



# McIntyre Site Report



**I. Statement of Purpose:** It is the purpose of this report to set forth the reasons why the McIntyre Site Committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission believes that the McIntyre Site, located to the northwest of Charlotte, NC, at the intersection of Beatties Ford Road and McIntyre Avenue, is worthy to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. First, the report will describe the historic significance of the site. Second, it will explain the committee's understanding of the National Register of Historic Places. Third, it will measure the site against the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Hopefully, this report will persuade the State Historic Preservation Officer to nominate the McIntyre Site for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

## II. Historic Significance of the McIntyre Site:

The historic significance of the McIntyre Site to Charlotte and Mecklenburg County has long been recognized. Indeed, *The Charlotte Daily Observer* of February 22, 1908, included it in a list of historic places. Further documenting the longevity of its recognition is the fact that two markers were erected on the site in the first decade of this century. The justification most commonly used for singling out the McIntyre Site is its association with the Revolutionary War skirmish, locally known as the "Battle of the Hornets' Nest" or "Battle of the Bees." On October 3, 1780 (according to some sources the skirmish occurred on October 5, 1780), elements of Lord Cornwallis's army, having occupied Charlotte on September 26, encountered a small detachment

of American militiamen on and in the vicinity of the McIntyre Site. Although not a major engagement, the skirmish between some 14 Scotch-Irish settlers and approximately 300 foraging Red Coats takes on wider significance in light of assessments advanced by Samuel Eliot Morison in his widely-acclaimed *The Oxford History of the American People*. Professor Morison contends that the ultimate defeat of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown and, therefore, the victory of the United States of America in the Revolutionary War were the result of "two unexpected factors." "The Carolina Loyalists," he writes, "were neither numerous nor strong enough to counteract the local Patriots, and the French navy intervened at a crucial point." Clearly, the McIntyre Site, the only relatively undisturbed battleground of the Revolutionary Era in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, possesses local historic significance.

McIntyre Site also contains the foundation of the log house which John McIntyre built soon after he purchased the property in 1769. Unfortunately, the house was destroyed in the early 1940's. However, Mr. Stuart Schwartz, who has had academic training in historic archeology, asserts that the site promises to yield significant archeological data. Also noteworthy is the fact the McIntyre Cabin was recorded by the *Historic American Building Survey* in the 1930's, thereby providing measured drawings which allow an authentic reconstruction to occur as soon as funds are available. That the McIntyre Cabin was regarded as an architecturally significant is certain. For example, it received substantial attention in the widely acclaimed book co-authored by F. B. Johnson and T. T. Waterman, *The Early Architecture of North Carolina*. On balance, the evidence suggests that the McIntyre Site possesses local historic significance, both because it promises to yield significant archeological data from an 18th century Mecklenburg farm and because it contains the foundation of an architecturally important structure which could be easily reconstructed.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century the McIntyre Site served as the location of the Hipp Gold Mine. The first record of gold in the area was the discovery of a large nugget in 1790 in what is now Cabarrus County. Conrad Reed's young son, while fishing, saw it shining in a creek on his father's farm and took it home. Not knowing what it was, the family used it as a doorstep for several years. In 1825 Samuel McComb made the first successful attempt to follow a vein of gold, located on his farm just to the south of Charlotte. Soon thereafter prospectors poured into the Piedmont, thereby creating the first gold rush in the United States. Small mines, consisting of surface trenches on hillsides above streams, dotted the landscape. Stuart Schwartz has confirmed that the McIntyre Site contains many of the trenches of the Hipp Gold Mine. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that archeological data associated with nineteenth-century gold mining operations is present on the property. This information underscores the local historic significance of the McIntyre Site.

That the people of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County consider the McIntyre Site to be historically significant is certain. Attached are several newspaper articles and other printed materials which document this fact. Perhaps the most convincing evidence, however, was provided by the development of the McIntyre Historic Site as a Bicentennial Project. Funding for this undertaking was secured from several sources: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Bicentennial Commission, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, Mecklenburg County, Junior Woman's Club of Charlotte, and the North Carolina American Revolution Bicentennial Committee. The official opening of the park on October 5, 1976 (see attached program), was an

official Bicentennial Activity (#021438) and was recorded on the Bicentennial Information Network -- BINET.

