his financial losses and spent the remainder of his life struggling to cope with debt. The young man who had come to South Carolina from England with high hopes for economic success found himself crushed with financial burdens as he struggled to survive through a war, temporary exile, and the travails of, as he put it, beginning the world again with few resources. His life provides fascinating insight into rarely explored aspects of South Carolina's Revolutionary-era history.

Chapter 1

A Young Englishman Becomes a Carolina Merchant

Henry Rugeley, the third son of Rowland and Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, was born at St. Ives, England, on March 8, 1742, according to the Julian or Old Style Calendar then in use in Great Britain. When Britain finally adopted the more widely used Gregorian Calendar in 1752, changing the first day of the year from March 25 to January 1 and dropping eleven days, Rugeley's birthdate became March 19, 1743. Henry's father, Rowland Rugeley, Sr., was a successful linen draper, a merchant who operated a shop selling cloth fabric used to make clothing and other household items such as bedsheets.



Old Harden Grange in St. Ives, England, built in 1680. Henry Rugeley, must have been familiar with this estate. Photograph by Paul Glazzard, 2007.

The family home was described as “a 17th-century Jacobean mansion near the end of the ancient bridge” that spanned the River Great Ouse in St. Ives. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., also owned at least one hundred acres of land in several separate parcels. Henry was baptized in the Anglican Church and seems to have remained an Anglican throughout his life—his children were also baptized in the same denomination, but he does not appear to have been overtly religious. Nothing is known of Henry's early life, though he was apparently well educated as demonstrated by his later correspondence.¹

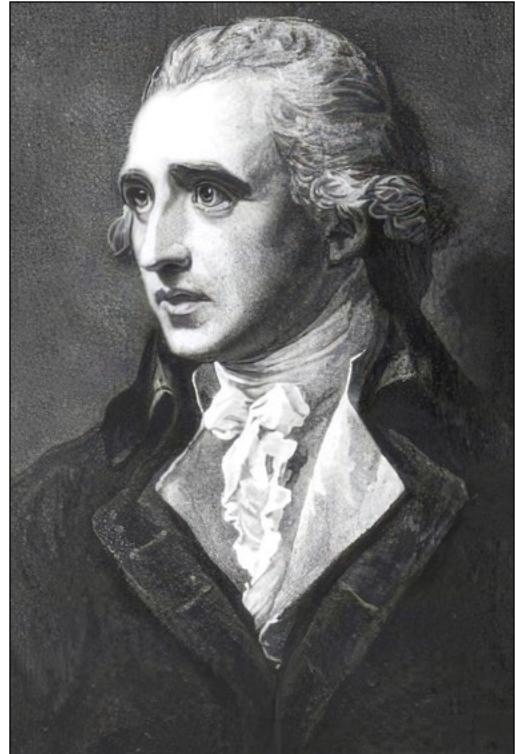
Among the Rugeleys' neighbors was Lord Charles Greville Montagu and his wife, Elizabeth. Montagu, second son of the Duke of Manchester, served in Parliament from 1762 to 1765 and in the latter year his political connections facilitated his appointment as royal governor of South Carolina. The Rugeleys were well acquainted with Montagu, with at least one or possibly several of the Rugeley brothers—Henry, Matthew, Rowland, and William—having served under him in the Huntingdonshire militia.² Their ties to Montagu were a key factor in Henry's and Rowland's decision to settle in South Carolina.

The first surviving letter from Henry Rugeley, written to his father, Rowland, Sr., from London on November 15, 1765, illustrates the Rugeley-Montagu connection. Henry stated that he arrived in

1. Helen Hoskins Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America, Vol. II: English & American Ancestors* (Austin, TX: Rugeley Family Association, 1997), 36, 40.

2. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 40.

the metropolis “in tolerable Health.” The previous day, he wrote, he “went to the other End of the Town to make my Congratulations to Ld. & Lady Montagu” on Montagu’s recent appointment as royal governor of South Carolina. After dinner, Rugeley met privately with Montagu, who “told me he had been made acquainted with my Story, & examined me as to the way of Life I now purposed to pursue—having satisfied him as well as I could,” Montagu said that “Till I got to my Government I cannot make any Promises of what I will do for my Frds. As till then I know not what it may be in my Power to bestow; undoubtedly there must be many Places worthy your Acceptance that will be in my Gift & when such Opportunities offer you may depend upon my Care of you if you chuse to embark with me.” Montagu noted that if Rugeley accompanied him to South Carolina, his only expense would be for clothing suitable for “your Appearance there as you shall be considered as one of my Family & constantly be with us.” After further discussion, Rugeley asked the governor “if he knew wether any beneficial trade might not be carried on at the same time.” Rugeley believed that Montagu “had thoughts of employing some money that way,” and the governor replied that he would ask his friend and predecessor as governor, Thomas Boone, about such opportunities.³



Lord Charles Greville Montagu, royal governor of South Carolina, whose patronage greatly benefited Henry Rugeley and his brother Rowland. Artist unknown, c. 1776.

Rugeley wrote that Montagu indicated that “his stay in South Carolina will be absolutely no longer than two Years & half & he told me he shou’d take such care in his provisions for his Friends as should not hinder them from returning with Him.” Montagu’s offer, Rugeley remarked, was “somewhat flattering to the present Disposition of my mind; but I could not give nor would he recieve an Answer till I had consulted you.” He asked his father to write and inform him of “your Approbation or dislike of these Proposals” and he would act accordingly. If the senior Rugeley disapproved, Henry noted that he would be able to return home anytime within the next six weeks.⁴

While Henry pondered future opportunities in America, his older brother Rowland, Jr., then about twenty-eight years old, traveled to Charleston in 1766 with Montagu’s encouragement. The new royal governor had promised Rowland the government post of register, the official who recorded deeds, other real estate transactions, and various important documents. Since the post did not require all his time or attention, Rowland decided to pursue an additional line of business.⁵

On April 11, 1766, Rowland Rugeley composed a lengthy letter to his father from Charleston. He reminded his father that in his previous letter, “by the Observations I had made I could not but deem Planting much more eligible than to enter into Business, as it was a more lucrative as well as a more genteel Employ.”

3. Henry Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., Nov. 15, 1765, Rugeley Papers, X311, Bedfordshire Archives (hereafter BA), Bedford, UK.

4. Henry Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., Nov. 15, 1765, Rugeley Papers, BA.

5. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 40.

Rowland had since traveled to Georgia and this experience had “more confirmed me in the same Opinion, and I should hope that in a few Years time,” even if Governor Montagu was unable to assist him, he would be able to return to England and live “tolerably genteel,” only occasionally returning to his South Carolina plantation. He assured his father that “You need not be apprehensive that I am engaging in an Undertaking which I cannot have acquired yet sufficient Skill to conduct—a small Portion of this is absolutely requisite, most of the Gentlemen engaged in this Branch know very little of the matter themselves, live not upon their Plantations, but trust wholly to the Management of their Overseers.” Nevertheless, in order to “make myself acquainted with it & be able to judge for myself, I have ... purchased a Tract of 200 Acres of Land so near Charles Town that I can often be upon the Spot & furnish myself with what Knowledge may be requisite for my Plan.” The site was “excessively Pleasant now some Part of the Wood is cleared away,” Rowland reported. Many South Carolinians were surprised that such a fine piece of property was available, and some had offered to purchase it from him. To cover the expenses necessary to establish the plantation, Rowland had drawn bills upon his father for £350 sterling. (One British pound sterling was worth approximately £7 in South Carolina currency.)⁶ These bills may have been in addition to funds his father was believed to have provided him when Rowland left England.⁷

Rowland stated that “my Health continues yet unimpair’d by the Heat of the Climate,” and that he had actually “not found it so hot as I expected,” though during his sojourn in Georgia he was invited to dine “at a Gentleman’s House” where “it became for about an Hour intensely hot, a large Company of us lay gasping as it were for want of Breath & in less than 5 Minutes we all ran to our Cloths (for in almost all Companies even where there are Ladies those are thrown aside) and button’d them close to defend us from the cold.” He discussed many details of his time in Georgia, including meeting Governor James Wright and Chief Justice Thomas Mellichamp. During Rowland’s time in Georgia the dispute between the American colonists and the British government over Parliament’s passage of the Stamp Act to tax the colonies was raging, and he related that Wright summoned the legislature, asserted “the Right of the British Parliament to laying Taxes upon the Colonies in America,” and that the legislators accepted this. “In all Parts of America they are extremely thankful for the Repeal of the Stamp Act ... an Event that was not much expected by a great Number of People here,” Rowland continued. “That strenuous Opposition that the Stamp Act met with in the southern Colonies of America was caught like an Infection from the northward; every thing remained quiet here, none thought their Liberties infringed by the Act or complained of the Burden of the Tax, & resistance to the Execution of it was not so much as dreamt of—though when once the Contagion had reached them they became as virulent in their Measures as their [Brethren?] of Liberty in the North.” Although he could not say what should have been done in the northern colonies, Rowland believed that in the southern colonies “the Act might have been carried into Execution without much Difficulty had the Parliament so desired.” He worried that the act’s repeal might make the colonists “more insolent in their Demands upon some future Occasion, tho’ now ... they appear very grateful for the late indulgence shown to them &, to do Justice to those of the Americans whom I have seen, seem not to harbour a Desire of throwing aside their Dependence upon the mother Country.” He added that “the name of [William] Pitt,” the prominent British politician who opposed the Stamp Act, “is idolized throughout all

6. Rowland Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., Apr. 11, 1766, Rugeley Papers, BA.

7. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 48.

America; our Assembly have voted £1000 for a Statue of him which is preparing in England.”⁸ Rowland’s views were clearly those of a Loyalist; in fact, many colonists who later became Loyalists were among the leading opponents of the Stamp Act.

Rowland eventually changed his mind about planting and opted instead to establish an import business in Charleston, a decision that would prove exceedingly unwise. He wrote to Henry asking him to join him in the enterprise, and Henry did so, arriving in South Carolina in 1769.⁹ It was a potentially profitable venture, Charleston being the wealthiest city in British North America and South Carolinians purchased large quantities of imported British goods.

Henry Rugeley was warmly welcomed in South Carolina by Montagu. On July 23, 1769, Rugeley wrote to his mother from Charleston stating that “the disappointment, which I had at first, in not meeting with my Brother here, was in some measure, alleviated by the favours which I received from Lord Charles, who has for this last Six Weeks, insisted of my being with him, and his introducing me to a great deal of Company, has helped to pass some of my Idle Hours” while he waited for his brother Rowland and his goods to arrive.¹⁰ The friendly reception he received from Montagu undoubtedly contributed to Rugeley’s favorable view of royal government.

The Rugeley brothers chose a site on a wharf along the Cooper River for their shop. This was likely the wharf owned by John Burns, some distance upriver near the town gates, as a record exists of Rowland purchasing a “lot” on that wharf. In addition, Rowland bought fourteen acres of land on Charleston Neck and Henry thirty acres in what is now the center of Charleston. The pair continued to acquire property, purchasing hundreds of acres outside the city. They were said to have maintained separate homes on Charleston Neck, described as “spacious estate[s] ... which included large, well-constructed houses and well-ordered gardens.” The homes were described as lavishly furnished and boasting fine china dinnerware.¹¹

Rowland decided to share the post of register with Henry. The brothers also secured appointments as justices of the peace for Berkeley County, both of their names appearing on a list dated April 24, 1770.¹² Doubtless Governor Montagu had a hand in their appointments, and he almost certainly gave his approval to the arrangement whereby Henry and Rowland shared the register’s duties. It was a wise action, because it allowed either Henry or Rowland to handle their official tasks while the other stayed at their place of business to manage those affairs.

Henry wrote to his mother on March 3, 1770, to express his sadness at the death of his sister Margetts. He stated that Rowland, who had sailed for England, had concealed the news by claiming that no letters had arrived from home, but when he opened Rowland’s trunk where some of his clothes were stored, he found the correspondence. Henry observed that Rowland should have arrived at St. Ives by the time his mother received his letter, and “that with the Rhetoric he is Master of has persuaded my Father to let Mathew come over, for I would not have desired him to come if I had not thought it would be to his advantage.” There was little else worth mentioning, Henry remarked, except his wish that “Parliament may soon releive us from What we suffer [manuscript torn] Resolutions we was fools enough to come into.” He was referring to

8. Rowland Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., Apr. 11, 1766, Rugeley Papers, BA.

9. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 40.

10. Helen Hoskins Rugeley, ed., *Rugeley Papers: Blue-Blooded Brits in Reduced Circumstances* (hereafter *RP*) (privately published, 1997), 9.

11. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 41.

12. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 41, 47.

the agreement among Charleston merchants not to import British goods until the Townshend Acts were repealed. Passed by Parliament in 1767, the legislation imposed import duties on glass, lead, tea, and other goods; as with the Stamp Act, the colonists responded by boycotting British goods. "I'm sure you will pity me," he continued, "when I have made you acquainted with the hardships I labour under and that is I have not and its as much as my Life's worth even to think of having a Peice of English Cheese in my House so that I am depriv'd of the only Meal I us'd to enjoy and that is supper."¹³

On January 23, 1771, Rugeley informed his brother William of an incident in Charleston that confirmed what he had written to his mother about the boycott: that Rugeley had supported it, even if reluctantly. "Last week we had a Ship from Liverpool consign'd to ... John Edwards who was our greatest Patriot for Liberty," Henry wrote. The vessel was "full of Goods" which led people to believe that Edwards had violated the agreement not to import British products. "The Inhabitants thought he had acted contrary to our resolution" of nonimportation, Rugeley continued. The people "insisted to have the Goods for they will not suffer him to sell them" until every merchant could acquire goods, as previously agreed. Edwards, "after long disputing the hardship" he would suffer, finally agreed "to give up the Goods ... he was oblig'd to comply or the Mobility wou'd have Tarr'd and Feather'd him a Punishment highly in vogue with the lower sort of People."¹⁴ Rugeley's reference to "the Mobility" did not refer to being mobile, but rather to the mob acting as though it was a legitimate part of society, like the British nobility. The letter indicates that while Rugeley joined other Charleston merchants in opposing the Townshend Acts, either from economic interest, political principle, or a combination of both, he resented the "lower sort of People" participating in political activity, perhaps seeing it as a threat to the social order.

Although in spite of Rowland's and Henry's hopes, Matthew Rugeley did not go to South Carolina; instead, their younger brother William signed a contract in London on March 16, 1771, in which Rowland and Henry agreed to hire him as a clerk in their Charleston store. William would be paid £60 sterling (about \$17,720 current value) for one year, receive board and compensation for expenses, and then become a partner in his brothers' company.¹⁵ Rowland would have personally handled the agreement as he was still in England. William would be entering a business that was on an uncertain footing, for that same year Rowland and Henry had been forced to borrow £400 from their father to keep afloat.¹⁶ William did not appear to be in a hurry to leave England; he was in London on June 1 when he informed his father that he was going to depart soon for South Carolina, accompanied by one of Governor Montagu's enslaved men,¹⁷ indicating that William, too, enjoyed the governor's friendship.

On August 28, 1771, Henry wrote to his mother to inform her William had arrived in Charleston on July 22 after a brief but "I will not say an agreeable Passage." William, the ship's only passenger, became involved in a dispute with the captain because he wanted "a good Table (that is, well stocked with a variety of Dishes)," whereas the "unconscionable" captain wanted to conserve food supplies in the event the voyage lasted longer than expected. When it became apparent that the voyage would be short, the captain relented and allowed William to choose the menus, so that "the Table [was] well furnished, for the *Rugeley's* are great

13. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, Mar. 3, 1770, Rugeley Papers, BA.

14. Henry Rugeley to William Rugeley, Feb. 23, 1771, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 12.

15. William Rugeley's Agreement with Rowland and Henry Rugeley, Mar. 16, 1771, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 13.

16. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 37, 48.

17. William Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., June 1, 1771, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 14.

epicures.” Henry was pleased to learn that the parrot his mother had requested and that he had sent reached St. Ives safely. He promised to send another parrot to his sister, Mrs. Ann Houghton, by the next packet, the same vessel that had brought William to America. His mother’s news in her last letter that Rowland had fallen in love with eighteen-year-old Miss Paine surprised Henry, but he did not oppose their marriage, only expressing hope that Rowland returned to Charleston before the wedding so that Henry could visit the family in England. Beyond that, he observed, there was little to report other than William’s discomfort with South Carolina’s mosquitoes, and that while people expected Governor Montagu to return from Britain soon, Henry did not think that would happen before early November, “& then he must pitch his Tent in the Field unless somebody will take them in for I cannot get them a House.”¹⁸ Henry’s close relationship with Montagu clearly continued since he had the responsibility for finding a residence for the governor on Montagu’s return to the colony, an effort which failed.

William Rugeley also appears to have had some difficulty acting on Montagu’s behalf, in this case, traveling with the governor’s enslaved man. William’s first cousin Richard Livett, Jr., provided that and other information when from London in late 1771 he replied to a letter he had received from William that is likely no longer extant. Livett wrote that he “observe[d] you find it verry hott but hope by this Time as You are more used to the Climate it is not so disagreeable.” Livett also noted that William “had a little more trouble with Lord Charles [Montagu’s] Black after You got on board, but that he turn’d out verry usefull at last.” William’s brief description of South Carolina disappointed Livett, who asked for more details in William’s next letter. He remarked that William had said “the People are verry gay ... you observe the Women are verry proud[,] are they prouder than the St. Ivians or the English but are they handsome do entitle them to pride[?] if they are they must be Devilish proud indeed.”¹⁹

Rowland Rugeley, Sr., wrote to William on October 19, 1771, declaring that while he himself would not go to America “for the wealth of the Indies,” he was happy that William was doing well in South Carolina and he hoped that “by Industry and constant applycation” his son would “soon become well acquainted with the Trade and gain a Fortune.” He warned William to “take care you make no mistakes, and think nothing too much trouble to acquire an Honest Gain, & with care & diligence every difficulty will be surmounted.” William’s description of the summer heat, Rowland observed, was worse than he had been led to believe, though he hoped his son would be better acclimated to it in the coming year.²⁰

Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley’s letter to William of April 5, 1772, referred to his being “very fond of the people in Charles Town,” which she did not find surprising given “they show you so much respect.” He had expressed interest “in regard to the Sugar-Bakers Daughter” and she agreed with his opinion that a relationship with that woman was not worth pursuing given her family’s lack of money. William’s mother also chided him for his “fall in the Water for tho it gave Ld and Lady Charles [Montagu] Some diversion it was a double Misfortune to you as it Spoild your Silk Stockings.”²¹ William had ostensibly gone to Charleston to work in Rowland’s and Henry’s business, yet remarkably little mention was made of that aspect of William’s activities.

18. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, Aug. 28, 1771, Rugeley Papers, BA.

19. Richard Livett, Jr., to [William Rugeley], c. late 1771, Rugeley Papers, BA.

20. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, Oct. 19, 1771, Rugeley Papers, BA.

21. Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley to William Rugeley, Apr. 5, 1772, Rugeley Papers, BA.

During 1773 and 1774, tensions rose between the southern colonies and the Creek Native American nation. The Cherokees had sold a large tract of land to the colonists in 1773, some of which was claimed by the Creeks. With the Creeks threatening hostilities over what they considered the theft of their land, John Stuart, British superintendent of the Southern Indian Department, halted all trade with that nation to force them to accept the land sale. Rowland Rugeley evidently feared an attack on the southern colonies; Henry noted in a letter to his father that Rowland “thinks a War with the Creek Indian’s is inevitable & that he is under great apprehensions that the Cherokee Indians will join them.” Henry disagreed, asserting that such worries should not give his father “a moment uneasiness, as I assure you, that even if the Cherokee Indians shou’d join [the Creeks], it cannot affect us.” By this time, Rowland and Henry’s business appeared to be in some difficulty, despite the earlier loan from Rowland Sr., as Henry told his father that they had transferred most of their property in South Carolina to the trustees representing their British creditors.²² They may have overextended themselves by engaging in too many different forms of commerce, including the deerskin trade and part ownership of the merchant vessel *Montagu*. In 1773, a document entitled “Debts of the Rugeley Businesses” showed that the brothers owed £14,568.²³ This may have been considerably less than what was owed to them.

As importers of British goods, the Rugeleys very likely also suffered from the repeated colonial boycotts of products manufactured in the parent country. The passage of the Townshend Acts occasioned such boycotts, most of which began in 1768 and lasted until Parliament repealed the acts in 1770. Even then, it took time for news of the repeal to reach America, for colonial merchants to order items from Britain, and for those products to arrive on the western shore of the Atlantic. When the Townshend Acts were repealed, Parliament left one import duty in place: the tax on tea. Passage of the Tea Act in 1773, though it did not raise the tax and removed other costs and therefore actually lowered the price of tea, led to new American protests motivated by fear that if the colonists paid the tax, they would surrender their principle of “no taxation without representation” and thus have to submit to any and all subsequent taxes Parliament might impose. The December 1773 Boston Tea Party led to Parliament passing the Coercive Acts to punish Massachusetts, which in turn sparked a new round of boycotts across the colonies. Refusal to honor the boycotts would have marked the Rugeleys and other Loyalist merchants for retaliation by the opponents of British policy, so that they were placed in the unenviable position of being retailers of products they frequently could not obtain. This must have contributed to their financial difficulties and may also have inspired their efforts to diversify their business by expanding their operations to South Carolina’s interior.

Undaunted by their financial difficulties, the Rugeleys decided they could best salvage their situation by opening a satellite store near Camden, center of a growing and increasingly prosperous part of the backcountry. Henry therefore purchased three tracts of land totaling five hundred acres, located about thirteen miles north of Camden, in August 1776. There, in addition to the store, Henry constructed what one historian has termed “a small industrial village” consisting of a sawmill, gristmill, and two bolting mills that sifted wheat flour to remove the bran and germ to produce a fine flour more suitable for baking. The estate also boasted a tanyard where animal hides were made into leather, log houses that probably

22. Henry Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., Apr. 9, 1774, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 23.

23. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 48, 49.

served as homes for the twenty enslaved people who labored for Rugeley, and his own fine home. Henry may also have brewed beer, since his father's will mentioned Henry as being involved "in the malt trade."²⁴

When Camden-area merchants such as Joseph Kershaw shifted their focus away from "maintaining integrated networks of stores and a dependance on retail sales and concentrated instead on increasing the volume of production of export staples and controlling their processing," it "opened the backcountry retail market to new competitors, such as Henry Rugeley, who in turn provided additional outlets for the export staples produced on emerging plantations, which relied on established mills and other facilities" in and around Camden, historian Kenneth E. Lewis observed. As agricultural production in the region increased, the need to process such crops "encouraged newcomers like Henry Rugeley to invest in multiple processing ventures at his Clermont plantation."²⁵

Rugeley's business enterprises at Clermont flourished. Situated on the "great road between Camden and Salisbury, North Carolina," its location was ideal for its diverse operations. The account book for 1776-1778 lists transactions involving "banking, livestock trading, milling, shipping, and repair work." A tavern managed by Robert Robinson served travelers and provided a gathering place for local residents. Goods shipped from Charleston were delivered by Rugeley's wagons. Rugeley also traded in "flax seed rice, honey, Indian corn, wheat, tobacco, hemp, and tallow," while his gristmill generated large profits grinding wheat and corn. He also hired out some of his enslaved people to work for others.²⁶

Clermont's diversified enterprises generated large profits. The store alone brought in £14,541 in 1776, which would have amounted to £2,077 sterling, or almost \$601,000 present value. This figure does not include income from Clermont's mills, tavern, tanyard, and other operations. A satellite store at "Richmond," possibly New Richmond on the Savannah River, produced a further £53,089 for Rugeley from March 1776 to December 1778 (£7,584 sterling or \$2,194,000 at present value). Rugeley's customers, named in Clermont's account book, included prominent Camden resident and Revolutionary leader Joseph Kershaw, both as an individual and with his businesses Kershaw and Wyly and Kershaw, Chesnut, & Company, and 287 other people. Rugeley's profits easily covered the large expenses he incurred; maintaining and supplying his house at Clermont cost him a total of £5,495 for 1776-1778 (£785 sterling or over \$227,000 present value).²⁷

Lewis noted that "most of Rugeley's customers appear to have been residents of the region," though others "came to Rugeley's store from farther afield." These included Thomas Knox Gordon, royal chief justice of South Carolina, and John Rutledge, who "visited the store only months after his election as president of South Carolina's provincial government in March 1776. ... his presence at the store reflected the increasing ties between the backcountry and the larger world, as well as the increasing importance of Camden and its inhabitants in the political structure of South Carolina."²⁸

Clermont had become a highly successful enterprise for Rugeley. Had he focused solely on supervising its diverse operations and withdrawn from the partnership with his brother, he might have

24. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 42-43, 49.

25. Kenneth E. Lewis, *The Carolina Backcountry Venture: Tradition, Capital, and Circumstance in the Development of Camden and the Wateree Valley, 1740-1810* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017). 164-165.

26. Joan A. Inabinet and L. Glen Inabinet, *A History of Kershaw County, South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 58-59.

27. Joan Inabinet, "Rugeley's 'Clermont,'" <https://kershawcountyhistoricalsociety.org/history-trail/> (accessed January 22, 2026).

28. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 164.

avoided the worst financial repercussions when the Charleston business collapsed after Rowland's death. Henry did not do so, however, and so found himself facing the twin difficulties of immense debt and the outbreak of war between Great Britain and thirteen of its American colonies.

A Time of Turmoil

The year 1776 brought a new spate of difficulties to the Rugeley enterprises in South Carolina and also affected the brothers as individuals. The success of their backcountry operations failed to offset the business crisis that resulted in the wake of Rowland's death that December. In addition, the start of open warfare between Great Britain and the American colonies, soon to proclaim their independence, left the Rugeleys, who remained loyal to Britain, in a precarious situation. William responded by returning to England, leaving Henry alone to wrestle with his financial troubles while trying to negotiate a path that would avoid bringing upon himself the wrath of his neighbors who supported the Revolution. The latter was no chimerical concern. By the end of 1775, several Loyalists had been killed opposing the Whigs, 136 prominent Loyalists had been imprisoned in Charleston, and others had fled the colony. South Carolina-born John Champneys, who like Rugeley was a merchant in Charleston before the war, was jailed in June 1776 for refusing to do duty with the Revolutionary militia, subjected to "insults and bad usage," later moved to Cheraw, and not released until February 1777.¹ Rugeley would have been aware of these incidents and done his utmost to avoid Champneys's fate.

The record of Rugeley's activities in the period from 1774 to 1777 is incomplete. Following his April 9, 1774, letter to his father, there is a three-year gap in Henry's correspondence, probably the result of the heightened tensions between Great Britain and the American colonies and the start of armed conflict. With the interruption of transatlantic communication, the Rugeleys would have either temporarily ceased writing to one another, or have sought new means to transport their letters, perhaps by American vessels traveling to neutral colonies such as the Dutch island of St. Eustatius, from whence the letters could be put aboard a British ship, or by neutral vessels that called in British colonies such as East Florida, the Bahamas, or Jamaica. These methods were riskier than the peacetime mail, so perhaps any letters written in that period were lost or intercepted by enemy ships. Nevertheless, by the spring of 1777 the Rugeleys had found a way to have their letters transported between America and Britain.

Henry wrote to his brother Matthew on March 18, 1777, congratulating him on his recent marriage, adding that Matthew "cannot be happier in that State than your deceased Brother [Rowland] and Sister here, but theirs was of a short duration." A note in the margin stated that Rowland had died on December 23, 1776, and his wife less than three weeks earlier, on December 4, indicating that Henry had not attempted to communicate with his family for many months. Rowland's will, Henry reported, left half of his estate to be divided equally between his brothers Matthew and William and his sisters Ann Houghton, Betsey, and

1. Jim Piccuch, *Three Peoples, One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, 1775-1782* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 55-57.

Fanny, with the other half going to Henry. Henry promised to send Matthew a copy of Rowland's will "as soon as the Times will permit me, to send one, in safety for the Chance is so greatly against its ever reaching you, that I think it needless to attempt it." He advised Matthew to send him a power of attorney on behalf of Rowland's heirs in Britain "to enable me to give sufficient Titles when I dispose of the Land." However, Henry did not intend to sell any property "till the Times are Settled."²

On March 28, Henry wrote to Richard Livett to say that he had just received Livett's letter of November 4, 1776, further indication of the disruption of communication between Britain and America. Henry reported Rowland's death, asserting that it was "occasioned by the Death of his Wife," because when she passed away, Rowland "immediately took to his Room, and expired ... to the surprize of us all, as we had not the least Idea of his being so near his End." There was no news to relate, Henry stated, "as we have nothing stiring but Polliticks here, & that I do not interfer with." Henry added that he had not heard from William since his brother's departure from South Carolina.³

Sometime before the end of March 1777, William Rugeley returned to England. He wrote his father that he would go back to America if he could resume his business, "but as Times are" across the Atlantic, no employment was available "except that of a Soldier."⁴

With William gone, Henry had to handle the family's business affairs on his own. Rowland's death required an accounting of the partnership's assets and liabilities in order to settle the estate. This investigation revealed that "their partnership was ... badly overextended."⁵ One of Henry's sons later observed that Henry and Rowland, though having "an extensive business," had been too free in extending credit to their customers. The brothers' embrace of the royal cause alienated many of their debtors who refused to pay them, leading to the collapse of the Charleston portion of their operations. They could not have pursued their business in the city in any case, since as Loyalists they would have been ostracized by the Whigs, who made up a majority of the inhabitants.⁶

Seemingly undeterred by the disastrous financial state of the Charleston store, Henry in April 1778 acquired an additional property in the Camden area, a plantation of 250 acres. Situated on the north side of Wateree Creek and the west side of the Wateree River, it included "houses ... appurtenances" and outbuildings.⁷ He continued to operate the numerous enterprises at Clermont while "he maintained an ambivalent political position and took no active role in the struggle." For example, despite his Loyalist sentiments, in 1780 Henry made a financial contribution toward the cost of fortifying Camden's powder magazine.⁸ He appears to have avoided any consequences of South Carolina's Banishment Act, passed by the legislature in early 1777. Designed to ferret out potential enemies, the law required residents to swear an oath of allegiance to the state government and the Continental Congress. Anyone refusing to do so was required to leave the state, with only a short time allowed to sell half of their property, assuming they could find buyers, the other half along with any unsold property being forfeited to the state government. Those able to sell part of their property usually did so at a highly discounted price. Once banished, any Loyalist

2. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Mar. 18., 1777, Rugeley Papers, BA.

3. Henry Rugeley to Richard Livett, Jr., Mar. 28, 1777, Rugeley Papers, BA.

4. William Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., [1777], in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 25.

5. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 117.

6. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 48.

7. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 41, 42.

8. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 210, 224.

who returned was subject to the death penalty. Many Loyalists reluctantly took the oath, a few managed to avoid doing so, and others left the state.⁹ There is no record of how Rugeley handled the matter, though his willingness to help finance the Whigs' powder magazine indicates that he probably swore the required oaths.

Back in England, William engaged in a lengthy correspondence with his father regarding a possible return to South Carolina. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., wrote to William in early 1778, asking "how is it possible to Reinstate you in the Place in Carolina when the office of Register was Lost long ago"—William had held the post of deputy register of mesne conveyances, that is, he investigated and identified the chain of ownership of properties that had been sold or transferred multiple times, a position likely procured through Governor Montagu's influence—and Rowland added that "whether Henry has any Substance now left is a great Doubt." In any case, William's time working for his brothers in Charleston had not been successful. "When Rowland agreed to pay you 50£ per annum the Reason was he wanted to be quitt of you," the elder Rugeley declared, "for before you went into the Office [of deputy register] he complained to me he could do nothing with you in the Store, as your Temper was disoblidging to Customers." William's father also asserted that his son had not given him "Sufficient Reason for your Return from Carolina," and did not believe that William should have left "in Such a hurry without bringing what you had with you or even so much an acct. which a Clerk in the office ought always to have ready." Rowland believed that his son intended to be supported by his family and friends upon his return to England. However, the elder Rugeley dismissed the idea, pointing out that when he had tried to prepare William to take over his draper's shop, "you was above my Instruction, although totally Ignorant of the quality of every sort of Goods and never endeavouring to Oblidge Customers the Consequences of such a Person in my Trade must be Bankrupt[cy]." He admonished William that the achievement of financial success required "Industry[,] Care & Frugality."¹⁰

William attempted to justify his actions but failed to change his father's mind. Rowland, Sr., remained adamant, telling William that his brother Rowland's marriage "was a Sufficient reason for takeing the Office to himself but if you would have been usefull in the Store he wod. never have taken you from thence & that I know." Furthermore, the elder Rugeley declared, "you Say your Property could not be got when you came away. I say no man of Sence could expect it without proper notice & in a short time might," adding that William's failure to maintain a record of accounts was "inexcusable." Finally, Rowland told his son that he was willing to loan him £200 or £300 to help him secure a position, but "I will not have myself and family disturbed again with you at home, and when Mr. Bryan goes for Carolina, if you doe not chuse to goe with him, must Provide yourself another Place to Board."¹¹

William appears to have been primarily focused on obtaining his share of his late brother Rowland's bequest, for on November 4, 1778, W. Simpson of London responded to William's October 29 letter in which William wrote that he was still "out of employ." Simpson explained the terms of Rowland's will, which he had signed as a witness, noting that William was entitled to one-tenth of the estate. However, Simpson did not mention procuring Rowland's assets, if indeed there were any, for William.¹²

9. Piecuch, *Three Peoples, One King*, 94.

10. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, [1778], Rugeley Papers, BA.

11. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, Sept. 16, 1778, Rugeley Papers, BA.

12. W. Simpson to William Rugeley, Nov. 4, 1778, Rugeley Papers, BA.

Rowland Rugeley, Sr., and William continued to spar by letter over the succeeding weeks. On November 25, Rowland repeated his lengthy list of criticisms of his son's behavior, adding a few new complaints, before hinting that William should return to America. "I think the next Campaign must make some alteration in America & then we may consider what is best to be done," Rowland wrote, adding that he had received a July letter from Henry who was well.¹³ William replied in late 1778 or early 1779, saying that when he left Yorkshire he planned to "Embark as Soon as Possible for Georgia." His acquaintance Mr. Bryan was going there, having purchased £8,000 sterling worth of goods to transport across the Atlantic, and William hoped that if he could obtain credit he wished to bring a small amount of merchandise, too, as he had failed to get a position as steward on a privateer. Before leaving England, William expressed a desire to visit his father as he worried he might never return from America.¹⁴ Rowland's letter of February 27, 1779, stated that he was sending some of William's possessions that he had apparently left at his father's house, complained that it was "very unkind" of William to be so near the family home without visiting, and noted that "I have heard nothing from Henry a long time." From the newspapers, he had learned "that the Kings Forces have taken Georgia therefore I think their next attack will be upon Carolina." Mr. Simpson, possibly former South Carolina attorney general James Simpson, had promised to call on him, having assured Henry that he would "acquaint us with all Particulars that he could not write about." Despite the British army's success in Georgia, Rowland feared that the campaigns in America "will come to nothing" and he could "See no end of the War."¹⁵

William had not yet departed England when his father wrote to him on May 25, 1779, with more information about Henry. Charles Ogilvie, who left South Carolina in July 1778, had visited and reported that Henry was well, and "his Lameness which we always thought a misFortune is now the only thing that keeps him o[ut of] the War for they oblige all to Engage [in military service] or [leave] the Province with loss of most of their Prop[erty]." This was the only mention that Henry may have suffered from some form of physical disability, which was almost certainly different, though possibly related to, an ailment that affected his leg on two occasions later in life. Ogilvie also told the elder Rugeley that he was able to remove only a small portion of his property, and at a very high cost.¹⁶ This was clearly the result of the Banishment Act.

On July 20, Rowland again wrote to William, who was still in England, as was his friend Mr. Bryan. "Whenever you have a mind to go to America I will not prevent you, but first ask yourself what are you to do, when you get there," the elder Rugeley advised. "I am informed that all must be Soldiers of one Side or other, at Present, their Situation is much worse than when you came away." As for William's idea of seeking a position with the royal government in America—probably in Georgia where Governor Wright had just resumed his office—Rowland refrained from comment. "There has certainly been an Engagement in South Carolina," Rowland noted, "Some say to the advantage of the English, but other's say in favour of the Congress; a little time will shew." Rowland asked where Bryan intended going, remarking that New

13. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, Nov. 25, 1778, Rugeley Papers, BA.

14. William Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., c. late 1778-early 1779, Rugeley Papers, BA.

15. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, Feb. 27, 1779, Rugeley Papers, BA.

16. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, May 25, 1779, Rugeley Papers, BA.

York was in his opinion the only place where trade could be reliably conducted, but “even there Insurance is very high.”¹⁷

The elder Rugeley was still discussing his son’s future plans in correspondence with William in the fall of 1779. He wrote to William on October 5, remarking that he “never thought Mr. Bryan would goe [to Georgia] at the time you mention’d the Danger too great & Insurance high,” and telling William that “you must await some alteration of times which I am in hopes this winter will Produce” before going to America.¹⁸ Two weeks later, Rowland informed William that “I have this post recd. your Letter of complaints without Reason as usual.” Rowland reiterated that William should not leave England at present because “as the times now are no Person in their sense’s would chuse it that can live here,” especially since he was giving William a generous allowance of ten shillings sixpence per week^{<?>}. He mentioned an argument that William had engaged in with Mr. Bryan, and asked: “If you was got safe to America what could you do there now the Condition of the place quite changed Since you left from Thence?”¹⁹

William, perhaps encouraged by his father’s lack of opposition and indifference to his proposal, made in mid-1779, to seek a government position in America, made an effort to obtain such employment in the summer of 1780. The timing was propitious, because a British expedition from New York under General Sir Henry Clinton had captured Charleston on May 12. Clinton returned to New York with most of his force, leaving General Charles, Lord Cornwallis, to command in the South. Cornwallis’s troops rapidly occupied important posts across South Carolina, and the government in London ordered the colony’s former royal officials to return to America. William contacted former South Carolina lieutenant governor William Bull, with whom he had been acquainted in America, and asked for a position in the colonial administration. Bull in turn wrote to Lord George Germain, secretary of state for the American Department, on July 10 on William’s behalf. Bull noted that before the war William had been a justice of the peace, clerk of the court of common pleas for the Winyaw district, and deputy register of mesne conveyances. William had “Acted with Integrity” in all these positions, Bull asserted, and had only left South Carolina “because he Refused to Bear Rebellious Arms.” Now that the colony had returned to “the Kings Obedience,” William was “very Desirous To Return.” In view of William’s “Loyal & Good Behaviour,” Bull recommended that he be given “Some Small Assistance from Government” on his return.²⁰

William submitted a copy of Bull’s letter with his petition of July 29 to the Treasury Commissioners. Rugeley stated that he had lived in Charleston for over five years, had held the positions listed in Bull’s letter until the Revolution, when “Your Petitioner was dispossessed of his Offices for refusing to Carry Arms Against the Sovereign, And in Order to Secure Himself from Persecution” had returned to Britain, arriving about July 21, 1776. He expressed a desire to return to South Carolina but could not do so without financial assistance. The commissioners provided him with £100 to pay for his voyage to America, where he was restored to his offices.²¹

17. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, July 20, 1779, Rugeley Papers, BA.

18. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, Oct. 5, 1779, Rugeley Papers, BA.

19. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, Oct. 20, 1779, Rugeley Papers, BA.

20. William Bull to Lord George Germain, July 10, 1780, Rugeley Papers, BA.

21. William Rugeley to the Commissioners of Treasury, July 29, 1780, enclosed in Henry Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, Great Britain Audit Office Papers (hereafter AO), Vol. 13, Folio 135, pp. 87-89, 91-92, microfilm, David Library of the American Revolution (hereafter DLAR), Washington Crossing, PA.

The next day, William informed his father that on July 7 he had gone to London's Carolina Coffee House "to Inquire of Henry," and on the way he met a gentleman from South Carolina who said that when he left nine months ago, Henry was well. William spent July 8 "Seeking for Lt. G. Bull Who I found at his Town house, got Admittance" and after conversing with Bull, the lieutenant governor was willing to do "Evereything to Serve Me." Because he was now "Pretty Certain of my Passage" to America with Bull, he had forwarded his father's letter to Henry. After meeting with Bull, William called on Germain and "Saw him though With great Deficuly And am to go to him again in a few Days." William expected to sail in about three weeks, as word circulating at the Carolina Coffee House indicated some twelve ships were soon sailing to South Carolina, some independently and others in convoy with warships.²² In his reply of July 13, Rowland stated that the family was "very glad to hear you was so well Recd. by L. G. Bull, hope it will be much to your advantage."²³ William's ability to procure a recommendation from Bull and an interview with a cabinet secretary demonstrated that the Rugeleys retained considerable political influence.

One week later, Rowland informed William that he was sending him some clothing. He warned William that if "Mr. Jones & others," who represented the Rugeley partnership's British creditors, planned "to impower you to act for them in case yr. Brother [Henry] is dead 'tis very well, but no otherwise for if he be Living I desire you take no such Power or Instructions if offer'd."²⁴

With William's departure imminent, his father stopped criticizing and instead provided his son with assistance. On August 15, the elder Rugeley, noting that William had "secured your Passage but it will be sometime before you can Sail," invited him to stay at the family home until his ship departed. Rowland also provided William with £500. "If you know what sort of Merchandise will turn to the most advantage in Carolina," Rowland wrote, William could use the funds to purchase those goods and send them to Charleston. Rowland also stated that he was "much concerned about Henry haveing had no letter all this time, and if you should have his Affairs to Settle will have business enough without takeing goods over."²⁵

Rowland's apprehension that Henry had died was alleviated in mid-October when he at last received a letter from his son. Rowland informed William that Henry's letter of August 10 reported that Henry "was very well and is with our Army under Ld. Cornwallis who has appointed him Colonell of a Regiment of Militia & say's he Expected going with him into No. Carolina directly." This led Rowland to hope for "quiet in that Part of America." Since William had not yet sailed, his father had given Mr. Newman, owner of a company that operated freight wagons, two letters for Henry that the elder Rugeley wanted William to pick up and send to America.²⁶

Shortly before British troops arrived in Camden, and before he was commissioned a militia officer, Rugeley was involved in an incident that demonstrated his adherence to a gentlemanly code of conduct despite his political views. It also showed his ability to straddle the divisions between Whigs and Loyalists. As the British siege lines tightened around Charleston in May 1780, Governor John Rutledge and two members of the council, Daniel Huger and John Lewis Gervais, escaped the city in order to keep some semblance of South Carolina's civil government alive. The trio spent the night of May 26 at Joseph Kershaw's

22. William Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., July 11, 1780, Rugeley Papers, BA.

23. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, July 13, 1780, Rugeley Papers, BA.

24. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, July 20, 1780, Rugeley Papers, BA.

25. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, Aug. 15, 1780, Rugeley Papers, BA.

26. Rowland Rugeley, Sr., to William Rugeley, Oct. 16, 1780, Rugeley Papers, BA.

house in Camden, then made their way to Clermont, where Rugeley is said to have “hospitably entertained” them. They were nearly captured by Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton’s provincial cavalry in the early morning hours of May 28, “being saved solely by an act of true chivalry on the part of their host, which must ever redound to his credit. . . . he aroused his sleeping guests in the dead hours of the night and warned them of Tarleton’s near approach. They barely escaped, hastening towards Charlotte.”²⁷

Upon arriving at Clermont, Tarleton questioned Rugeley, who denied that Rutledge, Huger, and Gervais had been there. Kenneth E. Lewis observed that “the failure of Rugeley, a known Loyalist, to divulge the presence of a rebel head of state could imply that he was hedging his bets in a conflict not yet resolved or simply that he did not want to explain Rutledge’s presence under his roof. A more plausible explanation,” Lewis postulated, “is that the strong ties of mutual cooperation and assistance that linked those in the mercantile network of the Wateree Valley imposed social considerations that affected Rugeley’s feeling toward and treatment of its members.” Rutledge had met Rugeley four years earlier, and by warning the governor and councilors, Rugeley “preserved social relationships upon which his past success had depended and upon which his future too would rely in these uncertain times.”²⁸

27. Thomas J. Kirkland and Robert M. Kennedy, *Historic Camden, Part One: Colonial and Revolutionary*, reprint edition (Camden, SC: Kershaw County Historical Society, 1904), 135.

28. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 205.

3

An Officer of His Majesty's Militia

As his father had learned from Henry's August letter, his son had been commissioned an officer of the royal militia that British officers were organizing across South Carolina. Their plan was for the militia to secure the colony against any rebel resurgence, thereby allowing Cornwallis to take his army northward to conquer North Carolina and then Virginia. Rugeley dealt most often with Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon, an Irish nobleman who led the Volunteers of Ireland, a provincial regiment (American Loyalists who were the equivalent of British regular troops) and also commanded the British garrison at Camden. In the earliest British correspondence concerning Rugeley, he was referred to as "major," but he soon received a colonel's commission along with command of a regiment.