The McIntyre Historic Site is an educational complex which consists of a pathway, along which one encounters signs that interpret the history of the site and of the larger context within which the site has evolved (see photographs 1, 2, 3, and 4). The initial theme centers around the Revolutionary skirmish and its place within Cornwallis's Southern Campaign. Highlights include the remains of the cabin (photograph 5), an explanation of the skirmish (photograph 6), and a description of Cornwallis's Campaign from Charleston to Yorktown (photographs 7 and 8). The visitor then encounters a series of signs which interpret gold mining in the Piedmont (photographs 9 and 10). Adding to the effectiveness of the signs is the fact that they are placed beside and among the mining trenches (photographs 11 and 12).

**III. Committee's Understanding of the National Register of Historic Places:** The committee understands that the National Register of Historic Places, created by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, represents an expansion of the Federal government's concern for properties of historic significance to include those of State, regional, and local significance. Furthermore, the Committee views the National Register as a planning device, whereby the Federal government takes into account the impact of Federally licensed and Federally funded programs upon properties of State, regional, and local historic significance. Finally, the Committee believes that the National Register is not intended to be exclusively a list of buildings or structures.

**IV. Measurement of the McIntyre Site against the Criteria of the National Register of Historic Places:** The Committee believes that the evidence presented in Section II of this report demonstrates that the McIntyre Site is historically significant to Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Consequently, the Committee believes that the McIntyre Site qualifies for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

### *Historical Overview*

For a full understanding of the skirmish at McIntyre's Farm some contextual information might be useful. On August 16, 1780 the British army commanded by Lord Charles Cornwallis routed an American Army under the command of Horatio Gates at the Battle of Camden in South Carolina. For all practical purposes the American Army ceased to exist in the South. Gates retired to Hillsborough, North Carolina, where he began the arduous task of rebuilding. This left Cornwallis in nominal control of South Carolina. To the considerable surprise of Cornwallis, that control was contested by bands of partisan irregulars, including those commanded by the famous South Carolina triumvirate of Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, and Andrew Pickens. Although not strong enough to take on the main British army, these irregulars interrupted

communications, ambushed supply trains, picked off stranglers, and harassed Loyalists. Patriots in North Carolina were likewise mobilized into action. On September 8 a group under the command of William R. Davie, later governor of North Carolina, surprised the British at Wahab's Plantation, just south of the border, in a hit and run raid that resulted in numerous British Casualties.

Despite this constant harassment Cornwallis decided to move into North Carolina. His first stop would be Charlotte, then a small community which was attractive to the British primarily because of its relatively large number of mills. From Charlotte he would go to Salisbury, Salem, and Guilford Courthouse, before finishing at Hillsborough, which he had been led to believe was a hotbed of Loyalism. His advance through the state would embolden North Carolina Loyalists, who would fly to the King's standard. Not only would this campaign secure North Carolina, but it would also overawe the by now isolated South Carolina rebels, ending resistance in that state. Cornwallis would then advance into Virginia and win the war for the King. For this plan to work it was essential for Cornwallis to keep his west flank secure, for he feared the hostile mountain and transmontane men of the west. To that end he sent a large force of Loyalist militia under the command of Patrick Ferguson to the foothills of the Carolina mountains. Ferguson's job was to protect Cornwallis' left flank and raise Loyalist militia. He was not to seek a general engagement.

Cornwallis moved into Charlotte on September 26 (some accounts say the 27th, even the 28th). A militia contingent under the command of Davie fought a vigorous rearguard action in the streets of the village before being forced to retire. Although Cornwallis knew the area was not completely loyal he had every expectation that his presence would intimidate opponents while attracting supporters. He overestimated both Loyalist numbers and initiative, a common British mistake during the war. We have plenty of contemporary evidence that the British found Charlotte most inhospitable. On October 3 Cornwallis wrote a correspondent that "Charlotte is an agreeable village but in a damned rebellious country." His subordinate, the controversial Banastre (Bloody) Tarleton, recalled the next year: "The town and environs abounded with inveterate enemies. . . . It was evident, and it had been frequently mentioned to the King's Officers, that the counties of Mecklenburg and Rowan were more hostile to England than any others in America. The vigilance and animosity of the surrounding districts checked the exertions of the well affected and totally destroyed all communication between the King's troops and the loyalists in the other parts of the province." Charles Stedman, a British historian who served with Cornwallis as a surgeon and wrote a detailed history of the southern campaign, said of the Mecklenburgers: "So inveterate was their rancour that the messengers with expresses for the commander in chief were frequently murdered, and the inhabitants, instead of remaining quietly at home to receive payment for the produce of their plantations, made it a practice to way-lay the British foraging parties, fire their rifles from concealed places, and then fly into the woods." Patriot Davie concurred with this assessment: ". . . no party of the enemy ventured out without being attacked, and often retired with considerable loss; the people of the neighboring country were strongly attached to the American cause, and gave his Lordship no assistance, and all information was cut off by the vigilance and activity of the militia cavalry." <sup>1</sup>

The point of all this that the skirmish at McIntyre's Farm was not an isolated incident. Tarleton, Stedman, and Davie all agree that during Cornwallis' stay in Charlotte, the British were subject

to attack in the countryside virtually every time they showed themselves outside the village.

Unfortunately, none of these men discuss the particular skirmish in question. The one contemporary account I have been able to find comes from a newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Packet* of January 9, 1781: "Captains Thompson and Knox, with fourteen men, attacked above 300 of a foraging party, who were entering Mr. Bradley's plantation (eight miles from Charlotte) with near 60 waggons [sic], and drove them back with such precipitation that, as I am well informed, many of their horses fell dead in the streets on their return." <sup>2</sup> General William Davidson, overall militia commander in the area, made a brief reference to the action in a letter to Jethro Sumner but gave no particulars. <sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, later accounts of the skirmish disagree in virtually every detail, including whether the fight took place at McIntyre's (or McIntire's) Farm or Bradley's Farm. Most accounts date the skirmish on October 3 but some say October 4. An 1820 letter from Joseph Graham, a Revolutionary War officer, places the engagement on October 3 and that seems to be the accepted date. <sup>4</sup> One lengthy mid-nineteenth century account comes from the pen of the Reverend William Henry Foote. It appears that his account has served as the basis for later tellings of the story. Inasmuch as some of Foote's information may have come from contemporaries and inasmuch as this is apparently the most detailed account of the skirmish, I will quote it in full, rather than attempt to condense.

The repulse at McIntire's is a good illustration of what Tarleton says in these quotations. The commander in Charlotte having heard of the abundant supply of grain and fodder that might be obtained from the rebel neighborhood, some seven miles from Charlotte, on the road to Beattie's Ford, sends out a force sufficient, as was supposed to overawe the neighborhood, accompanied with a sufficient train of baggage wagons to bring in the necessary supplies. A lad, who was ploughing a field by the road side, upon seeing the advance of the soldiers, leaves his plough, mounts his horse and gallops through bye-paths to give notice to the inhabitants that a foraging party was out. They, of course, fled and spread the alarm, riding away their horses, and hiding or removing their most valuable effects.

The family at Mr. McIntire's had just time to escape; the men in the fields armed themselves and took to the woods; and the women and servants rode off towards the residences of neighbors, whose houses were supposed to be out of the track of this armed force; the house and all the property were left to the mercy of the foragers. The neighboring men, conjecturing the object of the party, rallied around McIntire's farm, according to the rules which had been voluntarily adopted, that neighbors would help each other; and about a dozen of them, armed with rifles and divided into companies of two, lay concealed in the woods in sight of the house, not far from each other.