When the British occupied Camden, they used Rugeley's facilities at Clermont "to store grain, and he undoubtedly ground a good deal of it at his mill."¹ British officers considered Rugeley a suitable choice for a militia commission. They needed to find influential local men to raise and lead the militia, and "Rugeley was representative of the type of men" they chose. He was "essentially a civilian who had not performed military service with the Americans" and "a man of some property." Rugeley's "role would be primarily that of a 'conservator of the peace' rather than someone to lead and inspire the militia in the field." When a crisis arose, he would be "found wanting" because he had been "asked to do a job for which he was temperamentally unfit," one historian remarked.²

Historians have also debated whether, in light of his seemingly ambivalent behavior as a militia officer, Rugeley was truly a Loyalist or a secret Whig sympathizer. "Some interpreted his conduct to a desire



Lt. Gen. Charles, Earl Cornwallis, who initially thought highly of Rugeley but later considered him a traitor.

Painting by Thomas Gainsborough, 1783. Wikimedia Commons.

1. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 163.

2. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 164.

to maintain stability in the region and curtail the bloodshed that had accompanied the recent invasion,” Kenneth E. Lewis wrote, “but Rugeley’s behavior may also have reflected more than altruism. As a regional merchant, he participated in the network of traders that included the Kershaw brothers, John Chesnut, William Ancrum, and their associates. He not only supplied produce and sold goods through the Camden business but also participated in the complicated transfers of funds upon which the business of long-distance trade depended. Like [Loyalist] Charles Ogilvie, who provided Joseph Kershaw with a crucial introduction to Bermuda merchants, Rugeley remained loyal to his fellow businessmen, despite their political differences, and avoided doing them harm.” Whenever possible, Rugeley tried to protect his friends’ property, including an unsuccessful attempt to stop the British from seizing Ely Kershaw’s enslaved laborers.³

Rugeley offered his services to the British in early June, about the time Cornwallis reached Camden with part of the army. As early as June 11, Rawdon, the twenty-six-year-old, highly competent officer, referred to Rugeley in a letter to his superior, Lord Cornwallis. Rawdon had arrived in the Waxhaws region on June 10 and set up camp with his regiment. The next day, he informed Cornwallis that several people had met with him, and he instructed them to appoint “a number of the principal inhabitants with whom I might transact all business.” Rawdon then met with this “committee” and “they professed the warmest desire to live under the British Government.” He therefore “strongly recommended to them to take up arms for their own defence, but this they declined,” preferring to be considered prisoners of war. Rawdon believed “the sound of the word *parole*,” which would exempt them from militia service, “decided their judgement, for, with a very envious and nice distinction, they expressed their desire that their arms might be left with them and that they might be empowered to use them against the rebel militia of Mecklenburg County [North Carolina] in case the latter should make inroads into the district.” He was not “inflexible” regarding such an arrangement, Rawdon told Cornwallis, and suspected that the Waxhaws people feared being organized into a militia when no other district’s inhabitants had yet done so. Once convinced that other South



Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon. As British commander at Camden, Rawdon worked closely with Rugeley, though Rugeley did not heed his order to evacuate Clermont on December 1, 1780. Painting by Thomas Gainsborough, 1783-1784. Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil.

3. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 224.

Carolínians “had arrayed a militia, they would immediately follow the example,” Rawdon asserted; he added that “the idea of an administration by a conservator of the peace is very pleasing to them, and I think Mr Rugeley may induce them to stand forth in support of that regularity.”⁴

From the Waxhaws, Rawdon went to Camden where he established his headquarters. By the time he wrote to Cornwallis on June 22, Rugeley had apparently been commissioned a militia officer or was at least acting in that capacity. “As the inhabitants of Waxhaw still endeavor to temporize,” Rawdon stated, “I have bidden Major Rugeley summon them to take up arms immediately under His Majesty’s standard. If they hesitate, he is directed to require that they shall surrender all their arms and ammunition, denouncing military execution against any person who shall presume to secrete either.”⁵

Rugeley does not appear to have had much success in his mission, as the Waxhaws inhabitants were still giving Rawdon trouble in early July. He reported on July 2 that he was considering sending five hundred of Col. Samuel Bryan’s North Carolina militia “to Waxhaw, where, with a few [regular] troops to support them, they may defend the frontier and certainly will not oppress a single friend. The inhabitants of that district are playing such a double game that I find it necessary to send troops among them, altho’ it is too early to do it with convenience.” Rawdon observed that if he did “not take that step, all the wheat of that country will be carried off to the enemy.” To prevent this, he planned to dispatch Major Thomas Mekan the next day to march to the Waxhaws with the 23rd Regiment and the light infantry of the British Legion, some of them mounted. Mekan would “have powers to embody any part of Rugeley’s militia which he may think necessary.”⁶ Five days later, Rawdon told Cornwallis that “Rugeley’s militia are embodied and advanced with [Capt. David] Kinloch” [of the British Legion cavalry] to the Waxhaws, but that the men of Col. William Turner’s Rocky Mount Regiment of royal militia had “for the most part joined the rebels.”⁷ By this time, Rugeley had officially become colonel of the 1st Regiment of Camden District Royal Militia, his commission at that rank being dated June 13.⁸

Rugeley had more success working alongside Kinloch’s regular troops in the Waxhaws operation. Rawdon having been stricken with malaria, acting brigade major John Doyle informed Cornwallis’s aide-de-camp, Capt. Alexander Ross, on July 12 that Rugeley had just returned to Camden “from Hanging Rock, where he left every thing quiet.” Doyle added that Rugeley “was with Kinloch’s people and some mounted militia up at the Waxhaws. Upon their approach Mr [Thomas] Sumpter left his strong holds in the Catawba lands and fled in great disorder.”⁹ From this report, it appears that Rugeley first marched to the Waxhaws, and from there moved westward toward Hanging Rock and Sumter’s position in the territory belonging to the Catawba Native American nation, then returned to Camden after Sumter and his partisans retreated. However, since many participants in the Revolution routinely, and for unknown reasons, confused Hanging Rock with the Waxhaws even though the two locations are some forty miles apart, it may be that Doyle also confused those places and that Rugeley’s foray extended only to the Waxhaws and back.

4. Lt. Col. Francis, Lord Rawdon, to Lt. Gen. Charles, Earl Cornwallis, June 11, 1780, in Ian Saberton, ed., *The Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Theatre of the American Revolutionary War* (hereafter CP), Vol. 1 (Uckfield, East Sussex, UK: Naval & Military Press, 2010), 128.

5. Rawdon to Cornwallis, June 22, 1780, CP, 1:183.

6. Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 2, 1780, CP, 1:190.

7. Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 7, 1780, CP, 1:195.

8. Walter T. Dornfest, *Military Loyalists of the American Revolution: Officers and Regiments, 1775-1783* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011), 298.

9. John Doyle to Capt. Alexander Ross, July 12, 1780, CP, 1:203

Also in early July, Rawdon consulted with Rugeley in composing a letter addressed to the latter that was intended to halt desertions from Rawdon's regiment, the Volunteers of Ireland; this letter later fell into American hands and created problems for both Rawdon and Cornwallis. Rawdon wrote a second letter to Rugeley a week later, laying out a plan to lure the troublesome Sumter into a trap. "I send you the names of some of the Field Officers, that are at present under General Sumpter's Command," Rawdon told Rugeley. "Perhaps you may have such acquaintance with some of them, at least with their characters, that you may tempt them with proposals without fear of their betraying you. The service which I would have them perform, is to advise Sumpter to advance & fix his Encampment behind Berkley's Creek; where there is a very spacious position." Rawdon promised to pay five hundred guineas to any rebel officer who convinced Sumter to make that movement, provided Rugeley received advance notice of it, and that the officer revealed "what detachments are made to secure their Camp from surprize." Rawdon pledged that whoever undertook the task would be protected by the "strictest secrecy," and provided some suggestions as to how the officer could convince Sumter. "It may particularly be represented," he observed, "that [Sumter] would thereby cover the Waxhaws from the incursions of our Cavalry, & secure the grain of that District; that Mekan's Detachment, from its halting at Hanging Rock, is evidently weak, & acting on the defensive," and since the position at Hanging Rock is more advantageous to the British, Sumter's "advanced parties will always be circumscribed in their range, & must always suffer when they fall in with ours." Rawdon proposed making the move more appealing to Sumter by spreading a rumor that North Carolina Gen. Richard Caswell's militia had defeated Maj. Archibald McArthur's British troops, and that Caswell was advancing toward Camden. The rebels' "credulity would ardently embrace a tale so consonant to their wishes," Rawdon remarked. However, to make the story credible a "proper emissary" would be required, who would also be rewarded financially for his services. Rawdon suggested that "a Lt Colonel Lacey, a Prisoner on Parole" who "has been confined & injuriously treated by Sumpter ... may be a good channel for the business." (Rawdon probably confused rebel Col. Edward Lacey with his Loyalist father of the same name.) Even if Sumter discovered Rawdon's plan, "no evil can arise," Rawdon believed. "Sumpter might indeed pretend to give into the snare, & might lay an ambuscade for us; but, as I should march prepared for every occurrence, I might probably draw much advantage from meeting him in that manner." Rawdon warned Rugeley to "take care not to be duped," adding that if Sumter were reinforced he might "take the step without instigation." Rawdon instructed Rugeley to show the letter to Major Mekan.¹⁰ If Rugeley made any effort to put Rawdon's plan into action, there is no record of it. It appears that Rugeley kept the letter, and the other concerning the Volunteers of Ireland, at Clermont, where American officers found them when they camped on Rugeley's property in mid-August. The documents were sent to Gen. George Washington; the American commander-in-chief made no comment on the plot to trap Sumter.

Rawdon had recovered from his illness by July 27, when he described an unusual incident in a letter to Cornwallis. "The rebel officer, who came [to Camden] with the flag of truce, in his way back stopped at Rugeley's," Rawdon wrote. "Having enquired for Rugeley, who was not at home, he very privately slipped a note into the hand of" Sarah Dickey Harper, whose husband was a Loyalist. "She retired into another room and attempted to read the note," Rawdon continued, "but, as it was written in a cramp hand, she had not time to make it out before the officer followed her and asked with emotion whether she was Mrs Rugeley.

10. Rawdon to Rugeley, July 7, 1780, George Washington Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter LOC), Washington, DC.

Upon her replying, 'No!' he snatched the paper with much confusion, put it into his pocket and left the house immediately." The American officer, Rawdon observed, "likewise put some very improper questions to some of our militia officers. As he was out of my reach before I became acquainted with these circumstances, I wrote to [American Maj. Gen. Johann] de Kalb, complaining of this prostitution of a public pledge of faith. ... Mrs. Harper says that, as far as she could make out, the note was an application from Rutledge to Rugeley."¹¹ Rawdon did not comment on why South Carolina's rebel governor might have sent a message to Rugeley, but the incident raises questions concerning the depth of Rugeley's commitment to the British. Perhaps, when Rutledge had lodged at Clermont two months earlier, he and Rugeley had come to some sort of understanding that they would cooperate when opportunity offered.

On July 31, Rawdon penned a letter to Cornwallis that Rugeley carried to Charleston. Rawdon reported that rebel partisans "had pillaged our waggons" between Camden and Hanging Rock, but the raiders, North Carolinians under Maj. William R. Davie, had been caught in camp north of Waxhaw Creek early on the morning of July 22 and defeated by a company of royal militia "who, with half their number, routed them, killing and wounding several."¹² The Loyalists were probably part of Rugeley's regiment, given the location of the action, though Rugeley was not present.

Cornwallis was impressed with Rugeley when the two met in Charleston; it appears unlikely that the two had met during the earl's brief time in Camden in early June. In an August 6 letter to Clinton, Cornwallis discussed his plans to invade North Carolina and the units he would take with him. "I intend to leave on the frontiers from Pedee to Wateree (to awe the disaffected, who I am sorry to say are still very numerous in that country, and to prevent insurrections in our rear) the New York Volunteers and Brown's corps [the Prince of Wales American Regiment], and some of the militia of the Camden District who are commanded by Colonel Rugeley, a very active and spirited man," Cornwallis wrote.¹³

Cornwallis's biographers Franklin and Mary Wickwire believed that men like Rugeley were one of the reasons why the earl chose to fight at Camden rather than withdraw when Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates and his army threatened the town in August 1780. They pointed out that Cornwallis could not afford to abandon the eight hundred British soldiers hospitalized in Camden and who were too sick to be moved, that he needed to convince the Americans that the British were going to remain in South Carolina's interior, and that the area's agricultural products "offered him solid material support." There were also "human resources," they noted, including "merchants like Henry Rugeley ... who were loyal to the crown, who helped Cornwallis keep order, who raised loyalist militia, and who could eventually prepare the way for the desired return to civilian government."¹⁴ Rugeley was still in Charleston when Gates's army camped at Clermont on the nights of August 13 and 14, and when the Battle of Camden was fought on the sixteenth.¹⁵

Rugeley was definitely back in Camden in early September, as on the second Lt. John Money noted that he had sent a message asking Rugeley to "inform Lord Cornwallis whether he got the necessary information relative to the forage at Waxesaw." Cornwallis marched from Camden on September 7, camped

11. Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 27, 1780, *CP*, 1:217-218.

12. Rawdon to Cornwallis, July 31, 1780, *CP*, 1:224.

13. Cornwallis to Clinton, Aug. 6, 1780, *CP*, 1:177-178.

14. Franklin and Mary Wickwire, *Cornwallis: The American Adventure* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970), 152-153.

15. Henry Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., Oct. 27, 1780, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 34.

at Clermont that night, and set out toward Charlotte the next morning, beginning his long-awaited invasion of North Carolina.¹⁶

On September 13, from his camp at Waxhaw Creek, Cornwallis sent Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour, commandant of Charleston, instructions on deploying forces to secure South Carolina while the main army was in North Carolina. The Prince of Wales American Regiment could no longer be used, as Sumter had decimated the unit at Hanging Rock on August 6. To secure the communications between Camden and Charlotte, Cornwallis wrote that “detachments of militia of Rugeley’s, [William] Turner’s, [John] Phillips’s and [James] Carey’s regiments must endeavour to keep the country clear.”¹⁷

During their advance, the British captured a number of Americans. Maj. Archibald McArthur of the 71st Regiment informed Cornwallis on September 30 that “I have wrote to Colonel Rugeley to send a sufficient party of his militia to receive the prisoners at Barclay’s House.”¹⁸ No further mention of this has been found, so it is likely that Rugeley carried out McArthur’s instructions.

Rugeley was in Charleston in October 1780 when he informed his father that “communication is now open” between South Carolina and Britain. He stated that in his previous letter, he mentioned that “unless North Carolina came under the British Government we should be continually harrassed by the Rebels. I did not then think they would have collected in so large a body as they did, for before I could get to my place from Town, Genl. Gates /a Rebel Genl.\ arrived there with an army of upwards of 6,000 Men, destroy’d my Plantation, killed my Cattle, Hogs, Sheep, stole my Horses, all my Household Furniture, & abducting 25 Negroes—some of the Negroes are come back & am in hopes the Major part of them will.” Rugeley added that these were not his first losses at the hands of the rebels. “In May 1779 when Genl. [Augustine] Prevost came before the Lines of Charles Town,” he explained, “Govr. Rutledge & the Rebel Council ordered Two exceeding Good Houses of mine to be burned with all the outbuildings as they unfortunately stood outside of their Works.”¹⁹ It is not certain whether this included Henry’s wood-frame Charleston house with its stable, kitchen, and cooper’s shop (where barrels were made), and which was leased for £1,000, though it is unclear whether Henry leased the property for his own use or owned the property and leased it to someone else.²⁰ Cornwallis had promised that the British government would compensate him for his losses, and Henry hoped that was true. He was glad to hear that his brother William was returning to South Carolina, though Henry would be unable to provide him with any financial assistance, “as this Rebellion has broke me quite up,” he complained.²¹ These losses inflicted by the rebels undoubtedly strengthened Henry’s loyalism.

Rugeley must have still been in Charleston on October 31, or was on his way back to Camden, when Lt. Col. George Turnbull, commander of the New York Volunteers provincial regiment and temporary commandant at Camden, informed Rawdon that he was going to build a redoubt on the east side of the Wateree River Ferry and would be alert for enemy partisans, though he was hampered by a lack of support from the royal militia. “[Samuel] Tynes’ regiment is dispersed, and so the greatest part of Rudgeley’s,” Turnbull wrote. “The Colonel himself I don’t know where.”²²

16. Journal of Lt. John Money, Sept. 2, 7, and 8, 1780, *CP*, Vol. 2, 360, 361.

17. Cornwallis to Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour, Sept. 13, 1780, *CP*, 2:82.

18. Maj. Archibald McArthur to Cornwallis, Sept. 30, 1780, *CP*, 2:281.

19. Henry Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., Oct. 27, 1780, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 34.

20. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 41.

21. Henry Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Sr., Oct. 27, 1780, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 34.

22. Lt. Col. George Turnbull to Rawdon, Oct. 31, 1780, *CP*, 2:265.

While Rugeley was in Charleston, controversy began to swirl around the letter Rawdon had written to him on July 1 in the hope of halting desertions from the Volunteers of Ireland regiment. Because the document, along with another letter penned by Cornwallis, became such a serious issue, the letter merits quoting in its entirety:

So many Deserters from this having passed with impunity thro' the Districts which are under your direction, that I must necessarily suspect the Inhabitants to have connived at if not facilitated their escape. If attachment to their Sovereign will not move the Country people to Check a Crime so detrimental to his service; it must be my care to urge them to their duty as good subjects, by using invariable severity toward every one who shall shew so criminal a neglect of the public interest. I am therefore, Sir, to request of you that you will signify to all within the limits of your Command, my firm determination in this case. If any person shall meet a Soldier straggling without a written pass, beyond the Picquets; & shall not do his utmost to secure him or shall not spread an alarm for that purpose, Or if any person shall give shelter to Soldiers straggling as aforementioned; or shall serve them as a Guide; or shall furnish them with Horses or any other assistance: The Persons so offending may assure themselves of rigorous punishment, either by Whipping[,] Imprisonment, or by being sent to serve his Majesty in the West Indies, according as I shall think the degree of criminality may require. I have ordered that every Soldier who passes the Picquets shall submit himself to be examined by any of the Militia who have any suspicion of him: If a Soldier therefore attempts to escape when ordered by a Militia Man to stop, he is immediately to be fired upon as a Deserter. Single men of the Light Horse need not be examined; as they may often be sent above on expresses: nor is any party of Infantry with a Non Commissioned Officer at the head of it to be stopped.

I will give the Inhabitants Ten Guineas for the head of any Deserter belonging to the Volunteers of Ireland; & Five Guineas only, if they bring him in alive. They shall likewise be rewarded (tho' not to that amount) for such Deserters as they may secure belonging to any other Regiment.

I am confident that you will encourage the Country People to be more active in this regard.²³

Rawdon eventually arrested and imprisoned some 160 men, about thirty of whom were prominent residents of Camden District. All or most of those arrested, however, were charged with refusing to join the royal militia, rather than aiding deserters.²⁴ In his history of the Revolution published in 1785, David Ramsay claimed that Rawdon composed the letter while in a fit of anger: his "temper was soured by disappointment, and [his] breast was agitated with rage against the new subjects, as well for their unmeaning submissions, as for their conniving at a practice so injurious to the royal interest" as aiding deserters.²⁵ However, the fact that few if any Camden District inhabitants were punished for helping British troops desert confirms the

23. Rawdon to Rugeley, July 1, 1780, Washington Papers, LOC.

24. Paul David Nelson, *Francis-Rawdon Hastings, Marquess of Hastings: Soldier, Peer of the Realm, Governor-General of India* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 77.

25. David Ramsay, *The History of the Revolution of South-Carolina, from a British Province to an Independent State*, Vol. 2 (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1785), 132.

view of historians Franklin and Mary Wickwire, who believed that Rawdon was merely engaging in a bit of showmanship to intimidate the people. "Apparently in a fanciful mood," they wrote, "Rawdon composed out of whole cloth a letter in the form of orders which he sent to ... Rugeley," who in turn "read [them] to all the militia companies under his command." Rawdon "knew he could not reward Americans for killing soldiers nor arbitrarily ship people off to the West Indies." He may have frightened a few people, the Wickwires concluded, "but in the long run the orders hurt his cause more than they helped it."²⁶

This letter, along with a letter from Cornwallis to Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour in Charleston in which the earl ordered several South Carolinians to be confined aboard a prison ship in the harbor after it was reported that they allegedly planned to destroy the city, and another from Cornwallis to Lt. Col. John Harris Cruger ordering "the most rigorous Measures to punish" those Americans who continued to support the rebellion, aroused Washington's ire when they reached his hands. The letter to Cruger had in fact been altered by the rebels after they intercepted it; they also changed the intended recipient to Balfour.²⁷ On October 6, the American commander wrote to his British counterpart, Sir Henry Clinton, to protest Cornwallis's order. Clinton replied three days later, stating that Cornwallis's action was the result of the individuals in question having planned the destruction of Charleston, and in his letter Clinton also declared that he was "well acquainted with the humanity of Lord Cornwallis."²⁸

Dissatisfied with Clinton's response, Washington informed the Continental Congress of the matter. On October 16, he sent the delegates copies of the letters he had exchanged with Clinton along with "a Copy of the Letter from Lord Cornwallis & Lord Rawdon to which it refers." Washington remarked that Cornwallis's letter "illy comports with the mild humane character Sir Henry Clinton is pleased to ascribe to him ... and shows, as well as Lord Rawdon, that he possesses a capacity for the most Careless domination over the rights of mankind."²⁹

The American commander also wrote to Clinton that day, insisting that the purported conspiracy to destroy Charleston was unfounded. Washington believed that the plot would "on investigation appear ... ill founded" and "improbable." He also stated that "I wish I could agree in opinion with you on the spirit which actuates your officers in the southern command; but I must conceive the enclosed intercepted letters of Lord Cornwallis and Lord Rawdon breathe a very different Temper. They not only profess a flagrant breach" of the terms of Charleston's surrender and "a violation of the laws of nations; but under whatever forced description the unhappy objects of the severity are placed, it is in a form and carried to an extreme at which humanity revolts." Washington stated that he expected Clinton to "interpose your authority and influence to prevent a prosecution of measures, which cannot fail to aggravate the rigors of war, and involve the most disagreeable consequences."³⁰

Clinton wrote to Cornwallis on November 5, enclosing "the copy of a letter said to be written by Lord Rawdon to Major Rugeley and of an extract of one from your Lordship to Lt Colonel Balfour, which the rebels pretend to say were intercepted; but as I have some doubts of their authenticity, I beg your Lordship

26. Wickwire and Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 178-179.

27. Wickwire and Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 180.

28. George Washington to Sir Henry Clinton, Oct. 6, 1780; Clinton to Washington, Oct. 9, 1780, Washington Papers, LOC.

29. Washington to the Continental Congress, Oct. 16, 1780, Washington Papers, LOC.

30. Washington to Clinton, Oct. 16, 1780, Washington Papers, LOC.

will be so good as to inform me if any such letters were actually written.” Clinton also enclosed a copy of Washington’s October 16 letter.³¹

It took nearly a month for Clinton’s letter to reach Cornwallis, who was camped at Winnsboro, South Carolina, following his retreat from Charlotte after Maj. Patrick Ferguson’s Loyalists were defeated at Kings Mountain on October 7. The earl in turn wrote to Rawdon, enclosing “the copy of your letter of which General Washington complains ... and of which Sir Henry desires to be informed of the authenticity.” Cornwallis added that he planned to write to Clinton “in a day or two.”³²

Rawdon replied on December 3. “The intercepted letter is mine,” he admitted. “It certainly is not such as I would have wished should be ushered to the public, merely on account of what relates to the Volunteers of Ireland. It was an ostensible letter written to Rugeley after consultation with him upon the point,” Rawdon explained, “and I have reason to believe it was of much service. The expression may be loose, but the intent I need not vindicate to your Lordship,” as Rawdon believed that Cornwallis knew he had always used his best judgment where the public good was concerned. Rawdon thought it would be necessary to “make a more formal avowal” to Clinton.³³

The issue concerning the letters arose for the last time that same month. On December 1, Cornwallis had written to Gates protesting the brutal treatment the Americans had meted out to the Loyalists captured at Kings Mountain, which included the hanging of nine prisoners. Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, who superseded Gates on December 3, replied on December 17 and dismissed Cornwallis’s concerns with references to the letters and Tarleton’s actions. “The feelings of mankind will forever decide when the rights of humanity are invaded,” Greene wrote. “I leave them to judge of the nature and tendency of your Lordship’s orders to Lt Col Balfour ... of Lord Rawdon’s proclamation, and of Lt Col Tarlton’s conduct in laying waste the Country and distressing the inhabitants.”³⁴

Meanwhile, Rugeley had left Charleston and reached Camden about November 5. On that day, Turnbull informed Cornwallis that “Rudgely is arrived from town very sick. I am afraid I blamed him too rashly.”³⁵ If Rawdon ever discussed the issue of the letter with Rugeley, there is no record of it. Although Rugeley claimed that the rebels had destroyed Clermont in August, it was in good enough condition for him to return there. Upon recovery from his illness, he resumed command of his militia regiment, with catastrophic results.

31. Clinton to Cornwallis, Nov. 5, 1780, *CP*, 3:15.

32. Cornwallis to Rawdon, Dec. 2, 1780, *CP*, 3:189-190.

33. Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 3, 1780, *CP*, 3:192-193.

34. Greene to Cornwallis, Dec. 17, 1780, in Richard K. Showman, ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* (hereafter *PNG*), Vol. 6 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 592.

35. Turnbull to Cornwallis, Nov. 5, 1780, *CP*, 3:137.

Disaster at Clermont

As November 1780 drew to a close, the region between Camden in the south and Charlotte to the north, and to the east and west of the road linking those towns, had been nearly stripped of supplies by the opposing armies. First, Gates's troops had marched through the area in August. The following month, Cornwallis advanced to Charlotte via the Waxhaws before withdrawing to Winnsboro, South Carolina, after Ferguson's defeat at Kings Mountain. Then, in November, Gates sent Continental generals William Smallwood of Delaware and Daniel Morgan of Virginia to New Providence, North Carolina, on the Great Wagon Road that connected Charlotte and Camden. Each time military forces marched through, they gathered provisions for the men and forage for the horses, so that by November little was left.¹

When the Americans moved southward in November, Morgan commanded the advance force of three companies of Continental light infantry, a unit of Virginia riflemen, William Lee Davidson's two battalions of North Carolina militia, and Lt. Col. William Washington's 3rd Regiment of Continental Light Dragoons, which included the remnants of the 1st Continental Light Dragoons. The two cavalry regiments had been decimated by Tarleton's mounted troops during the operations around Charleston in the spring, and were only now ready to return to action. Washington's Continental light dragoons were augmented by a troop of Virginia State Cavalry under Maj. John Nelson. Smallwood ordered Morgan to take this force to the Waxhaws, where Maj. William R. Davie's North Carolina militia was gathering supplies. While Morgan was carrying out this task, Gates arrived from Hillsborough, North Carolina, with the main Continental Army. Gates advanced to New Providence, where on November 25 a council of war determined that the main army should withdraw to Charlotte. Smallwood's troops, Gates decided, would follow shortly.²



Lt. Col. William Washington, American cavalry officer, who used a pine log to trick Rugeley into surrendering on December 1, 1780. Painting by Rembrandt Peale, c. 1795.

1. Lee F. McGee, "The Battle of Rugeley's Fort": "A Spirit of Enterprize and Intrepidity Still Prevails," *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* 2 (2005):11.

2. McGee, "Battle of Rugeley's Fort," 11.

Smallwood had not yet departed from New Providence when he received a letter from a Waxhaws resident offering to provide pork and corn to the Americans. The general concluded that it would be too risky to try and procure those supplies, but Morgan wanted them and appealed to Gates, who approved on condition that Smallwood, Washington, and Davidson concurred. They did; Morgan set out on November 28, though only one hundred of Davidson's militia accompanied him. Morgan's troops, however, found no supplies when they reached the area south of Waxhaws Creek.³

Rugeley, despite some skepticism concerning his true allegiance, continued to fulfill his duties as a militia officer, including dispatching scouts to observe the rebel army. On December 1, he informed Rawdon that two days earlier he had sent a man "to Mr James Simpson's in the Waxaws," who had just returned and reported "that there was 600 of the rebels encamped at Mr Simpson's house the night before last, that yesterday they kept passing in small parties by there downwards, and that he himself saw some of them encamped at Mr Simpson's house last night" before he returned to Camden. Rugeley noted that Capt. James McCullough of his militia regiment had recommended the scout "Makey," possibly Samuel McKee, "as a man I might put confidence in" and sent him to Rawdon for further questioning.⁴ The Americans Makey or McKee had seen were Morgan's troops.

Rawdon spoke with Makey, who was "very clear and positive in his intelligence. He understood that the corps encamped at Simpson's (which consisted of both infantry and cavalry) was commanded by Morgan," Rawdon stated in a report to Cornwallis. Makey said the Americans marched along the road leading to Rocky Mount and "had carriages of some kind with them." Additional intelligence came from an African American man, who told Rawdon that "he came in on purpose to give me the information," and stated that "a party of the rebel cavalry under Major Marshall [possibly Maj. John Marshal of Sumter's brigade] lay last night at Murphey's beyond Lynches Creek, 25 miles from hence." Major John Harrison's South Carolina Rangers, a provincial regiment operating in that area, "upon hearing of this party, immediately went off down Lynches Creek," apparently trying to evade the Americans. Rawdon concluded that it was "very probable that an attempt is in agitation against Rugeley's post. I have therefore desired the colonel to send out parties all around him, and if he finds any large body of the enemy near him," to withdraw to Camden.⁵

At 7 p.m. Rawdon sent a second report to Cornwallis. "A deserter from Washington's dragoons has just come in to me," Rawdon wrote. "By his account Washington with an hundred cavalry lay at Murphy's last night and this morning three miles above Rugeley's, joined Morgan, who had marched with six hundred infantry by the Rockey Mount Road. The plan is to storm Rugeley's post this night." The American deserter had been ordered to try and find a ford to cross the creek behind Clermont's buildings. "Having arrived there," Rawdon continued, "he slipped from his guides and, galloping up to Rugeley, gave him notice of the enemy's intentions. A patrol of mine arriving at that time, Rugeley forwarded the deserter to me, assuring me that, as he found the enemy had no cannon, he would defend himself to the utmost." Rugeley described his fortified building, leading Rawdon to believe "it could not possibly be forced without artillery." Rawdon "was much tempted to try a stroke against Morgan," but declined because he did not want to risk the security of Camden on the basis of a deserter's story that "may be deceitful." Instead, Rawdon dispatched "a

3. McGee, "Battle of Rugeley's Fort," 11.

4. Rugeley to Rawdon, Dec. 1, 1780, *CP*, 3:188.

5. Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 1, 1780, *CP*, 3:187.

small party of mounted men, instructing them to throw a few random shots upon the enemy's rear. This may perhaps make Morgan suspect that from the information of the deserter I have marched out with intention to cut him off." Rawdon told the mounted party that if any of them were captured, they should tell the rebels that "I was just going to march thro' the woods with a large body of infantry." The deserter also said, Rawdon noted, that Gates with the Continental troops and four pieces of artillery had fallen back to Charlotte, while Smallwood was at Six Mile Creek with the militia awaiting the outcome of the attack on Rugeley's.⁶

The deserter's information about Gates and Smallwood was accurate. Washington, meanwhile, who had set out with 82 men, had been reinforced by more troopers of the 3rd Continental Light Dragoons under Maj. Richard Call. In addition, an unknown number of mounted militia from both Carolinas were with Washington, as were some Virginians, possibly the riflemen from Morgan's command. On the morning of December 1, as the deserter had reported, the Americans were only three miles from Clermont. After dark that evening, Washington advanced on Rugeley's post. Although Washington never stated what his original intention had been, Col. Otho Holland Williams of the Maryland Continentals believed that the cavalry commander planned only to conduct a reconnaissance, while other sources stated that, not expecting Clermont to be fortified, Washington hoped to capture the post in a surprise attack. Whatever his plan, upon arriving outside Rugeley's fortified barn, Washington sent a soldier to demand the Loyalists' surrender, promising to treat them as prisoners of war.⁷ The move was largely a bluff, because Rugeley's log barn was strongly fortified. In November, Cornwallis had sent an engineer officer to oversee construction of some of the defensive works at Clermont.⁸ One account states that Rugeley's barn was surrounded by a "wall of stout pine logs and peppered through with loop holes and sally ports from which to fire muskets. ... and the whole enclosure was lined with abatis [felled trees with sharpened branches pointing outward] to prevent a cavalry charge."⁹ According to Richard K. Showman, editor of Nathanael Greene's papers, Rugeley "had transformed his plantation into a strong advance post, which protected the British fort at Camden and threatened American supply lines."¹⁰

Rawdon had just finished the letter when the unexpected arrival of some fugitives from Clermont required him to add a postscript at 7:30. "Rugeley's Negroes and the man whom I had sent to advise him to fall back came galloping in to me," Rawdon stated. "The enemy advanced suddenly towards Rugeley's blockhouse, then, halting at some distance, summoned him to surrender. He said he would defend himself to the last and ordered his Negroes and the express [rider] to make the best of their way to Camden." Rawdon could not think of anything he could do at that point to assist Rugeley. "If Rugeley's people once begin to fire," Rawdon wrote, "they will find themselves safe; and the enemy, knowing the alarm to be spread, will not remain long there. Perhaps I miss an opportunity of making a creditable blow against the enemy," Rawdon remarked, "but when I weigh the consequences of any misfortune, I strengthen myself in the resolution of leaving nothing to hazard."¹¹

6. Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 1, 1780 (second letter of this date), *CP*, 3:188-189.

7. McGee, "Battle of Rugeley's Fort," 12.

8. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 163.

9. Daniel Murphy, *William Washington, American Light Dragoon: A Continental Cavalry Leader in the War of Independence* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2014), 68.

10. *PNG*, 6:529n.

11. Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 1, 1780, (second letter of this date), *CP*, 3:189.

Smallwood described what occurred at Clermont from the American perspective. "Receiving Intelligence on the first of this [month] that Parties of the Tories were advancing from the out Posts of the British, up to Cane and Lynches Creeks, with a View to intercept our Waggon, and avail themselves of the Supplies in those Settlements, from whence the principal Support of the Advanced Troops under my command had been drawn," he wrote, referring to the movement of Maj. John Harrison's South Carolina Rangers and perhaps some attached royal militia, Smallwood "detached General Morgan with five Hundred Infantry, and Lt Colo Washington with one Hundred Cavalry to cover a number of Waggon" that had been sent to gather corn and pork, "and if possible to intercept the Tories." Upon learning of Morgan's and Washington's approach, Harrison retreated, and the American infantry covered the wagons while Washington "with the Continental and some Militia Horse reduced Colo Rugely, Major [John] Cook and one Hundred and twelve Tory officers and Soldiers (in a logged Barn on Rugely's Plantation strongly secured by Abatis) to surrender at discretion without firing a Shot."¹²

Washington succeeded in convincing Rugeley to capitulate by a clever ruse, Smallwood explained. "The Colonel[']s Address and Stratagem on this occasion deserve Applause," the general wrote. "Having no Artillery, he mounted a Pine Log, and holding out the Appearance of an Attack with Field Pieces, carried his Point by sending in a Flag and demanding an immediate Surrender."¹³ A Virginia soldier who was present provided additional details. He recalled that Washington instructed his men to cut some pine logs, which were then sealed and scalded before the Americans mounted them on the wheels and axle frames of baggage wagons to simulate artillery and assigned men to pose as artillery crews. Washington then sent a second surrender demand, threatening to "blow them [Rugeley's militia] across the millpond" if Rugeley failed to comply.¹⁴

Two other Continental soldiers, both from Delaware, recorded Washington's use of deception. Sgt. William Seymour stated that Washington's cavalry had been sent to Rugeley's "to draw them out" of their fortified building. Failing to do so, the cavalry commander ordered the construction of the fake cannon, which "was drawn up in full view of the Tories," and then Washington sent in his surrender demand. Rugeley asked for time to consider, only to have Washington's emissary respond that "we had cannon and would put them all to immediate death if they did not give up." This had the desired effect. After Rugeley surrendered, the rebels turned about, marching toward their camp, with a detachment of North Carolina militia assigned to escort the prisoners.¹⁵ Capt. Robert Kirkwood, after describing the preliminary movements, summarized the incident by noting that "Col. Washington went down to Col. Ridgeley's, and with the Deception of a pine knot took the garrisons" of a colonel, major and 107 privates.¹⁶ Seymour also used the term "pine knot," indicating that the "cannon" may have been made from a fallen tree that had lost its bark. Such a piece of wood could have been prepared and disguised in much less time than it would have taken to fell pine trees, cut them to length, and blacken them to simulate artillery.

12. Maj. Gen. William Smallwood to Greene, Dec. 6, 1780, *PNG*, 6:538-539.

13. Smallwood to Greene, Dec. 6, 1780, *PNG*, 6:539.

14. McGee, "Battle of Rugeley's Fort," 12.

15. William Seymour, "A Journal of the Southern Expedition, 1780-1783," *Papers of the Historical Society of Delaware*, Vol. 15 (Wilmington: Historical Society of Delaware, 1896), 10.

16. Robert Kirkwood, "The Journal and Order Book of Captain Robert Kirkwood of the Delaware Regiment of the Continental Line, Part I, A Journal of the Southern Campaign 1780-1782," ed. Joseph Brown Turner, *Papers of the Historical Society of Delaware* 56 (Wilmington: Historical Society of Delaware, 1910), 12-13.

In his memoirs, Gen. William Moultrie, who was a prisoner of war in Charleston at the time of Rugeley's capture, offered a somewhat different account, in which Washington's "stratagem" did not actually occur, except perhaps in the Loyalists' imagination. Rugeley, wrote Moultrie, "upon the appearance of Colonel Washington's force before the fort ... immediately surrendered the whole of his party, to a pine-log which they had been accustomed to see every day, elevated a few feet from the ground by its branches; but seeing a military force about it, their fears converted it into a field-piece, ready to fire upon them; this occasioned their surrender."¹⁷ One historian described a more complex process in which, after felling a pine tree, Washington had his men "form the log to the shape of a six-pounder cannon and scald it black with a torch and soot" before mounting it "on the running gear's axle" from a baggage wagon.¹⁸



Replica of the "cannon" made from a pine log with the end scorched, as used by William Washington to force Rugeley's surrender. Historic Camden Foundation.

The next day Cornwallis replied to Rawdon's letters. "I own I tremble for Rugeley and most heartily wish that he had retired as you desired him," the earl declared. "I am very anxious to hear the event, for altho' the intrinsic value of his garrison may not be great, yet their being taken will contribute to damp the spirits of the militia." Cornwallis expressed his approval of Rawdon's actions, observing that "you had much more to lose than to gain, and a great part of your troops are not such as I wish to trust in an affair by night. To have carried a decided superiority against the enemy you must have left Camden very weak."¹⁹

Rawdon updated Cornwallis the same day, reporting that the mounted infantry he had dispatched returned from Rugeley's, with the commanding officer stating that he "found the last logs of the house burning" when he arrived at Clermont. Rawdon therefore concluded "that Colonel Rugeley surrendered." He described Rugeley's post as "the barn which your Lordship may recollect at the end of the field near the road. It was built of strong logs, loopholes were put thro' it, a platform erected inside for an upper tier of musquetry, earth thrown up against the outside, and a strong abbatis well pinned down around it. In short, it was a post that ought not to have been touched without cannon." Rawdon's patrol thought they saw enemy campfires burning about a mile north of Clermont, leading Rawdon to suspect that Washington withdrew early that morning. "I have spies out and constant patrols," he added. The letter was sealed and awaiting a messenger to carry it to Winnsboro when Rawdon received additional information. In a

17. William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, So Far As It Related to the States of North and South-Carolina, and Georgia*, Vol. 2 (New York: David Longworth, 1802), 247-248.

18. Murphy, *William Washington*, 69.

19. Cornwallis to Rawdon, Dec. 2, 1780, *CP*, 3:189-190.

postscript, he indicated that he had reopened the letter upon the return of two spies who asserted that “Rugeley surrendered without firing a shot, and the enemy are gone back.”²⁰

Cornwallis was not pleased by the news. “Your account of Rugeley vexed me altho’ it did not surprise me,” he informed Rawdon on December 3. “I think he must be a traitor, or he would have come away when you desired him. I will have an inquiry made into his conduct and would have his Negroes secured, as that will be the only forfeiture we shall probably get from him.”²¹ If such an inquiry was conducted, no record of it survives.

As more information reached him, Rawdon sent Cornwallis further details of Rugeley’s disastrous encounter with the rebels. “A deserter from Morgan’s corps (a Scotchman) asserts that Rugeley surrendered to the light horse alone, Morgan with the infantry being three miles distant,” Rawdon reported. “The light horse had not even a carbine to attack the post with. Rugeley knew that I was advertised of the enemy’s approach and he had full time to retire in case he did not mean to defend himself. *I am confident he has betrayed his men,*” Rawdon declared, claiming that “I have thought it likely to happen and have always had my precautions.” Morgan, he noted, had returned to Six Mile Run, and the American troops fired a *feu de joie*—a musket volley—to celebrate Washington’s victory.²²

Cornwallis sent the news of Rugeley’s defeat to his superior, Gen. Clinton, and other officers. On December 3, the earl informed Clinton that Smallwood with 1,300 militia, Morgan’s 250 Continentals and Washington’s 70 dragoons had been camped some twelve miles south of Charlotte for the past month, confirming what the deserter had told Rawdon a few days earlier. Cornwallis stated that the front of this force was “guarded by [William R.] Davie and other irregular corps, who have committed the most shocking cruelties and the most horrid murders on those suspected of being our friends that I ever heard of.” Gates was said to have joined them a week ago with 1,300 Continentals and 300 cavalry, the latter figure being a significant overestimate. “Morgan’s infantry and Washington with 100 cavalry came down on the 1st in the evening to attack a block house built by Colonel Rugeley in which he had placed himself with 100 militia,” Cornwallis stated. “Lord Rawdon, who ... had notice of their approach, sent to Rugeley to order him to retire to Camden, but he answered that, as the enemy had no cannon, he was determined to defend himself to the last extremity and had no fear of being taken. The enemy’s infantry did not advance within six miles of his block house, but the cavalry surrounded it and summoned him and he instantly surrender’d without firing a shot.”

On December 4, Tarleton, apparently having learned of Washington’s foray, told Cornwallis that “I am anxious to hear General Rugeley’s fate,” erroneously ascribing a higher rank to the militia colonel. Cornwallis corrected Tarleton. “Rugely will not be made a brigadier,” the earl snarled. “He surrendered, without firing a shot.” Tarleton dismissed the incident, remarking that “I think Rugely’s affair very immaterial.”²³ Rugeley, of course, was not promoted, and his militia regiment appears to have been disbanded shortly after his surrender, as muster rolls prepared in 1782 listing him and his men gave the end date of their service as

20. Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 2, 1780, *CP*, 3:191.

21. Cornwallis to Rawdon, Dec. 3, 1780, *CP*, 3:191.

22. Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 3, 1780, *CP*, 3:192-193.

23. Tarleton to Cornwallis, Dec. 4, 1780; Cornwallis to Tarleton, Dec. 5, 1780; Tarleton to Cornwallis, Dec. 5, 1780, *CP*, 3:347, 348, 349.

December 13, 1780.²⁴ Nevertheless, Rugeley was obviously still considered an active officer, or he would not have been released as part of a prisoner exchange the following spring.

Apparently still irked by the events at Clermont—his biographers remarked that Rugeley’s surrender “managed to fill the Earl’s cup of bitterness to overflowing”²⁵—Cornwallis mentioned them in a letter to Balfour on December 5. “You will have heard of that rascal Rugely,” the earl stated. “I think from the circumstance of his not retiring, when directed to do so by Lord Rawdon, and promising to defend himself to the last extremity and afterwards surrendering to a detachment of cavalry only without firing a shot is a plain proof that he must be a traitor.”²⁶

Further investigation revealed a possible reason for Rugeley’s failure to withdraw to Camden. “I find that Rugeley did not receive the letter I wrote him upon getting information of Morgan’s march,” Rawdon informed Cornwallis on December 6. However, Rawdon did not consider it a valid excuse, because “I had before particularly recommended to Rugeley to fall back on me whensoever he should hear that any considerable body [of enemy troops] was moving towards him.” In addition, Rawdon noted, “the neighbors seem to suspect collusion between Rugeley and the enemy.”²⁷

Gen. Morgan seemed to confirm this opinion on December 5 when he informed Nathanael Greene that Rugeley intended to ask for permission to go to Charleston on parole, adding that he believed Rugeley could be “depended on.” Morgan remarked that the British might be reluctant to exchange an American prisoner of equal rank for Rugeley “as they won[']t after this, Look upon him [as] a great Military charictor,” an accurate, even charitable, assessment of Cornwallis’s and Rawdon’s opinions. However, if Rugeley could be exchanged, Morgan recommended that Greene seek the release of his friend Col. Elisha Isaacs of North Carolina.²⁸

Some historians have treated Rugeley with more sympathy than was shown by the Loyalist colonel’s contemporaries. Noting that Rugeley received intelligence, which Rawdon had confirmed, that the Americans had no artillery, historian Lee F. McGee suggested that if visibility at night “was a factor in discerning the true nature of the threat, Rugeley’s motives for accepting the terms of surrender were probably based on perception that the threat was real.” However, McGee could not rule out “the possibility that Rugeley was easily swayed into giving up his post.”²⁹ Robert W. Barnwell, Jr., generously termed Rugeley’s response to the “mounted logs” as a “humiliating though very natural mistake.”³⁰

Greene, like Tarleton, did not consider Washington’s capture of Rugeley and his men to be of particular significance. On December 6, the general penned a letter to Virginia governor Thomas Jefferson and mentioned a recent engagement between Sumter and the British at Blackstock’s plantation, along with “Colo Washington’s Success, who by Stratagem took Colo Rugely and his Party.” Greene called these “little Flashes of Success,” implying that they had not materially weakened the British. He used identical phrasing in a December 7 letter to President of the Continental Congress Samuel Huntington, and only briefly

24. Dornfest, *Military Loyalists*, 298.

25. Wickwire and Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 226.

26. Cornwallis to Balfour, Dec. 5, 1780, *CP*, 3:99.

27. Rawdon to Cornwallis, Dec. 6, 1780, *CP*, 3:198.

28. Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan to Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, Dec. 5, 1780, *PNG*, 6:529.