While lying there, they witnessed the advance of the British,-- saw them pause on the brow of the hill near the branch and reconnoitre, and then slowly advance to the house. The dragoons dismounted and fastened their horses, and the work of plunder began. Harnessing some of their horses to the farm wagons they began to load them forage; and when the baggage wagons arrived they proceeded to load them with corn and oats. While this was doing the soldiers were

running down and catching the poultry in the yard and killing pigs and calves. By accident, some of them overset the beehives ranged by the garden fence, and the enraged insects fell in fury upon the soldiery. The scene became one of uproar and boisterous merriment. The commander of the forces, a portly florid Englishman, stood in the door with one hand on each post, enjoying the scene of the plunder, and laughing at the antics of the soldiers discomforted by the bees.

The owner and his neighbors had approached within rifle shot of the house, under cover of the woods, and were exasperated witnesses of the merry plunder of the foragers. At length one of them cried out - "Boys, I can't stand this - I take the captain. Every one choose his man and look to yourselves." Quick as his word, the sharp crack of a rifle was heard; and the captain fell from the doorway. The rifles of the other eleven answered in quick succession; and nine men and two horses lay on the ground.

The trumpet sounded a recall; and the dragoons hastened to form a line. The assailants shifted their position, and from another direction, from a skirt of woods, poured in another straggling fire, with fatal accuracy. The dragoons began a pursuit, and set on the dogs; but soon a fire from another direction alarmed them, lest they were surrounded. The dogs came on the trail of these retreating men, and the leading one sprung upon the heels of a man who had just discharged his rifle. A pistol-shot laid him dead; and the other dogs, coming up to him, paused, gave a howl, and returned. The alarm became general, and the troops hastened their retreat, attempting to carry off the loaded wagons. But the more distant neighbors had now rallied and the woods echoed on all sides with rifles and guns of concealed enemies. The leading horses of the wagons were some of them shot down before they ascended the hill by the branch, and the road was blocked up; and the retreat became a scene of confusion in spite of the discipline of the British soldiers, who drew up in battle array and offered to fight the invisible enemy that only changed their ground and renewed their fire. In full belief that they were assailed by a numerous foe, and disappointed of their foilage, they returned to camp -- swearing that every bush on the road concealed a rebel.<sup>5</sup>

Foote's account contains most of the elements that appear in later renditions of the fight. Since Foote is not footnoted it is not clear where he obtained his information. It is possible that an earlier account, besides those already mentioned, exists but I have been unable to come across one. Considering that the Foote account was written in 1846 it was most likely written, at least in part, from some first hand oral traditions. A point of interest is that Foote has the patriots firing from the woods, with no mention of mounds. Other accounts of the skirmish consistently place the attackers in the woods. It is also interesting that Foote does not specifically discuss the number of combatants involved in the skirmish, although a careful reading indicates that well over a dozen patriots were engaged near the end of the encounter. Foote does, however, mention the tombstone of George Graham (d. 1826), which reads in part "one of the Gallant Twelve who dared attack and actually drove 400 British troops at McIntire's." This is only one of several estimates of the relative size of the forces. The 1820 letter by Joseph Graham claims 450 British infantry, 60 cavalry, and 40 wagons, opposed by 14 locals. The most extreme estimate was made in 1853 by his son, then former governor William A. Graham, who has 400 British troops attacked by only 7 patriots. In his 1903 history of Mecklenburg County, D. A. Tompkins has militia Captains James Thompson and George Graham, in command of 12 men, attacking a force of 450 foragers under the command of Major Doyle. Tompkins also has the patriots

following the British through the woods for miles in order to set up an ambush. A completely different interpretation of events comes from Samuel Ashe, who wrote that Cornwallis dispatched for foraging detail a contingent of 450 infantry, 60 cavalry, and 40 wagons under the command of Major Doyle. (This agrees with Joseph Graham.) However, according to Ashe, when the party reached McIntyre's farm, Major Doyle left 100 men and 10 wagons at the farm, while taking the remainder of the party further down the road towards Long Creek. Ashe gives the number of patriot attackers as 14 men, who left 8 British dead and 12 wounded. The entire force, including Doyle's contingent, then returns to Charlotte with only 4 wagons loaded with provisions. The 20 casualties (killed and wounded) agrees with the total arrived at by Joseph Graham and by Howard Peckham in his authoritative *The Toll of Independence*.<sup>6</sup> Nothing that I have read on the skirmish, by the way, has any mention of American casualties.