29. McGee, “Battle of Rugeley’s Fort,” 13.

30. Barnwell, “Loyalism in South Carolina,” 281.

mentioned William Washington's "stratagem" and Sumter's success in a report to George Washington.³¹ When Gen. Washington replied, he was more effusive, writing that "the brilliant action of General Sumpter, and the stratagem of Colonel Washington deserve great commendation. It gives me inexpressible pleasure to find that such a spirit of enterprize and intrepidity still prevails."³²

After his capture, Rugeley was taken first to Charlotte and then to Salisbury, North Carolina, where he wrote to Greene on December 18. He thanked the American general for the "polite treatment" accorded to him and to Major Cook, adding that he had hoped to have been paroled earlier. He was in Charlotte when Greene arrived there, but thought it "improper to trouble" him at that time. Rugeley had since learned that the British would exchange American officer prisoners for American-held captives of equal rank, and hoped that Greene would grant his and Cook's request to "be paroled home."³³

At about this time, Dr. William Read with the American forces wrote that "Col. Rugeley was a sick man." Rugeley had also suffered a loss when a plundering party raided the home of a woman doing laundry for the prisoners and stole his clothing and that of several other captives. Greene chose not to grant paroles and instead urged that the prisoners be moved quickly to Virginia to prevent their being freed by Loyalists. Rugeley was taken there where he remained until he was exchanged.³⁴

Some of the prisoners captured with Rugeley narrowly averted serious danger. Col. John Marshal of Sumter's brigade sent John Jones with a letter of introduction to Greene on December 22; Jones, Marshal wrote, would give Greene information concerning the actions of three "Notorious Offenders" taken at the surrender of Clermont. Jones had details regarding the actions of Ephraim Smith and James Holley, and Marshal said he would later send proof of the "Vallanies" of Benjamin Kimball.³⁵ Later that day, Marshal informed Greene that two others captured with Rugeley were "true men to the Cause of America" and had been forced to serve in the royal militia "to save their living." Marshal asked Greene to order the two released, promising to "take Security of them for their future good behaviour."³⁶

Greene replied on December 25, declaring that the men captured at Clermont were prisoners of war and therefore not "triable for high treason." By doing so, he saved them from a fate that may have been the same as that of the Loyalist prisoners executed after their capture at Kings Mountain. As for those prisoners who were "good whigs" and served with the British under compulsion, Greene stated, they could "manifest their attachment to the cause of their country after they are exchanged." In the meantime, Greene would not grant them parole.³⁷

Rugeley wrote to Greene a second time on January 2, 1781, expressing concern that Greene may not have received his previous letter. He enclosed a copy and assured Greene that if his request for parole was granted, he and Major Cook would "strictly" abide by its terms.³⁸ Five days later Greene's aide, Maj. Ichabod Burnet, replied. Burnet stated that Greene had received the original letter and instructed another aide, Col.

31. Greene to Thomas Jefferson, Dec. 6, 1780; Greene to George Washington, Dec. 7, 1780, *PNG*, 6:531, 544, 546n.

32. George Washington to Greene, Jan. 9, 1781, *PNG*, Vol. 7 (1994), 99.

33. Rugeley to Greene, Dec. 18, 1780, *PNG*, 6:600.

34. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 51.

35. John Marshal to Greene, Dec. 22, 1780, *PNG*, 6:606, 606n.

36. Marshal to Greene, Dec. 22, 1780 (second letter of this date), *PNG*, 6:607.

37. Greene to Marshal, Dec. 25, 1780, *PNG*, 6:612.

38. Rugeley to Greene, Jan. 2, 1781, *PNG*, Vol. 7 (1994), 40-41.

Lewis Morris, to respond. Burnet's answer was the same as Morris's: Greene could not agree to Rugeley's request.³⁹ The Loyalist colonel would remain a prisoner until exchanged.

Rugeley's service as a militia officer had come to an ignominious end. He had been tricked into surrendering, a defeat that in addition to costing the royal militia over a hundred men had demoralized the remainder. Rugeley had also lost the confidence of Cornwallis and Rawdon, who now accused him of treason. He had proven himself to lack the abilities, and perhaps the courage, of a competent military officer.

39. Maj. Ichabod Burnet to Rugeley, Jan. 7, 1781, *PNG*, 7:67

Within the Charles Town Lines

In late February or early March 1781, Rugeley was exchanged and released from confinement in Virginia. He probably sailed from there to Charleston with other freed prisoners, a faster and easier method than making the long overland journey. If he did take the land route, Rugeley almost certainly stopped at Clermont on his way to Charleston. Although he had claimed that American troops under General Gates had destroyed Clermont in August 1780, some sources indicate that most of the plantation's buildings were in good condition in early 1781, and that it was Nathanael Greene's troops who plundered and burned Clermont in April of that year, leaving not a single structure standing.¹ If Rugeley also stopped at Camden, there is no record of it. In any case, it was unlikely he would have wanted to risk meeting Lord Rawdon or other British officers who would question him about his actions of the previous December. Whether traveling by land or sea, Rugeley would have been happy to stay away from Camden to avoid any unpleasant confrontations.

At some point after reaching Charleston, Rugeley took steps to obtain sources of income. He was able to regain his former office of register and in addition, on February 19, 1781, Rugeley was commissioned a lieutenant in the Duke of Cumberland's Regiment, a provincial unit commanded by former royal governor Montagu.² Since it is certain that Rugeley was not yet in Charleston on that date, the commission was backdated, a frequent practice in that era, as the date of officers' commissions determined their seniority and therefore their ability to command others of the same rank. Montagu had recruited the regiment in Charleston from American prisoners of war who were promised freedom if they chose to join the British army, with the stipulation that they would not be required to serve against Americans. Many prisoners preferred to enlist in British service rather than remain in the harsh conditions aboard prison ships. Recruiting proved so successful that the regiment was enlarged to two battalions on January 25, 1783, with Rugeley's unit redesignated the 1st Battalion.³

Rugeley composed a letter to his parents on March 18, 1781, reporting that he had arrived in Charleston a few days earlier and seen William for the first time since the latter's arrival in South Carolina. He informed his family that not long after he had written his October 27 letter, "I was taken prisoner by the Rebels, & carried into Virginia, from whence I have just got released, after being confined four Months." He was exaggerating; he had been held captive only about three months. Rugeley promised to inform his

1. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 43.

2. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 37, 48.

3. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 362n; Dornfest, *Military Loyalists*, 298.

parents of his plans later, “but the Fleet just ready to sail, must bid you adieu for this time.” In a postscript, he added that he once again held the office of register and proposed “geting my Bror. Wm. Made Deputy.”⁴

Despite being in a British-occupied city and having taken a provincial commission, Rugeley resumed his previous policy of treating rebels well. On May 19, 1781, Lt. Col. Stephen Moore aboard the prison ship *Torbay* in Charleston harbor wrote to British commandant Lt. Col. Nisbet Balfour asking him to free the 129 Americans confined on the vessel; Moore noted the “generous treatment” that the captives received from Loyalist colonels Rugeley, Nicholas Lechmere, Edward Fenwick, and Fletcher Kelsall.⁵ Rugeley may have acted solely from humanitarian motives, or he may have wished to ingratiate himself with the rebels now that British military fortunes in South Carolina were obviously ebbing.

If members of the Rugeley family corresponded further in 1781, very few letters survived. The first extant letter following Henry’s March 18 message was from Matthew Rugeley to William, dated October 30, in which he informed his brother of his disappointment in not receiving a letter in response to his of February 17 reporting that their father had died. He also expressed his frustration that the government’s “Ministers are obstinate as to News,” making it difficult for him to learn what was happening in America.⁶

On November 3, Henry was at “Retreat,” his property near Charleston, and sent his enslaved person Toby with a note to William asking him to send “some Beef, or Pork, or both if you can get them enough for today and to Morrow,” as a guest was to dine with Henry that day and he had “nothing here for Dinner.” Afterwards, the guest was going to Charleston in Henry’s chair, a two-wheeled, horse-drawn cart, and Henry added that if William could dine with him the next day, he would “Order the Chair to remain in Town all Night that you may ride up in the Morning.” The distance, however, was not great, since Henry remarked that William might choose to walk.⁷ Henry was apparently doing well enough financially to afford such a luxury as a chair, also called a chaise.

Rugeley made his first known effort to go to Camden in February 1782. Maj. Richard Call wrote to Greene on the twenty-third, reporting that Rugeley was at Dorchester and sought permission to visit American general Isaac Huger, who was at Jacksonborough, and then continue to Camden. Call said he would detain Rugeley until he heard from Greene. Rugeley provided additional information on this incident in an April letter to John Chesnut, a friend who remained on good terms with him despite their taking opposite sides in the war. According to Rugeley, his niece Betsey wished to return to Camden, so he had resigned his commission in Montagu’s regiment from a desire to “live amongst my Friends and acquaintance” in South Carolina. Greene, however, refused to let Rugeley leave the British lines.⁸ Rugeley therefore asked Chesnut to handle the sale of some of his property, which apparently had not yet been confiscated, to support his niece.⁹ His claim that he had resigned his lieutenantancy in Montagu’s regiment was not true, though perhaps he intended to do so if he had been allowed to leave British lines.

It was not until March 31, 1782, that William composed a letter to his mother consoling her on the loss of her husband and William’s and Henry’s father. He then discussed the war, observing that “Was America in Peace possibly it would be some Time before I saw England But I need not repeat what we

4. Henry Rugeley to parents, Mar. 18, 1781, Rugeley Papers, BA.

5. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 51.

6. Matthew Rugeley to William Rugeley, Oct. 30, 1781, Rugeley Papers, BA.

7. Henry Rugeley to William Rugeley, Nov. 3, 1781, Rugeley Papers, BA.

8. Maj. Richard Call to Greene, Feb. 23, 1782, in *PNG*, Vol. 10, ed. Dennis M. Conrad (1998), 399, 399n.

9. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 253.

undergo to live where the seat of War is nor what the fate of War is to many.” William harshly criticized the Americans’ actions, declaring that “the delight of the Rebels is murder & plunder where ever they go. Thousands that was Possessed of thousands [of pounds] have fled to Charles Town—with nothing more than a Blanket to save theire lifes. In Short to repeat all theire Barbarity & cruelty that the American Rebels are dayly Committing upon the Inocent would shock human Nature. Every Man that was a Man of Property before the Rebellion Broke out are now beggars,” he continued. “The fate of War. Amongst those Unfortunate Gentn. is my Brother Henry—who in the year 1775 could have paid all his Debts—and an Overplus of Twenty thousand [pounds] Sterling is now reduced to Beggary, was it not for the office which Has kept us both—But Since Cornwallis left us worth Nothing In a garrison Town.” After reviewing the high prices for foodstuffs, William stated that more British troops were expected at any time, “which I Pray God we may—that we may be able to live.” He added that he held “every place I did in time of Peace—And as an Acting Magistrate make enough to keep me.”¹⁰ With Charleston’s inhabitants, the British garrison, and thousands of Loyalist refugees crammed into the city, conditions were indeed difficult.

William wrote to his brother Matthew that same day to thank him for his offer of financial assistance. “Such are times here every one is at a loss what to do and such has been the fate of War that almost everyone that was Men of Property are reduced to Beggary,” William again lamented. “Amongst those Is poor Henry ... now not worth a Shilling.” Many Loyalists, including Henry, were owed thousands of pounds but “Nothing can be recovered,” William observed. He again condemned “the Cruelty and Barbarity of the Rebels,” and complained about the heavy expense of living in a crowded, undersupplied city. William stated that “everything I earn goes for Bord,” which cost fourteen shillings sterling per day, while food prices were also exorbitant. He reported that bread cost 1 shilling per pound, beef 2 shillings per pound, pork 18 pence per pound, two fowls cost 14 shillings, as did one turkey or a small roasting pig, while butter cost 7 shillings and salt 3 shillings 6 pence per pound.¹¹

By that time it is doubtful that Henry, had he been allowed to leave Charleston, would have found conditions at Clermont to be much better. On April 15, 1782, Lt. Enos Reeves of the Pennsylvania Continentals passed Clermont on his southward journey; he left a description that is at odds with Rugeley’s assertion that the rebels had destroyed the entire plantation in 1780 or historians’ accounts that Greene’s troops had done so in 1781. Reeves wrote that he “arrived at a house formerly belonging to Mr. J. Rugeley, an elegant building which never was finished, and is now vacant and all the buildings dependent on it going to ruin,—an elegant mill among others of less note.” By then the story of Rugeley’s surrender to William Washington circulated throughout the area, since Reeves heard and recorded it, with a few variations, including that “a pair of old wagon-wheels” was used to mount the fake cannon, and that the end was sawed off and the center “blackened ... the size of the calibre of a Cannon.” Reeves added that Rugeley and his men “were much mortified to be so simply taken in.” According to Reeves, after Rugeley’s capture, Washington burned the fortified barn and abatis, but he saw some of the palisades still standing.¹² Reeves

10. William Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, Mar. 31, 1782, Rugeley Papers, BA.

11. William Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Mar. 31, 1782, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 37.

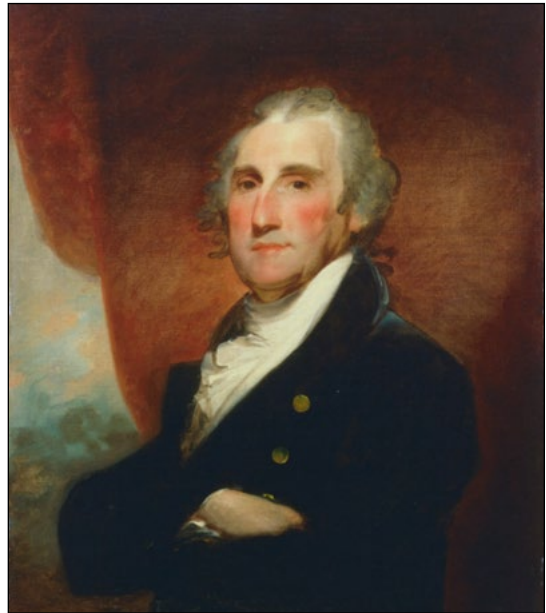
12. Enos Reeves, Letter 241, undated [Apr. 1782], in *Extracts from the Letter-Books of Lieutenant Enos Reeves, of the Pennsylvania Line Reprinted from the “Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography” for 1896 and 1897* (Philadelphia, PA: privately published, 1898).

was the only observer to describe Rugeley's house as unfinished, so it is possible that what he actually saw was damage to the building inflicted by the rebels in August 1780 or April-May 1781.

In Charleston, Henry continued to perform his duties while awaiting another opportunity to get to Clermont. On May 31, 1782, he signed a muster roll of his militia regiment. He appeared as colonel, with his Camden District neighbors John Cook, Sr., listed as major and John Adamson as one of the lieutenants. The roster named thirty-four men of all ranks and covered the period from June 13 to December 13, 1780. A revised roll of late July increased the number to thirty-six, with a note from Adamson indicating that two men were inadvertently omitted from the earlier roster.¹³ Those listed on the roll appear to be those who left Camden in May 1781 when the British evacuated the town and went to Charleston. Unfortunately, no earlier muster rolls of Rugeley's militia regiment are known to have survived, so there is no way to know exactly how large his unit was while it was operating in and around Camden.

Rugeley became involved in a dispute with a Mrs. Callaghan in September over an enslaved person. Details are lacking. However, they referred the matter to British authorities, and Lt. John Blucke of the 23rd Regiment, acting as secretary to the commandant, informed Rugeley that he should choose a "Gentleman of Character to judge upon the business of the Negro": Mrs. Callaghan would do the same.¹⁴ Apparently these two men would decide the issue. The outcome of the matter is unknown.

That same month, Rugeley made a second effort to leave Charleston. This time, he made it through the American lines, but before he could get to Camden, he "was taken prisoner on the grounds that Gen. Alexander Leslie's aide had given him an 'improper Flag'" of truce, he told John Chesnut. Once again, Rugeley had to return to Charleston.¹⁵ Rumors circulated that the British would soon evacuate the city, but Rugeley was still reluctant to leave South Carolina. He informed Chesnut that if Leslie permitted the British army "to carry away every Negro ... it would not in that case be prudent to stay." Yet he mused that if "my feelings are not to be hurt by any conversation after I have got absolution" from the Confiscation Act, he might stay if he received promises that he would not be harassed for his loyalty. The state legislature had passed the Confiscation Act in February and Rugeley was among those Loyalists named in the law who were to be banished and whose properties were to be seized by the state.¹⁶



Col. John Chesnut, Henry Rugeley's friend, who assisted him during the final year of the war despite their having been on opposing sides. Rugeley later returned the favor by supporting Chesnut's political ambitions. *Painting by Gilbert Stuart (n.d.). Denver Art Museum.*

13. Rugeley's Regiment, Muster Roll, June 13-Dec. 13, 1780, May 31, 1782, and revised roll, July 25, 1782, in Murtie June Clark, comp., *Loyalists in the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1981), 147-148.

14. John Blucke to Henry Rugeley, Sept. 28, 1782, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 38.

15. *PNG*, 10:399n.

16. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 253.

Rugeley married Elizabeth Cook in Charleston on November 28, 1782. The service was performed by the chaplain of the British 84th Regiment.¹⁷ She was the daughter of John Cook, who had served in Joseph Kershaw's militia regiment and later had been commissioned major in Rugeley's royal militia regiment.¹⁸ With the city's evacuation barely two weeks away, Rugeley had decided to go to Jamaica, but his new wife had no desire to go there and instead returned to Camden. Rugeley had earlier managed to send some of his enslaved people outside British lines, and he asked Chesnut to use the income from their labor to support Elizabeth.¹⁹ Chesnut also helped to recover a still stolen from Rugeley and cared for horses he had left behind.²⁰ Although he was distressed by the need to leave South Carolina, Rugeley managed to joke with Chesnut before he left Charleston, writing "I fancy I hear you cry, a happy riddance to you all, and now we have got the d_mned Tories ... all away; we shall do very well again."²¹

Prior to his departure for Jamaica, Rugeley petitioned the South Carolina legislature on December 1, saying he regretted to learn he had been banished and the state had confiscated his property. The "only crime alledged," he wrote, "is his having taken a Commission in the British Militia which he assures ... was merely in Compliance with the request of some principal Neighbours (now Subjects of this State) to prevent its falling into the Hands of a person whose intent it was well known was to oppress the Inhabitants of the District in which he Resided." The petition was signed by more than twenty supporters of the Revolution from the Camden area, who declared they were "impressed with Gratitude for his humanity to them, when they Laboured under the Severe treatment of the British Officers, during their Domination."²² The petition, however, had no immediate effect.

Rugeley also took time to write to his London attorney, Henry Jones, who was handling the debts that Henry and Rowland's partnership owed to British creditors. "I am sorry to inform you, that I am under the necessity of departing this place, with a great number of the Inhabitants," he wrote. He was going to Jamaica, where he planned to stay until he was permitted to return to South Carolina, "which I hope will not be long, as I have every assurance, that I shall be taken off the confiscated List, when the American Assembly meets, for my Conduct has been such, I flatter myself I have not created an Enemy, but on the Contrary many Friends." In accordance with Jones's instructions, sent earlier, Rugeley had given his Charleston attorney James Gregorie "all the bonds, Notes, Deeds, Mortgages, Books, Papers &c." Rugeley "could not get them down [from Camden] untill a few Days ago, for when I found I was under the Necessity of leaving this Province, I got General Greene's leave, to have them sent to the Lines, & then to fetch them in." Apparently, the rebels had not destroyed all Rugeley's possessions, if these records were intact. He expressed hope that Jones would be able to recover some of his losses, which he claimed the records given to Gregorie undervalued. He was taking with him to Jamaica "Three Men, Two Women, Two Boys, and One Child which are all the Negro's that I can get down," Rugeley informed Jones. He would have left them with Gregorie, but the attorney thought that if he did, the Americans would seize them.²³ Rugeley's comment that his behavior had created friends rather than enemies gives some credence to Cornwallis's suspicions

17. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 37.

18. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 234.

19. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 255.

20. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 234.

21. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 234.

22. Inabinet and Inabinet, *History of Kershaw County*, 95.

23. Henry Rugeley to Henry Jones, Dec. 9, 1782, in Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/132/197-198, DLAR.

that Rugeley was a traitor to the royal cause. Yet while Rugeley's loyalism was genuine, he certainly made every effort to maintain good relations with his prewar friends and associates who had chosen the opposing side.

Henry also penned a brief message to his brother Matthew. "I am in a great hurry, as I have positive Orders to be on board in Two hours time," Henry stated. "I am agoing to Jamaica, to join Ld. Chas. [Montagu's] Regt." He told Matthew that his friends had advised him "to draw upon you for the amount of what my Father has left me" in his will, which he did, as he did not want the money to go to his creditors. He therefore drew up a bill payable to William for £287 and 10 shillings sterling and another for £250 payable to Thomas Skottowe. Rugeley wanted the money invested in stocks or an estate in Skottowe's name, so that his creditors could not find and come after the money. "Have delivered up my Bonds, Notes, Books, Titles of Land, Mortgages, Papers &c &c to Mr. [James] Gregorie," he added, and enclosed "a Copy of Part of my Loss's." He asked Matthew to apologize to their mother for his failure to write, "as I am in great haste, for it was but very lately I was determined to leave the Country."²⁴

The partial list of Henry's "Loss's sustained by the War" totaled £28,540.18 [shillings].3 [pence]. It included £3,500 for fifteen "Tracts of Land," £355 for enslaved people "left in Carolina," £17,491 for "Bonds & Notes," and £6,194 of his "Personal Estate," the latter verified by royal lieutenant governor William Bull.²⁵ The total was equivalent to over \$6,252,500 present value. It was a substantial sum, but whether Rugeley would be compensated for it, and if he was, that compensation would be sufficient to satisfy his creditors, remained uncertain. Equally uncertain were the prospects he would face in his new home, Jamaica.

24. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Dec. 10, 1782, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 38.

25. "Loss's Sustained by the War," [Dec. 1782], in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 42.

From Charles Town to Jamaica and Back Again

Having sailed from Charleston in December 1782, Henry Rugeley at the age of thirty-nine found himself having to rebuild his life on the island of Jamaica, a place that, as far as is known, he had never been before. He still carried the burden of debt to his British creditors, his South Carolina properties had been confiscated by the state government, and his wife had stayed behind. Alone and with few resources, Rugeley faced daunting challenges.

Rugeley's first surviving letter from Jamaica was written from Kingston on February 28, 1783, where he had arrived "after an Agreeable Passage of Twenty Seven Days from Charles Town," which would have put his arrival about January 10. He informed his mother that he was in "exceeding good Health" and that Jamaica "seems to agree with my constitution very well, although, I do not like the place, or the Inhabitants, near so well as Carolina." When he reached Jamaica, Rugeley had been disappointed "to find Lord Charles Montagu, had left this place about a fortnight before, and gone to New York, to raise a Second Battalion." Rugeley hoped Montagu would "return in a few Months, as I have no Friend to apply to in his absence. besides it prevents me from prosecuting a Plan, which I had agreed upon, to procure a Flag to go to So. Carolina to fetch Mrs. Rugeley, or if that could not be obtained, to get leave of absence from the Regiment for Six or Eight Weeks, and go to St. Augustine in East Florida, and write to her to meet me there, as I find there is no prospect of my returning to So. Carolina soon, upon any other Terms than with a Flag of Truce." He apologized for not writing earlier to tell his mother about his marriage, blaming "the shortness of the time from my entering into the Married state, to my being forced to part with Mrs. R. and the Multiplicity of Business I had to settle before the Evacuation of Charles Town." Because the ownership of his assets was endangered by debt, Henry stated that he had instructed his brother Matthew to pay his inheritance from his late father to William, who he had instructed to deposit the funds in the Bank of England to be used for stock purchases in William's name. However, if his mother and Matthew disapproved of that plan, he wished them to hold the money for the time being. William had opted to return to England, and Henry hoped he had by this time arrived safely.¹

William Rugeley, safely back in England, received a letter from his sister Ann Houghton, directed to the Carolina Coffee House in London, that discussed family matters before she asked if he had seen Lord Cornwallis and if it was likely his endeavors, which she did not specify, would succeed.² William, whose plan involved seeking Cornwallis's assistance in obtaining financial help from the government, wrote to the earl on March 10 "at the particular Request of Col. Rugeley my Brother." He stated that he had called on

1. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, Feb. 28, 1783, Rugeley Papers, BA.

2. Ann Rugeley Houghton to William Rugeley, Mar. 2, 1783, Rugeley Papers, BA.

Cornwallis on behalf of Henry and himself, "Having lost every thing - & some Valuable places in America," to "Beg for your Lordship's Interest to Government."³ A few days later, on March 18, William filed a petition with the Treasury Department asking for financial relief.⁴ There is no record of his receiving any payment, nor of any testimony from Cornwallis on behalf of either Rugeley. Given Cornwallis's anger at Henry for his surrender in December 1780, it would have been surprising if he had complied with William's request.

Henry wrote to his brother Matthew from Kingston on October 10, complaining that although he had been in Jamaica for nine months, he had not received a single letter from his family despite having written to them often. He pointed out that in a letter to his sister Ann, he had "mentioned that I was going to take a Trip to the Spanish Main [Central America], with a view to settle on Musquito Shore, if I liked the Land & Climate." However, he had since learned "that the Spaniards insist upon Great Brittain giving up all claim to Musquito Shore, and that our wise Ministers mean to do it, and as the difenitive Treaty is not yet signed, it has prevented many persons from going to the Shore, that meant to settle there." Rugeley therefore had been forced to devise another plan, and was "fortunate enough to have agreed with a Mrs. Roberts Widow for a Plantation & Twenty three Negroes belonging to her for Ten Years, but at my option to leave at any time after the first Year, at the rate of £350 Jamaica Currency or £250 Sterling pr. Year." He considered the agreement "a very good Bargain" since it included "a very good House, Furniture Compleat, Provision in plenty for my Negro's & a very Healthy spot" near Mount Prospect. The only drawback was the lack of livestock, which made it necessary for Henry to purchase "a small Quantity of each kind" of horses, cows, sheep, hogs, goats, and poultry, "which has taken all my Cash, and brought me a little in Debt," so he had drawn upon Matthew for £30 sterling, payable to John O'Donnell. Henry had written to Paul Maylor, the agent for his regiment, requesting that he send Matthew "all sums of Money that is due to me" for his military service, and told Matthew that he was to receive half pay upon leaving the army. Henry also wondered if his creditors had attached the inheritance due him from his father, and promised to send a complete accounting of his financial losses to supplement the summary to show "that I have not embezzled any of the Property & that if this unhappy Contest [the war] had not happened, I should not only have had enough to have paid all Demands against the Estate, but have had something Considerable for myself."⁵

The items listed at the end of Henry's letter, labeled "Loss's sustained by the War," were "15 Tracts of Land" valued at £3,500 sterling, "10 Negro's left in Carolina" worth £355 sterling, "Bonds & Notes" with interest to September 1, 1783, valued at £122,439.14.2 Carolina currency or £17,491 sterling, personal estate of £6,194 sterling, £500 sterling in "Book Debts," and £500 for "Loss's sustained by receiving Paper Currency when depreciated," for a total of £28,540.18.3 sterling.⁶

On October 15, Henry again wrote to Matthew, enclosing additional financial documents and requesting that Matthew "send them to the Trustees" handling the claims of his British creditors. Henry's acquaintance Mr. Balmer had assured him that "when the Creditors sees what Loss's I have sustained" they would release him from his debts. Balmer, who was leaving for Britain in November, promised to "go to the Creditors and try and get it done for me." However, Rugeley confessed that "little dependence is to be

3. William Rugeley to Cornwallis, Mar. 10, 1783, Rugeley Papers, BA.

4. William Rugeley, Petition to the Treasury Department, Mar. 18, 1783, enclosed in Henry Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/135/91-92.

5. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Oct. 10, 1783, Rugeley Papers, BA.

6. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Oct. 10, 1783, Rugeley Papers, BA.

placed on him,” so he had written to attorney Henry Jones for assistance. Rugeley noted that when he left South Carolina, he had on Gregorie’s advice taken eight enslaved people with him, valued at £280 sterling. He worried that the trustees “will insist upon my giving them up,” but hoped they would not “be so cruel as to take away those few Negros,” though he was willing to sell them to pay some of his debts, as they were “liable to be seized by any creditor, that chuses to distress me.” Henry advised Matthew to “say nothing” about the enslaved people unless Jones or his creditors raised the matter.⁷

Rugeley’s letter to Henry Jones included another estimate of his losses, supported by John Fisher, Moses Kirkland, and George Kincaid in a sworn statement concerning fifteen tracts of land Rugeley had owned in South Carolina, given before a justice of the peace on September 8, and signed by Jamaica’s royal governor, Archibald Campbell. Rugeley expressed surprise that the rebels had been allowed to retain his properties. “[I] thought they were secure, as I had no Idea, although we were agoing to evacuate Charles Town, that Great Brittain would allow them their Independence without a Proviso, that we should be reinstated in our Properties, or at least what could be collected of it,” he wrote. Rugeley complained yet again “that if this unhappy War, had not have happened, I should not only had enough, to have paid every demand against the Estate, but something considerable for myself.” Adding to Rugeley’s troubles, he lamented that “by every Account from America we learn, that they are determined not to let any of those, who were mentioned in the Confiscation List, return to enjoy their Properties.” As a result, believing he could not return to South Carolina, Rugeley had asked Gregorie “to try to collect what sums of Money is due to the Estate if it is practicable, and send it” to Jones. Rugeley had also asked Thomas Bourke, who had been the bookkeeper for Rowland’s portion of the business, to do all he could to assist Gregorie.⁸

In late 1783, Capt. John O’Donnell sent Matthew Rugeley “a Bill Drawn by your Brother Lieut. Henry Rugeley,” though O’Donnell had lost the accompanying letter. He wrote that he and Henry had served together in the Duke of Cumberland’s Regiment (Montagu’s unit) and that Henry “has taken a mountain in Jamaica, where I remained with him some time, & He seems very well pleas’d with His Situation.”⁹

Matthew did his best to assist Henry with his debt problems. He planned to send “Henry’s Audit of Losses” to William, who was in London, but there were so many documents that he could not send them by mail and sought “some other means.” He hoped “the result of the Meetings,” perhaps between William and the trustees for Henry’s creditors, “may be productive of any advantages to you & Henry & the rest of the Loyalists,” and advised Henry “to consult with Mr. Jones previous to the Delivering in the inventory & take his opinion.”¹⁰

On March 26, 1784, Rugeley’s wartime effort to maintain good relations with his erstwhile enemies finally paid off. The South Carolina legislature approved a change in his status under the punitive laws against Loyalists. Instead of banishment from the state and confiscation of his property, Rugeley was placed in the amercement category, which permitted him to return to South Carolina and reclaim his property upon payment of a tax set at twelve percent of its total value. However, he was barred from holding public

7. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Oct. 15, 1783, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 42.

8. Henry Rugeley to Henry Jones, Oct. 10, 1783, in Rugeley, *Loyalist Claim*, AO 13/132/199-205, DLAR.

9. Capt. John O’Donnell to Matthew Rugeley, [late 1783], in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 43.

10. Matthew Rugeley to William Rugeley, Feb. 18, 1783 [dated incorrectly, should be 1784], Rugeley Papers, BA.

office.¹¹ His success, like that of some other Loyalists, was largely due to the support of “a network of influential associates.”¹² As one historian observed, “such support for a former Loyalist colonel contrasted sharply with the raw hatred felt toward other Tories.” During his time in Jamaica, Rugeley corresponded with several former Revolutionaries, including merchants Joseph Kershaw and Duncan McRa as well as Camden District sheriff John Wyly.¹³ Rugeley’s namesake son Henry told a visitor in 1819 that while his father sided with the British, “he was thought to be an American at heart; and his extensive influence ... was generally exerted in doing good, and procuring mercy for and from both parties”; he believed that prominent Revolutionary Thomas Taylor had played a crucial role in having his father removed from the confiscation list.¹⁴ Rugeley’s wartime behavior may have cost him the respect and trust of Cornwallis and Rawdon, but it did not hurt his relationships with Americans. Nevertheless, Rugeley continued his policy of assisting people on both sides. During his time in Jamaica, many exiled Loyalists sought him out seeking his support for claims they were filing with the British government, and he willingly signed testimonials on their behalf.¹⁵

Rugeley did not receive any correspondence from his mother or Matthew until June 18, 1784, when he received Matthew’s letter of March 6. Fearing that he had somehow offended them, Henry was relieved to hear from his brother after some eighteen months. He expressed surprise that the trustees had not heard from Gregorie in that same time span. Gregorie did send Henry a copy of the Charleston newspaper reporting that the South Carolina legislature had removed Henry’s name from the list of Loyalists whose property was to be confiscated, and instead amerced him.¹⁶ Henry complained that the commission Parliament had created to inquire into the Loyalists’ financial losses and compensate them “have thrown every difficulty they possible could to prevent the Loyalists from reaping any Benefit for I assure you not one in Twenty can [afford to] go to England” to submit claims. Rugeley stated that he could not visit England for at least two years because of the cost. “As I have just began the World again, am exceedingly distress’d for want of Money & shall be untill I have gather’d Two or Three Crops and then I hope to be easier in mind,” he wrote.¹⁷

Henry continued to discuss his financial difficulties, including the £262 he “paid Mrs. Roberts for the Rent of the mountain.” He also announced his intention to go to Charleston “to fetch my Family away,” noting that he had left his wife there “on purpose to Recover what she could ... /and which she has done by geting me off the Confiscation list\.”¹⁸ He had previously claimed that she had stayed in South Carolina because she did not want to go to Jamaica. Perhaps he changed his story to convince Matthew he was doing everything possible to secure repayment of the debts owed to him.

In July Henry was at last able to journey to South Carolina. On the twenty-eighth he informed Matthew that he was sailing for Charleston the next day aboard the *Sally* and expected to return to Jamaica in October. He mentioned that he was producing limes on his rented plantation but made no mention of other crops.¹⁹

11. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 38.

12. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 238.

13. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 234.

14. Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 357n; Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 45.

15. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 45.

16. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, July 6, 1784, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 43.

17. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, July 6, 1784, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 43.

18. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, July 6, 1784, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 44.

19. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, July 28, 1784, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 44-45.

Rugeley's voyage did not last long. The *Sally* left Port Royal on the morning of July 29, but a "Hurricane came on the Evening," he wrote, "it began about 8 O'Clock, and about 10 O'Clock the Captn. came into the Cabbn, and told us, we should not be in existence a Quarter of an hour longer." Rugeley observed that "what made our situation so bad was, we had had little or no wind all day, and therefore could not get clear of the Island so that we were every moment expecting to be drove upon some of the Rocks, as the Captn. & Crew had given up the Vessell for sometime before, to the mercy of the Winds and Waves." The crew's attempt to "cut away the masts" failed, but "providencial for us, the Wind shifted & blew from Shore, and carried away our Main Mast & all our Sails upon which our Vessell righted and we was able to return to Port Royal the next Morning." Rugeley was indeed fortunate, because "there were six Vessells in Company with us and they were all lost, and every Soul on board perished." Rugeley estimated that more than 250 people had been killed by the hurricane, and almost forty ships "in the Harbour, and on the Coast, were either Sunk, or drove on Shore and destroyed."²⁰

Returning to his plantation, Rugeley found the damage considerable. The hurricane "blew down every Negro House, Granary, Kitchen & Stable, about Fifty Acres of Plantains [a fruit similar to bananas] destroyed, near Twenty Acres of Corn ... about 1000 lb of Coffee, One Negro Child killed, and two Negro Women with their Ribs broke." He believed the women would recover, and blamed "their own obstinacy for not being used to Hurricanes, they would not take advise of the rest of the Negros, that were, but remained in their houses, untill they fell in upon them." Rugeley estimated his losses at about £100, which was "nothing to what I expected it would have been, when I first saw my Plantation after the Hurricane, for I thought my Crop of everything I had planted were destroyed."²¹

When Rugeley wrote this letter he was in Charleston. On his arrival he found his wife and niece Betsey were living at Clermont, 136 miles distant, "so that it was upwards of a fortnight after I arrived before we had the pleasure of meeting, for I did not think it wou'd be prudent to venture my Carcase so far in the Country, untill I was convinced how I should be received." He remarked that he had no reason to believe the backcountry inhabitants "wou'd use me ill, for the Inhabitants in Charleston in general, seems to treat me with the utmost politeness," including several state legislators and Governor Benjamin Guerard, "who has promised me his protection." The only person who disappointed Rugeley was his attorney, Gregorie, who he learned had declined to act on his behalf.²² Rugeley had almost certainly not paid the amercement at this time, so it is not clear how his family was permitted to reside at Clermont. They probably benefited from his extensive connections with influential South Carolinians.

Rugeley was still in South Carolina, at Camden, when he penned a letter to his brother Matthew on November 8. Aside from noting that the reason Gregorie gave for not providing the expected legal services was "owing to his having so much business of his own, that he could not attend to it," Henry limited his discussion to financial matters.²³

Henry's financial problems troubled his sister Frances, who discussed them with William in a letter of June 9, 1785. "I cannot for a moment defur Accuainting you with any thing that offers for the benefitt or quiet of pore Henry," she wrote, her spelling reflecting the limited education most women received in that

20. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, Oct. 2, 1784, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 45.

21. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, Oct. 2, 1784, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 45.

22. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, Oct. 2, 1784, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 45.

23. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Nov. 8, 1784, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 46.

era. She told William that a close friend of “the paymaster for the Refugees,” Mendes Da Costa, had dined with her family that day, and said that if William went to London and submitted an account of Henry’s losses he could obtain some reimbursement for them; the man had volunteered to accompany William to meet the paymaster and offered to write to Lord Cornwallis on Henry’s behalf.²⁴ It is not known if William accepted Da Costa’s offer.

Henry wrote to his mother from Richmond Lodge near Camden on July 7, 1785, repeating his statements from previous letters that the trustees had urged him to stay in South Carolina “and settle the Affairs, as no one but myself could do it, as the [legal] actions must be brought against those Indebted, by me as Surviving Partner.” He would, however, have left South Carolina before receiving the trustees’ letter, had it not been for his wife’s illness. After four months during which the doctors failed to successfully treat Elizabeth’s “sore breast,” she consulted “some Old Women in the Neighbourhood” and by following their advice was cured in three weeks. Unfortunately for Rugeley, while waiting for his wife to recover, several lawsuits were filed against him “for Damages sustained whilst I was Colonel” in the royal militia, an indication that not everyone in the Camden area was satisfied with his treatment of them while he held a British commission. He added that he sent Matthew certificates “for a Year, & two Months Pay,” which was still owed him by the British government.²⁵ Shortly after he wrote this letter, Henry and Elizabeth’s first child, a daughter also named Elizabeth, was born on July 28. Unfortunately, she died just over a year later and was interred on September 8, 1786.²⁶ This may account for the yearlong gap that followed in the Rugeley correspondence.

On July 21, 1787, Henry wrote to Matthew from Richmond Lodge, South Carolina. He stated that he was sorry Matthew “had so much trouble with Maylor about settling my half pay” and enclosed his half-pay certificate for the period December 25, 1786, to June 25, 1787, for Matthew to redeem. British officers whose military service had ended received half-pay afterwards, so Henry had obviously resigned his commission at least eighteen months earlier. He also thanked Matthew for the information he had provided “respecting the Prospect for recovering some satisfaction for my Losses.” At the end of the letter, Henry appended a list of items he needed that he could not procure in Charleston, asking Matthew to send them.²⁷

Henry wrote to Matthew again two weeks later, enclosing an additional list of items he wanted. He complained about “my circumstances not being so good as I cou’d wish,” explaining that he had been unable to accomplish much “on Account of my Leg, which has confin’d me near a Month and am affraid it will, untill cold Weather, its now upwards of Ten Years since it broke out & then it was Eight Months before I got it healed.” Henry remarked that “I hope it will not be so long now.”²⁸

Henry wrote to Matthew on June 6, 1788, to inform him “that the Trunk of Goods you was kind enough to purchase for me” had arrived in Charleston six weeks or two months earlier and had just been delivered to Camden a few days ago. He observed that he had not received any letters from Matthew since the one dated April 25, 1787, “in which you desired me to send you my Vouchers for my being a Colo.” In reply, Henry had sent his colonel’s commission and other documents on August 14, 1787, which had

24. Frances Rugeley to William Rugeley, June 9, 1785, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 47.

25. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, July 7, 1785, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 47.

26. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 47.

27. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, July 21, 1787, Rugeley Papers, BA.

28. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Aug. 4, 1787, Rugeley Papers, BA.

apparently not reached Matthew when the latter wrote to Henry on November 30. Matthew had informed him that he had £142.9.1 $\frac{3}{4}$ due from their father's estate. Henry also sent a list of bills he had drawn on Matthew that Matthew had paid, a total of £530 sterling in seven bills to six creditors, said he did not know how much Matthew had collected from his half-pay certificates, and asked his brother to tally the accounts between them so that he could make payment. He enclosed his most recent certificate for half-pay, from June 25, 1787, to December 25, 1787.²⁹

Although Henry had been barred from holding public office, this prohibition did not apply to other types of public service; he served on Camden's grand jury in 1788.³⁰ It therefore appears that he was fully reintegrated into the local community by that time, with few if any residents holding grudges against him for his wartime loyalism.

Rugeley's London attorney William Havard, a partner of Henry Jones, appeared before the Loyalist Claims Commission on Rugeley's behalf on July 31, 1788. Rugeley had sent the commission a memorial earlier, though the document is undated. In it, Rugeley had described himself as a "Charles Town Merchant" and stated that "by reason or on Account of his Attachment and adherence to the British Constitution and Government" he had suffered financial losses of £27,540.18 as shown in enclosed "Schedules ... and Certificates." He noted that he was not in Britain so could not testify before the commission, but asked them to consider his case "in order that he may be enabled under your Report to receive such Aid or Relief as his Losses and Services may be found to deserve." The document was signed not by Rugeley, but by attorneys "Jones Havard Jones & Jones for the Memorialist."³¹

Havard testified that Rugeley was in South Carolina, where he had lived for many years, and "had not been in England since the peace." Based on "what he has heard," Havard stated that Rugeley "was firmly attached to Great Britain," had gone to Jamaica upon the British evacuation of Charleston, and then returned to that city. Rugeley was "now an American Subject" and, having been removed from the state's confiscation list, remained in South Carolina "for the purpose of collecting Debts." Havard noted that "Mr. Rugeley does not mean to Claim for any other Loss than for property destroyed by the British and Rebels while he was under the protection of the British amounting to the Sum of £6194.10.6 Sterling." In support of this claim, Havard submitted two of Rugeley's letters dated December 9, 1782, and October 10, 1783, and referred the commissioners to several Loyalists, including South Carolina's former royal attorney general, James Simpson. Rugeley, Havard declared, "is very much in Debt to people" in Britain, among them his own law firm, and "his Affairs are in a State of Bankruptcy."³²

This was not the law firm's first appeal to the commission. On March 5, 1784, "Henry Jones, William Havard, William Jones, and Robert Jones, of London Merchants, Attornies to, or Agents for, Henry Rugely," had submitted a memorial to the commissioners that was filed with Rugeley's claim. They asserted that "by reason, or on Account, of his Attachment and adherence to the British Constitution and Government," Rugeley has lost £27,540.18.3 and three farthings sterling, as shown in the "Schedule thereof, proofs made, and Certificates relative thereto, herewith produced." These documents included former royal lieutenant governor William Bull's certification that justices of the peace John Mills, Thomas Winstanley, and Thomas

29. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, June 6, 1788, Rugeley Papers, BA.

30. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 47.

31. Henry Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, AO 12/52/260-261, microfilm, DLAR.

32. Testimony of William Havard, July 31, 1788, in Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, AO 12/52/261-262, DLAR.

Skottowe had received valuations of several of Rugeley's properties, along with Rugeley's affidavits, which Bull urged should receive "all due faith and credit." The attorneys asked that the commission grant Rugeley "such Aid or Relief as his Losses and Services may be found to deserve, and [that he] not be precluded from receiving such Relief as may be granted to other American Loyalists."³³

Also enclosed in Rugeley's claim was a statement, signed by royal militia colonel James Cary and two officers from Rugeley's regiment, John Adamson who was described as a merchant and John Cook, Sr., a planter, who had sworn to the truth of the document in Charleston before royal justice of the peace Thomas Winstanley on July 27, 1782. The three Loyalists stated that Rugeley owned Clermont, "on which there lately stood ... sundry Buildings of considerable Value," including a three-story house that measured 46 ½ by 16 feet, "with Kitchen, Stable, and sundry convenient Out Buildings." There was also a two-story log house, 26 by 16 feet, another log house of 30 by 20 feet, a saw mill, a three-story grist mill measuring 60 by 34 feet with two pairs of grindstones, two bolting mills, water wheels, a log house for the miller, "one Tanyard compleat," a "Bark Mill shod with Iron, a large Shed, Store House, a House for the Tanner," and a two-story wooden house with dimensions of 36 by 16 feet that served as Rugeley's store.³⁴

When the British evacuated Camden on the night of May 9, 1781, the statement continued, "the aforesaid Plantation and Buildings of the said Henry Rugeley were left entirely to the Mercy of the Rebels who has Burned, pulled down and otherways destroyed the said Buildings." Rugeley had therefore "made application to us the Subscribers who were well acquainted with the Buildings and the Value thereof to make appraisement and Valuations of the said Buildings." The three had "collected all the necessary Proofs and Information on the Subject and carefully and diligently compared them with our own knowledge." They agreed that Rugeley's buildings were worth £2,568.17.9 sterling.³⁵ The three men were certainly friends of Rugeley and familiar with his property, so their estimate must have been substantially correct, though it is difficult to imagine how they could have been so precise, even to the amount of nine pence.

Rugeley would have benefited greatly from any compensation he received from the Loyalist Claims Commission, but he undermined his own case. Having become a citizen of the United States sometime after his return to South Carolina, the commissioners were less disposed to assist him and decided that he had not provided adequate evidence of his losses to obtain reimbursement.³⁶ The decision must have been made shortly after Havard appeared before the commission on July 27, 1788. A brief, undated note in the claims records summarized Havard's testimony and states that "This Claim was altogr. Disd. [altogether disallowed] for want of Proof of Loss." A second notation, dated November 6, 1789, states that "This Claim has been already decided upon."³⁷ None of the Loyalist claimants ever received full repayment for their losses; however, if Henry had been awarded only ten percent of the £6,194 he sought, it would have substantially helped to redeem him from his financial woes.

On June 22, 1790, Rugeley was in Charleston, where, he informed his brother, he had gone with "a full determination" to settle the affairs of his and Rowland's partnership. He had tried to do so two

33. Memorial of Henry Jones, William Havard, William Jones, and Robert Jones, Mar. 5, 1784, in Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/132/187-194, DLAR.

34. Statement of James Carey, John Adamson, and John Cook, Sr., July 27, 1782, in Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, AO 12/52/263, DLAR.

35. Statement of Carey, Adamson, and Cook, July 17, 1782, in Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, AO 12/52/263-264, DLAR.

36. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 46.

37. Henry Rugeley, Loyalist Claim, AO 13/87/230-231, DLAR.

months earlier, but “Mr. Grigorie, General [Charles Cotesworth] Pinckney, and myself could not settle the Concerns.” Now he hoped to get “a clearance” of the company’s debts. On the advice of his lawyer, Henry had signed over his inheritance from his father to Matthew and his mother, and any inheritance he might receive upon his mother’s death had been signed over to Matthew. He discussed other aspects of his financial affairs along with arrangements for exchanging letters, since he believed “that numbers of my Letters are opened & destroyed after they arrive here.”³⁸

Henry sent Matthew another letter on July 17, in which he reported that “a Letter which I received from Messrs Jones & Co. in which they requested—indeed Ordered me to stay in this Country,” meant he would not be returning to Jamaica. This instruction was apparently the result of yet another economic reversal. As Henry related, he had taken on a partner who was managing the enslaved people on his Jamaica plantation, and the man “ran away with my Negros, and carried them to Cape Gracias a Dios, Honduras.” The partner had promised to return the enslaved people, though he had yet to do so, and meanwhile his actions had left Rugeley with a debt of about £300 owed to Mrs. Roberts, from whom he had rented the Jamaica plantation and who was the actual owner of the enslaved people taken to Honduras. Gregorie and Pinckney wanted him to sell the enslaved people he and his wife owned in South Carolina as part of the settlement of his debts, but Henry was reluctant to do so, as he needed them to work the “fine Tract of Land” he had purchased in his son Rowland’s name and where the family was “comfortably fixed.” Henry was considering establishing a “Country Store” there and told Matthew that if he was interested in partnering with Henry in the venture, £1000 from Matthew would be needed to stock the store with merchandise.³⁹



Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, who fought for the Americans in the Revolution but assisted Rugeley in settling his debts. Painting by Henry Benbridge, c. 1773.

Rugeley’s agreement to liquidate his debts, finalized in mid-July but not signed until July 27, 1790, required him to turn over twenty-eight parcels of land to Pinckney and Gregorie, who placed them in a trust along with Rugeley’s uncollected debts, in the forlorn hope that some of the latter might be paid, with the proceeds from the sale of the land and any debt payments designated for payment to Rugeley’s creditors.⁴⁰ Rugeley had to give up his beloved five-hundred-acre Clermont plantation as part of the arrangement.⁴¹ It is not known whether he had paid the state the assessed amercement, though it is likely he would have since it appeared that encumbrance had been removed from the property. However, Gregorie and Pinckney may have paid it, either when Rugeley surrendered the property, or earlier to allow Rugeley to reclaim his properties, taking their reimbursement when the properties were sold, with the remainder going toward Rugeley’s debts.

38. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, June 22, 1790, Rugeley Papers, BA.

39. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, July 17, 1790, Rugeley Papers, BA.

40. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists*, 299.

41. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 42.

Some of Henry's properties do not appear to have been sold as part of the agreement to pay his debts. His will of June 19, 1796, bequeathed four properties to his family: 637.5 acres on Taylor Creek where the family resided, to his widow; 250 acres on the Wateree River to his son Rowland; 100 acres on Taylor Creek, also left to Rowland; and 650 acres on Wateree Creek to be divided equally between his sons Henry and John. This latter property probably including the original Clermont estate, which at some point Rugeley reacquired, and was later reported to have been sold to Daniel DeSaussure in 1820.⁴²

From Charleston, Rugeley wrote to his mother on July 19, 1790, apologizing for not communicating more frequently, which he attributed to his financial troubles. "For these many years back, my affairs has been in such a disagreeable situation, that I have been very unhappy indeed, as I saw no prospect of ever getting a Release from that Concern between my Brother Rowland and myself, for it has been a very unfortunate one to me, and, it has prevented me from doing any thing for myself" since Rowland's death, Henry grumbled. However, he stated that he now had hope he was "clear of it, for last Week I agreed with Mr. Grigorie and General Pinckney /the two Gentlemen appointed by Mssrs. Jones & Co.\," who acted as trustees for Rugeley's British creditors, "to assign over all my property to them, and they have engaged to pay all my Debts here in full and to give me a general release from what I owe here and in England, so that I shall now be quite clear of Debts." Henry assured his mother that "I feel much easier and contented ... than I have ever done since I left England last, although I have to begin the World again with little or nothing."⁴³

Despite the improvement in his circumstances, Henry complained that he had been saddened to be forced to sell three enslaved people owned by his wife, who had inherited them from her parents. "It hurts me more," he noted, "as I know the Attachment" his wife "has for them, they being brought up in her family, yet for all that she did not hesitate a Moment to give them up, as she wants to see me extricated" from debt. On a more positive note, Henry expressed his satisfaction at having purchased a plantation a year-and-a-half earlier and putting it in his son Rowland's name, "by which means we have secured that" against creditors "and got ourselves comfortably fixed. It is the luckiest as well as the best purchase I ever made." The plantation, Henry believed, was an excellent location "for a Store, as it is a thick settled part of the Country, most of them able Planters, and being perfectly acquainted with the people, and mode of Trade, I am certain I could carry on business here ... to great advantage." Unlike his late brother Rowland, who had injured their business by extending too much credit, Henry would not do so. He had asked his brother Matthew for a loan of £500 to stock the store with goods, promising to work hard so that "I may be enabled to leave Mrs. Rugeley and my Children in a more flourishing situation than they at present are." Henry expressed pride in his "fine Boys," sons Rowland and Henry, adding that his niece Betsey, Rowland's daughter, still lived in his home.⁴⁴

Although he had told his mother that his mind was at ease after resolving his debt issues, Rugeley remained preoccupied with financial matters when he wrote to his brother Matthew from "Wateree Plantation" on April 24, 1791. After discussing various issues relating to a debt owed him and his inheritance from his father, Henry reviewed his purchase of the South Carolina plantation, telling Matthew that he had used his name in the transaction which gave ownership of the property to Henry's son Rowland. He assured

42. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 42.

43. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, July 19, 1790, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 54-55.

44. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, July 19, 1790, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 55.

Matthew that he had purchased the property for cash and that there was not “the least doubt, that you or your family should be the least injured by any action of mine, and you may rest assured that in future, your name shall never be made use of by me in any future purchases.”⁴⁵

Henry went on to report that on his return from Charleston, “I found Mrs. Rugeley and my Two Sons exceeding ill.” Rowland, who had turned two on March 5, was still “ill with the Ague and Fever,” but young Henry and Elizabeth Rugeley had recovered. Henry had been “exceeding apprehensive for a Month that I should have lost her.” Henry added that his niece Betsey continued to reside with him, “& I assure you a very industrious young Woman for she is now Twenty Years of Age. I got the Trustees to give her Two Negros.” Henry also informed Matthew that he had changed his mind and decided not to open a store, his wife and several friends having advised him “it would be better to go into the Planting Line as I had a good Tract of Land,” and if he should die “before my Sons should arrive to years of maturity Mrs. Rugeley could manage with Executors untill they did,” whereas if he went into business as a merchant, upon his death “my Affairs would be unsettled & Mrs. R. would be under the necessity of getting some person to transact & settle the Estate for her by which means She and the Children might be much injured.” Having given these matters some thought, Henry agreed, and asked Matthew not to ship him the goods he had requested if they had not already been sent. Instead, he asked for £200 or £300 “to purchase some Negros,” promising to pay back the loan with interest within three or four years. He also enclosed two certificates covering the period from December 24, 1789 to December 25, 1790, each for six months’ half-pay, and asked Matthew to see if he had received those payments.⁴⁶

From Charleston on October 11, 1791, Rugeley wrote to Matthew reminding him of the account of his family’s illness and recovery in his previous letter and lamenting “how transitory is happiness in this Life.” He stated that in late May, his wife, sons, niece, “and the House Negros, all took the Meazles at one time.” They all recovered within two weeks, “but Mrs. R. too anxious about her affairs went out too soon, and got Cold, by which means she was thrown in Violent fevers, and other Complaints, which baffled the skill of our Doctors here.” Unable to come up with a remedy, they advised Rugeley to take Elizabeth to Pacolet Springs in present-day Spartanburg County, “about 120 Miles above Camden.” Fortunately, Henry noted, when he did “the Change of Air, or the Water /for its a matter of doubt which of them\ has perfectly reinstated her Health, and we returned home the last of August.”⁴⁷

Henry then reverted, as usual, to financial matters, remarking that the file of papers he had received from Pinckney and Gregorie concerning his release from debt “was so large that I could not carry it up with me into the Country,” so he had “brought a Servant” to Charleston to bring the papers home. He promised to send Matthew an abstract of them later, because “my Crop is on hand, and I want to return as soon as possible” for the harvest.⁴⁸

From Charleston, Henry penned another letter to his brother Matthew on March 25, 1792, stating that he had drawn on him for £80 sterling to purchase oats, indigo, clothes, and pumps. Henry also mentioned that he had corresponded with Edward Fenwick, who like himself had been a colonel in the royal militia during the war but chose to remain in South Carolina. Worried that his creditors might try

45. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Apr. 24, 1791, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 56.

46. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Apr. 24, 1791, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 56-57.

47. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Oct. 11, 1791, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 57.

48. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Oct. 11, 1791, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 57.

to seize the inheritances from his father and William, who had died on September 7, 1789, Henry advised Matthew to produce the bills Henry had drawn on him and that Matthew had paid out of their father's bequest to Henry, and added that he suspected his creditors of planning to claim any future inheritance from his mother rather than the amount William had left him. Henry reported that he "had bought Six more Negros for £310" he had borrowed from Gregorie and Pinckney, an amount he expected Matthew to pay, again assuring his brother he would be reimbursed, with interest, in two or three years. The ownership of the enslaved people was recorded "in my Childrens name" to secure them from creditors and ensure that Matthew would be repaid.⁴⁹

Matthew wrote to John Constantine on May 10, 1792, to inform him that he had accepted one of Henry's drafts for £80 payable to Constantine. He added that he planned to write to Maylor "to know what I may draw upon him" for Henry's half-pay. He noted that Henry "had adjusted his Affairs with his Creditors & that now he had turned Planter entirely upon his own Authority—which is the reason of his drawing upon me at this time."⁵⁰

Maylor's clerk Nathaniel Thwaites replied to Matthew's inquiry on May 29, 1792, stating that the balance owed Henry was £30.16.10 sterling and would be paid within a month. A note on the back of the letter indicated that Henry's half-pay was just under £21 per six months; Maylor received a two percent commission on all payments, leaving Matthew, who collected Henry's pension, just over £40 annually.⁵¹

Henry continued to draw on Matthew for funds with seemingly little regard for any inconvenience it might cause his brother. He wrote from Charleston on February 1, 1793, that he had brought his crop of indigo to town three days earlier but that instead of selling it immediately, his friend Robert Henry "advised me to leave it, as he thinks it will fetch a much better price a Month hence." Henry Rugeley had paid Robert Henry in two bills drawn on Matthew, one for £160 sterling and one for £10 sterling, probably for storage of the crop and handling its sale. He assured Matthew "that when my Indigo is Sold the Ballance of the purchase of the Negros [that he had drawn on Matthew to purchase] will not amount to more than Forty or fifty Pounds." It is likely that in addition to paying part of what he owed Matthew for the purchase of the enslaved people, the profits from the indigo would cover the payments to Robert Henry. Rugeley remarked that his family was well and that although he had intended to write to his mother while in Charleston, he had to leave that day because "my friend Mr. Chesnut is hurrying me out, as he has proposed himself a Candidate for Congress, and as I have great influence in the Country I live in, he wants me to be there when the Election comes on which will be the Sixth Instant." The Chesnut to whom Rugeley referred was Camden resident John Chesnut, who had helped Rugeley when the latter was in British-occupied Charleston. Chesnut was captured at the fall of Charleston in 1780 and paroled; when the British occupied Camden in early June 1780, they drove Chesnut's family from their home and confined him in the town jail. Nevertheless, Rugeley and Chesnut remained friends and Rugeley's influence may have helped Chesnut win election to the South Carolina state senate in the election mentioned.⁵² This constituted further proof that voters in the Camden area, like Chesnut, harbored no ill will toward Rugeley for his Loyalist sentiments

49. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Mar. 25, 1792, Rugeley Papers, BA.

50. Matthew Rugeley to John Constantine, May 10, 1792, Rugeley Papers, BA.

51. Nathaniel Thwaites to Matthew Rugeley, May 29, 1792, Rugeley Papers, BA.

52. Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 367, 368.

and service with the British, nor did anyone appear to have lost respect for him due to his financial troubles, since his prestige was such that Chesnut sought his support.

On March 18, 1793, Henry wrote to his mother from his Wateree property. He expressed a desire to visit England, but admitted he was unable to leave America “as soon as I thought I could when I had settled the Concerns” of his and Rowland’s business. Since doing so, he remarked, he had “enjoyed a good State of Health owing, I believe to my being easier in mind.” Each time he went to Charleston, Henry continued, friends “Compliment me on my looking heartier, and better in health [than] when I was there last.” Although he would be fifty years old the next day, “considering the Troubles I have experienced, Thank God I have no reason to complain,” he observed. “My Eyesight is near as good as ever,” but “my Teeth has failed me,” so that he could no longer “make a Dinner upon hard Crust of Bread.” However, he stated that “this is a fine Country for People in my situation ... for we have *Homany, Mush, Bonny Clabber* [thickened sour milk sweetened with molasses], *Sowings, &c. &c.* most of which I am fond of and I can relish them without Teeth.” He told his mother that he had not lost all his teeth, but those that remained were “the worse for wear, yet I have enough left to relish a piece of English Roast Beef If I could get at it.” He also wrote that he had apprenticed himself the previous November to “a Mr. Caldwell to learn me the Art of Distilling, so that I might make Whisky myself,” as it was very expensive to pay someone else to do it. Henry was now able to distill whiskey; “Indeed there is little Art required the chiefest thing is care and Industry.” He intended to ensure that “my Negro shall possess” those traits, “as I mean to attend him very close.” Rugeley did not plan on doing the work of distilling himself, but rather to teach an enslaved person to do it. He informed his mother that his wife and children were well but “she is uneasy about her Children on Account of the Small Pox, as it is about the Country. She would have them enoculated, but [is] affraid of offending the Neighbours, as it has not as yet got into our settlement and therefore we do not want to be the first that brings it.” He declared that “as soon as one of my Neighbours gets it shall then Enoculate my Children.” He noted that his son Rowland had turned six on December 17, Henry four on March 5, and John one on January 12.⁵³

Shortly afterward, Henry sent Matthew a brief note informing him that he had drawn on him once again, this time for £60 sterling to be paid to Zachariah Cantey, another Camden resident who had fought for the Americans in the Revolution. Henry did not explain for what purpose he had used the funds.⁵⁴

In his January 11, 1794, letter to Matthew, Henry apologized for not having written since the previous April, “owing to the situation of my family.” In May he had them inoculated for smallpox, and had “frequently repented of it since, for by some Mistake of the Doctor in giving the Mercury I lost a fine Negro Girl, and for several Months did not know which of my Sons Henry or John I should loose first.” He and his wife “were near six Month that we did not pull off our Cloaths, we could not hire a White Nurse, and we did not like to trust to a Black,” so they cared for everyone themselves. His family was now “tolerable well,” and Elizabeth was pregnant and due to deliver a child in a few days, so Henry remarked that he could not linger at Charleston, where he had brought his crop to sell. However, he complained that the war in Europe between Revolutionary France and its enemies, which included Great Britain, “hurts us greatly here in the sale of our Produce.” Henry had been unable to sell his crop unless he did so at a discounted price,

53. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugely, Mar. 18, 1793, Rugeley Papers, BA.

54. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Mar. 27, 1793, Rugeley Papers, BA; Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 356.

so he had “by advice of my friends stored it, and hope in a Month or Two the Marketts for Indigo will be better.” Rugeley’s indigo may not have yielded the expected income, for it appears he stopped raising that item after 1795. Meanwhile, he had drawn a bill of payment on Matthew for £40 sterling to cover a debt to Robert Henry, who was in London. Henry enclosed certificates for eighteen months of his army half-pay for Matthew to redeem along with a power of attorney authorizing Matthew to collect Henry’s pension, saying he expected his brother to receive that money, which would cover the payment to Robert Henry, before that bill came due.⁵⁵

On August 14, 1794, Henry wrote to Matthew from Camden, reporting the birth of a daughter, Mary Ann Caroline (named after Henry’s eldest sister), called “Polly,” who had been born on January 25 at his Taylor’s Creek plantation. Yet again, Henry focused on his financial affairs. He enclosed another half-pay certificate, covering the period December 25, 1793, to June 25, 1794, and informed Matthew that because “Genl. Pinckney & Mr. Grigorie seems very much induced to help me, as much as lays in their Power,” he had “made another purchase from them of the property I gave up” to pay his British creditors. Henry also asked Matthew to clarify the state of “my Accounts with you” and inquire if he had any inheritance coming from his deceased brother William. He also drew up another bill of payment on Matthew, this one for £30 sterling due Zachariah Cantey, who was in London. Henry promised that if he had no inheritance from William’s estate, he would “not draw upon you any more untill I have Money in your hands again, but must beg at any rate you will give due honor” to the bill to Cantey.⁵⁶

Henry wrote to his mother on April 29, 1795, to complain about the effects of the French Revolutionary Wars, believing them to be worse than what he had suffered during the American War for Independence. “I never before experienced half the Calamities that a War brings upon individuals, as I do in this present one,” he lamented. The conflict had disrupted his communication with his family and left him with “no other resources to support me in my situation,” an indication that the uncertain nature of maritime trade, with both France and Britain seizing ships bound for the other’s ports, had hurt Rugeley’s indigo exports. On the positive side, Rugeley had “at last engaged with a person to keep a School near me, which is a very difficult thing to do so far back in the Country, he is an Englishman, and brings my two Boys Rowland and Henry on very well so that I am in hopes they will soon be able to write to you themselves.” There were “several good Schools in Camden, and a Colledge at Winnsborough about Twenty Miles from us,” Rugeley observed, but he and his wife thought the boys were “too young to be sent away so far from us,” so he would let them continue studying for another year or two with their current schoolmaster. His third son, John, “grows a fine Boy” and would begin school the next year, while his daughter had just been baptized the previous week. Rugeley’s wife said “she will have no more Children,” though Rugeley thought she might change her mind.⁵⁷

The spring of 1795 saw Rugeley in good health, in a better frame of mind having overcome the worst of his debt problems, and devoting considerable attention to his wife and children instead of financial affairs. He would soon be ready to undertake his long-postponed trip to visit his family in England.

55. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Jan. 11, 1794, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 64; Lewis, *Carolina Backcountry Venture*, 249.

56. Henry Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, Aug. 14, 1794, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 65, 65n.

57. Henry Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, Apr. 29, 1795, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 66.

The Final Journey

In the summer of 1796, Henry Rugeley set out for England after an absence of nearly thirty years. During that time, many of his family members, including his father, his sister Margetts, and his brother William, had died. Rugeley must have been eager to see his elderly mother again, as well as his surviving siblings. And he could not quite put his financial affairs completely aside—he would now have an opportunity to deal in person with his brother Matthew on those matters.

On July 22, 1796, James Gregorie wrote to Jones, Havard, and Jones, the trustees for Rugeley's British creditors, to inform them that Rugeley had sailed for London to visit friends and while there would call on them and provide "every information in his power respecting his affairs." Since the agreement with Rugeley's British creditors that Gregorie and Pinckney had brokered, Gregorie noted that he had collected "about £300—which is also paid away for debts in this Country, and is nearly all that is owing except the Taxes which I expect to Collect Money to pay in a few Days." These were apparently state taxes, possibly the balance owed on Rugeley's amercement, "so that all the property now on hand which is principally the Lands adjoining to this Town [Charleston] will go to the British Creditors," along with any debts owed to Rugeley that were recovered in the future. Pinckney had intended last November to ask the legislature to remove Rowland Rugeley from the Confiscation List so that his property could be sold for Henry's benefit; however, Pinckney had to leave the legislature to care for sick family members and had not been able to deal with the issue. Gregorie expressed hope that Pinckney would accomplish the task during the next legislative session.¹

Rugeley was in England by September 21, 1796, as on that date John Constantine sent a note to Matthew regarding financial matters, and added that it "must have been great pleasure" for Matthew's mother to see her two surviving sons.²

Elizabeth Cook Rugeley wrote to Henry from their Strawberry Hill plantation on October 2, 1796. Although she had received enough education to achieve basic literacy, her lessons in spelling and grammar had clearly been cursory at best. Elizabeth expressed disappointment at not having received a letter from Henry, stated that she hoped to receive one soon, and wished he would get home safely. She thanked God for the blessing of being "the only famly in this Part of the world that has mist the fever this fal[,] it has been very mortel in town." She had heard that forty people had already died and everyone was afraid to go to Camden because those who had gone there had become ill, and many died. Nevertheless, she had sent "tommy," likely an enslaved man or boy, to Camden to mail her letter. Two of the plantation's horses

1. James Gregorie to Messrs. Jones, Havard, & Jones, July 22, 1796, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 66.

2. John Constantine to Matthew Rugeley, Sept. 21, 1796, Rugeley Papers, BA.

had died from an ailment similar to diarrhea and Elizabeth worried that more would be lost. She was very busy “Putting in the [wheat]” and gathering crops. Those tasks required horses so she decided to use them despite the risk to their health; the plantation workers were giving the horses medicine “to kepe tham from giting sick.” Rugeley had apparently opened a store though he had not mentioned it in his correspondence; Elizabeth reported that it had done very little business due to the scarcity of money, and she hoped to collect money owed to them by customers. Rugeley, it seemed, had not overcome his poor business habit of extending credit to his customers. Elizabeth promised to do all she could to operate the still and produce whiskey, but the first grain used “turnd out very bad.” A neighbor, Mr. Adamson, probably the John Adamson who had served under Rugeley in the royal militia, had agreed to send her all the barley she wanted along with forty or fifty bushels of rye, and she believed those items, with the plantation’s own grain and some corn mixed in, would make distilling successful. She would begin as soon as the mill could grind the grain. The children, she stated in closing, missed their father.³

A correspondent using only the initials S. A. informed Rugeley from Clermont on October 20, 1796, that a Mr. Adams (perhaps he meant Adamson) had visited Rugeley’s family the previous day and all were well, Elizabeth Rugeley having “recovered her health—entirely.” The writer remarked that “it has been very healthy in the Uper Country this summer—but Charleston has suffered very much by an Epidemic fever which has been fatal to Numbers but mostly to strangers.” Nineteen passengers who had arrived from London in August had all died, S. A. believed, and “many Europeans fell that had been settled there two or three years—indeed Charleston has become a dreadfull place thier distresses with fire & sickness has been very great.” There had been “several more Attempts ... to set the City on fire Again”; two men had been charged with attempted arson but no evidence could be found to convict them. Charlestonians “live in Continual dread of further Calamity,” the writer observed, so “we may think ourselves happy in the Country exempt from such evils.” The writer then updated Rugeley on political affairs in South Carolina, including Charles Cotesworth Pinckney’s appointment as ambassador to France.⁴

Henry Rugeley was still at the family home in St. Ives when he died on December 18, 1796, at the age of fifty-three. He was buried at Potton, where his brother Matthew lived, on December 27.⁵ On March 29, 1797, Matthew undertook the difficult task of informing his sister-in-law Elizabeth of her husband’s death. Matthew opened by stating he had a “very unpleasant subject to write about—my Brother’s decease & his concerns respecting his affairs.” Had Henry “supposed his dissolution so near,” Matthew believed they would have discussed Henry’s finances at greater length, but as Henry hoped to recover from his illness, he had delayed doing so. He did, however, tell Matthew that “he had been purchasing some land & had outbought himself,” so that he had yet again drawn upon Matthew for funds. When he died, Matthew noted, Henry left only a small amount of cash in silver, and he hoped Elizabeth might have money to pay part of the amount that Henry had drawn on him. Matthew had read Henry’s will but was “quite unacquainted with either the value or the nature” of Henry’s American property. Perhaps to encourage her to relieve him of some of the debt Henry owed him, Matthew pointed out that Elizabeth would receive £500 on the death

3. Elizabeth Cook Rugeley to Henry Rugeley, Oct. 2, 1796, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 67-68.

4. S. A. to Henry Rugeley, Oct. 20, 1796, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 68.

5. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 36.

of Henry's sister Elizabeth, who had no children, as well as "a considerable Sum of money" when Henry's mother died.⁶

Elizabeth Rugeley wrote to Matthew from Charleston on May 22, 1797, apparently in reply to a February 24 letter from Matthew that has not been found. She stated that Matthew had told her "of the onhappy State of halth yore Pore dear Brother ways in," but as much as she was saddened by the news of Henry's illness, she had since received "the worst acont" from Robert Henry that her husband had died. She had lost, she stated, a good and kind husband and wished he had never left America, as she thought he might have lived longer had he stayed at home. Henry had left some £600 in debts, Elizabeth noted, so that she might have to sell the family's property which would pay only about half of what Henry owed, and she would be unable to afford further schooling for their children. Just before Henry had left for England, a Mr. Belton had gotten a judgment against him for seven guineas and served him with a writ. Mr. Cantey and Mr. Henry were staying with Elizabeth to handle Henry's estate, and would remain until she heard from Matthew, who she hoped could provide her with some assistance.⁷ She sent Matthew a similar but shorter letter the next day, the only significant difference being her assertion that if she had to sell the family's property to pay Henry's debts, they would lose their only source of support which was the plantation's crops.⁸

Elizabeth Cook Rugeley wrote to her mother-in-law from Charleston two days later, seeking financial assistance. The loss of her husband, she declared, was the greatest tragedy she had experienced in her life, as he was "one of the kindes[t] of husband and a tander father to his Pore littel Children" who were aware of their loss and frequently said that they would never see their father again. They were "fine Children[,] if I C[o]uld bring them up in the manner I culd wish to d[o] wich whill be out of my Power if you Cant or my brother [Matthew] cant holp me tha [they] must Sufer very much as the litel Propperty tha have will be sold to Pay the dats [debts] and if so it must hurt tham vary much as propety Sel[ls] very loe." Elizabeth stated that Henry went to England because he wanted to see his mother as, given her advanced age, he might not have the chance again. He also "was in hopes you C[o]uld halp him so as he mi[gh]t be abil to Pay his dats wich he was in hopes you Co[u]ld with out hurting your Self as he fered he cold not aver Pay tham without sum asistence from you or his Brother." She was surprised that Henry had never raised the issue with his mother, and attributed it to his unwillingness to trouble her, as he had informed Elizabeth in a letter that his mother was "very sick." Elizabeth then repeated her plea for financial help, declaring that Henry's debts totaled some £600 sterling that were in part due to poor harvests. She added that if she had to sell the family's enslaved people they would "Severly Sufer as tha ar all we have to Soport us from want." One of the men managing Rugeley's affairs on Elizabeth's behalf, Zachariah Cantey, had promised to send Matthew a complete account of Henry's debts and property, and had been very helpful to Elizabeth, though she worried about paying him for his services.⁹

Matthew wrote to Henry's widow on June 29, 1797, acknowledging receipt of a letter she had written to Henry before his death. Matthew expressed happiness at news that Henry's family was well, by which "you will be better enabled to conduct your business—which I hope you will do with success—for the benefit of yourself and family" He complained of the "unpleasant situation" in Britain because of the war

6. Matthew Rugeley to Elizabeth Cook Rugeley, Mar. 29, 1797, Rugeley Papers, BA.

7. Elizabeth Cook Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, May 22, 1797, Rugeley Papers, BA.

8. Elizabeth Cook Rugeley to Matthew Rugeley, May 23, 1797, Rugeley Papers, BA.

9. Elizabeth Cook Rugeley to Elizabeth Ginn Rugeley, May 24, 1797, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 72.

and hoped that a peace agreement with France might be achieved. Matthew also commented on American politics, remarking that “what a pleasure it would have given my Brother (Had he lived) to have seen the account of the Election of Mr. [John] Adams as President[;] he us’d very often to express his wishes about it.” Next, Matthew provided Elizabeth with more details of Henry’s death, describing how his “dissolution came on at [the] last. he had been getting very weak a considerable time from the nature of his complaints but was not confined to the house until Wednesday afternoon & he died on the Sunday Morn. ... I was at St. Ives & left him on the Friday (‘though weak) in pretty good spirits ... much to my surprise I was sent for the next afternoon (Saturday) & when I arrived there ... he was not sensible & expired the next morning.” Henry had told Matthew that “he hop’d he could get cured in England” but that proved impossible. The funeral was relatively simple, Henry’s body being carried to the cemetery in a hearse drawn by four horses with his family and friends following. A gravestone purchased by his mother for six guineas, matching those of other deceased family members, marked his resting place.¹⁰

Matthew reported that Henry had left two trunks which he would send to Robert Henry for delivery to Elizabeth. He inventoried their contents; they contained 7 shirts, 11 pairs of stockings, 3 coats, 4 waistcoats, 4 pairs of breeches, 2 pairs of trousers, 2 hats, 4 pairs of shoes, 5 neck handkerchiefs, 1 silk handkerchief, 6 pocket handkerchiefs, shaving equipment, quills, writing paper and ink, 2 knives, a silver watch, a pair of silver shoe buckles, 12 silver teaspoons, a pair of silver tea tongs, a silver tea strainer, a medal, and 3 silver tablespoons. There were also “4 Crown pieces” (five-shilling coins), “5 small pieces of Money,” and two shillings sixpence in Henry’s pants’ pockets.¹¹ It was a small amount of money, so that had he lived, Henry would probably have had to borrow more funds from Matthew to pay for his return passage to America.

Matthew and his mother did not receive Elizabeth’s May letters until early July, and the contents gave them “great concern.” Matthew wished that Henry “had explained himself to me,” though Matthew himself “was so distressed for money for my own uses” that he could not have provided significant assistance. A combination of poor economic conditions in Britain and unavoidable business expenses meant that Matthew could not help Henry’s family, and “as to my Mother she has nothing of the kind in her power to serve you.” He reminded Elizabeth that Henry was “indebted to me for Sums advanced for him at different times,” and he would provide an account of those amounts in a future letter.¹² Henry’s family would not receive any financial help from his English relatives.

Matthew Rugeley wrote to Robert Henry on November 18, 1797, commenting on Henry’s estate and Elizabeth Cook Rugeley’s situation. He had yet to receive the detailed account of the widow’s finances that she had promised that Cantey, who with Nicholas Peay (owner of a plantation on the Wateree River) was one of Henry’s executors, would send. While he would “have been very glad to have received any general information respecting” Henry’s affairs, Matthew stated, “as to any minute details or particular statements I shoud think unnecessary as at this distance & myself totally unacquainted with & quite a stranger to the nature of my late Brother’s business ... I cou’d not advise.” However, he hoped “for the sake of the Children they will be properly conducted and manag’d as well as circumstances will admit.” With regard to

10. Matthew Rugeley to Elizabeth Cook Rugeley, June 29, 1797, Rugeley Papers, BA.

11. Matthew Rugeley to Elizabeth Cook Rugeley, June 29, 1797, Rugeley Papers, BA.

12. Matthew Rugeley to Elizabeth Cook Rugeley, June 29, 1797, Rugeley Papers, BA.

Elizabeth's concern over Henry's debts, Matthew declared that he knew "neither how or why they could be so involved or any thing of the kind as I could comprehend."¹³

On November 24, 1797, Matthew penned a letter to Elizabeth Cook Rugeley informing her that he had shipped Henry's possessions to Charleston. He mentioned that he had heard nothing from Cantey and "should be glad to hear in a general way your affairs were well doing & here I cannot help observing ... how incumbent it is upon you as Mother of your family to exert every ability for their good. not only as to managing business but in every other respect where their welfare is concerned." Matthew observed that in "my Brother's letters of late years he appeared doing extremely well," probably a hint that Elizabeth possessed sufficient resources to support herself and the children. He also reminded Elizabeth that Henry owed him about £200, not including medical expenses incurred around the time of Henry's death and funeral costs. If there were any funds due Henry "arising from this Quarter of the World," Matthew stated he would apply them to the amount Henry owed him and any balance would go to Elizabeth.¹⁴

Elizabeth, who had married Thomas Starke, Jr., wrote to Matthew from Strawberry Hill on June 11, 1798, to describe her situation and plead again for money. She hoped that Matthew was not offended by her remarriage and believed he would not blame her because it was "out of my Power to live So" and run the family business. Starke had lived with Henry for a year before the latter left for England and Henry had entrusted him to manage his affairs until he returned. Having stayed another year and been paid £20 for his services by Elizabeth, Starke offered to remain with the family until Henry's affairs were settled. He ran the businesses at the Rugeley home "and at the Plantation whar the negros Planted," and was "so kind to me and my Children he won my hart," Elizabeth stated. Henry's creditors were suing to recover their funds, so that Elizabeth would probably have to sell the land, leaving her "to Soport my Children on only my industry." If Matthew knew how hard her life was, Elizabeth declared, he would pity her. She had no way to clothe her children except to do the spinning herself, and she could no longer afford to educate them because to hire a live-in tutor would cost £30 annually, less than the £40 per year it would cost to send the children to boarding school. Much of Henry's property had been sold, but Elizabeth said she still owed some £200, more than the value of the remaining land, and again asked Matthew to help financially.¹⁵

Two weeks later, Elizabeth composed another letter to Matthew, providing more details of her economic travails. Her horses had died, and the sale of property thus far had yielded only £500, leaving the family £250 in debt. They still owned one plantation held in the names of Henry's minor sons Henry and John, which was worth £700, but it would bring less than half that if sold. A second plantation in Henry's son Rowland's name could not be sold as the family depended on it for their support. She only had two enslaved people left, both women, who worked in the fields, and her sons Rowland and Henry "have to Put ther pore littel hands" to work rather than get an education. This time, Elizabeth did not directly ask for money, instead asking for Matthew's advice on how to deal with the children.¹⁶

Matthew wrote to Robert Henry in Charleston on November 10, 1798, asking him to inform Elizabeth Rugeley Starke that his mother, and her mother-in-law, had died on November 8. He stated that he had directed his message to Henry because "Mrs. Starke is not partial to writing," possibly having ceased

13. Matthew Rugeley to Robert Henry, Nov. 18, 1797 (partial copy), Rugeley Papers, BA.

14. Matthew Rugeley to Elizabeth Cook Rugeley, Nov. 24, 1797, Rugeley Papers, BA.

15. Elizabeth Rugeley Starke to Matthew Rugeley, June 11, 1798, Rugeley Papers, BA.

16. Elizabeth Rugeley Starke to Matthew Rugeley, June 26, 1798, Rugeley Papers, BA.

corresponding with Matthew because he had not provided her with any funds. Matthew also reminded Henry that in September he had reported that his mother “was extremely Ill indeed & grew much weaker every day,” and he presumed Henry had forwarded that information to Elizabeth.¹⁷

In 1799, Henry’s widow finally learned that some financial relief would be coming. A letter, probably from attorney John Lawrence of St. Ives, and composed on July 19, informed Elizabeth that the settlement of William Rugeley’s estate was nearly complete. Lawrence estimated that after paying Henry’s debt to Matthew, there would be about £400 sterling for Henry’s children, though £200 was currently tied up in a lawsuit. Matthew, Lawrence stated, desired that Elizabeth consult with Cantey “and other Friend[s] how the property coming to your Children can be best applied for their benefit” and inform her brother-in-law of her plans. The lawyer also stated that John Rumbald Leeds, the surviving spouse of Henry’s childless sister Elizabeth, who died in 1791, would on his death leave some £500 for Henry’s children, though Leeds “may live many years being a hearty good conditioned Man.” Finally, Lawrence noted, there was nothing left for Henry’s children in Henry’s mother’s estate.¹⁸ Elizabeth would finally get some help, but she and her husband would for the most part have to fend for themselves.

Henry Rugeley’s descendants and his creditors continued to battle over the Rugeley family’s assets well into the nineteenth century. A few surviving letters in the Rugeley Family Papers testify to the struggle. In July 1806 Susan Payne Rugeley was trying to unravel a tangle of information concerning dividends from Rowland and Henry’s partnership, the claims of Henry’s British creditors, and Rowland’s estate. James Gregory, son of Henry Rugeley’s previous lawyer and who had changed the spelling of his surname, corresponded with a London attorney in 1814 regarding the purchase of South Carolina property owned by Henry’s children, Henry’s namesake son having informed Gregory of his and his siblings’ willingness to sell some of their property if it would fetch a good price.¹⁹

Two years later the efforts of both sides continued, as Matthew’s widow Susan Payne Rugeley traveled fifty miles from Potton to London to meet with attorney James K. Douglas “to give him every information that laid in my Power” in hopes it would “bring about a change in that dilemma that ... has so enormously long & prejudiciously subsisted relative to the important & extensive American Property.” She did not exaggerate when she observed to her nephew, Henry’s son Rowland, that “incalculable have been the difficulties” in resolving those matters. Henry’s creditors, along with Susan, wished that Rowland would “immediately investigate the whole Affair” to determine how it could be resolved.²⁰ A day later, William P. Rugeley of Potton, probably Matthew’s son, informed Douglas that he had called upon William Walton, lawyer for the trustees of Henry’s creditors, who had asked for “a farther insight to the important subject of our American Affairs, which does not at this End appear practicable to obtain.” William’s mother and family in America wished to do everything they could to resolve the matter, as everyone involved had been exhausted by “the long and total stagnation towards a Settlement.”²¹

In his effort to sort out Henry’s finances, William Payne Rugeley went to London in August 1816 to meet with Walton to obtain more information on Henry’s “American Affairs.” He found that this could

17. Matthew Rugeley to Robert Henry, Nov. 10, 1798, Rugeley Papers, BA.

18. [John Lawrence?] to Elizabeth Rugeley Starke, July 19, 1799, Rugeley Papers, BA.

19. Susan Payne Rugeley to Henry Rugeley (son of Henry), July 13, 1806; Henry Rugeley to James Gregory, Apr. 23, 1814; James Gregory to William Walton, June 12, 1814.

20. Susan Payne Rugeley to Rowland Rugeley, Aug. 8, 1816, Rugeley Papers, BA.

21. William Payne Rugeley to James K. Douglas, Aug. 9, 1816, Rugeley Papers, BA.

not be done in Britain, “and the several persons interested therein, that we saw, were most uniformly of Opinion that none are so proper to investigate the whole affair ... as our relatives on the Spot” in South Carolina, he informed Douglas. James Gregory had “insinuate[d] the defferences then existing between” the United States and Britain in the wake of the War of 1812 were “the principal barrier” to settling Henry’s affairs, including ownership of property of which the Rugeleys had never “seen or even heard or having any knowledge of the deed” that Walton sent to Gregory in July 1811. William assured Douglas that “my Mother & our whole family most cordially hope that the result of their enquiries may be propitious.”²²

More than three decades of continued wrangling passed before Rugeley’s descendants received their final payment from his estate in 1848. On March 1, attorney John Lawrence sent Anna Maria Rugeley a check for £52 “for the last remittance from America,” from which he deducted 5 shillings sixpence for his commission and postage.²³ Five decades after Henry Rugeley’s death, his complicated financial dealings had finally been resolved.

22. William Payne Rugeley to J. K. Douglas, Aug. 9, 1816, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 82.

23. John Lawrence to Anna Maria Rugeley, Mar. 1, 1848, in Rugeley, ed., *RP*, 83.

Conclusion

Helen Hoskins Rugeley observed that “some might say that Henry was an opportunist, but he certainly was not venal. He would not deliberately harm others to further his own interests. He was diplomatic enough to maintain civil relations both with his Patriot neighbors and with British officers.” As proof, she cited the incident in May 1780 when, immediately after the fall of Charleston, Governor Rutledge and some of his council who had escaped the city before the surrender had appeared uninvited at Clermont seeking shelter. Rugeley permitted them to stay, and when he learned the next morning that Tarleton was nearing Camden, he roused his guests, warned them, and enabled them to escape to Charlotte. He did this despite Rutledge and his council having ordered the destruction of two of his houses outside the lines of Charleston a year earlier.¹

During the bloody civil war that characterized the American Revolution in South Carolina, Henry Rugeley was one of the few people who managed to choose a side without alienating those who held opposing views. He deftly balanced his loyalty to Great Britain with his attachment to friends and neighbors, regardless of their political opinions. Had others matched his pragmatism and followed his example in allowing it to temper his attitudes toward both sides, the conflict in South Carolina might have been far less bloody and destructive. Yet, skilled as he was at navigating troubled political waters, Rugeley was far less competent when it came to his primary interest, business. If his careful loyalism enabled him to emerge from the war with his person, relationships, and reputation largely unscathed, his poor business practices plunged him into a whirlpool of debt from which he could never completely extricate himself, and which plagued him until his death.

1. Rugeley, *Rugeleys in America*, 52.

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I told her I was definitely interested, and about a year later, with the help of a relative because she was ill, Ms. Rugeley sent me photocopies of a large number of letters her family had procured from the Bedfordshire Archives in the United Kingdom. She had published some of them in her collection of Rugeley Papers, transcribed others but not published them, and still others remained untouched. Much of the material was not in order; many letters that consisted of multiple pages were not even together, so as I had other projects to work on, I put the material aside intending to organize it later. However, it seemed something else always arose to prevent my returning to those documents. Teaching, conference presentations, invitations to write on other subjects, all combined to push Rugeley farther into the background. I take responsibility for the delays, and am grateful to Ms. Rugeley and her family for making this valuable trove of documents available to me.

When the South Carolina state government established a commission in 2019 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, my longtime friend and newly-appointed chair Charles B. Baxley met with me to discuss contributions I could make. We reviewed a list of projects he hoped I could do and I in turn mentioned several ideas that I had. One of these was a study of Henry Rugeley.

Charles immediately embraced the idea and assigned me that task, along with several others, so that poor Henry was again neglected for several years. Now, however, I have finally completed the work. I am thankful to Charles for his support of the project, and regret that he did not live to see it finished.

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