Regardless of the number of combatants, all accounts agree that a large number of British foragers were attacked by a much smaller group of patriots and driven back to Charlotte in some disorder. On October 7 Ferguson's forces were surrounded and slaughtered at the Battle of Kings Mountain. When Cornwallis heard the doleful news he made immediate plans to withdraw back to South Carolina. There is little question that Cornwallis' withdrawal was a direct response to the exposure of his left flank and the sudden vulnerability of his South Carolina bases. In Stedman's words, Ferguson's defeat "put a stop, for the present, to the farther progress of the commander in chief, and obliged him to fall back into South Carolina, for protection of its western borders against the incursions of a horde of mountainers, whose appearance was as unexpected as their success was fatal to the protections of the intended expedition." In other words, the hostility of the citizens of Mecklenburg County towards his lordship was not a primary factor in this withdrawal. It should also be kept in mind that Stedman maintained that while in Charlotte the British army "was sufficiently supplied with provisions, notwithstanding the hostile disposition of the inhabitants."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps more important than the persistent attacks against British foragers was the constant interruption of Cornwallis' communications. This was particularly the case with Ferguson's important force, which sent several unreceived requests for aid to Cornwallis. The poor communication between Cornwallis and Ferguson was almost certainly a contributing factor in the later's crushing defeat.

The historiography of the skirmish is interesting. With the exception of the one line in Peckham already mentioned, the accounts of the fight were written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Outside of Charlotte the Skirmish has been largely forgotten. None of the recent standard histories of the Revolutionary War, even those devoted exclusively to North Carolina, mention the fight specifically, although most discuss Cornwallis' difficult situation in Charlotte in more general terms. The site has apparently never been proposed or considered for a North Carolina Historical Highway Marker. In 1961 author and local historian LeGette Blythe bemoaned the neglect of the site: "Now the site is a tangled, densely overgrown spot known to hardly any of the thousands who stream by it daily over the asphalt highway that has succeeded the narrow clay road of Revolutionary days."<sup>8</sup> Thus the attention shown in Charlotte towards the site in recent years is a reversal of a long trend of scholarly and physical neglect.

None of this is to suggest that the fight or the site are unimportant. Clearly the skirmish as McIntyre's Farm has strong local significance. The hostility of Mecklenburg County's populace towards Cornwallis and the British is well documented and has long been a source of pride to

Charlotteans. In more general terms the failure of the British to attract and utilize Loyalists elements has been cited as a contributing cause in their defeat by virtually every historian of the Revolution. During their two plus weeks in Charlotte (they left on October 14) and the difficult withdrawal back to South Carolina, the British faced unremitting and implacable opposition to their cause at virtually every step. McIntyre's Farm is highly symbolic of that opposition.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Walter Clark (ed.), *State Records of North Carolina* (Winston, Goldsboro, and Charlotte, 1895-1905), 15:172; Banastre Tarleton, *Campaigns of 1780-1781 in Southern America* (London, 1781), 160; Charles Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War* (London, 1794), II, 216; Blackwell Robinson (ed.), *The Revolutionary War Sketches of William R. Davie* (Raleigh, 1976), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Charles Davidson, *Piedmont Partisan: The Life and Times of Brigadier-General William Lee Davidson* (Davidson, NC 1951).

<sup>3</sup> Davidson, *Piedmont Partisan*, 80.

<sup>4</sup> Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 19:990.

<sup>5</sup> William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina: Historical and Biographical* (New York, 1846), 506-508.

<sup>6</sup> Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina*, 508; Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 19:990; William A. Graham, "British Invasion of North Carolina, in 1780, and 1781," in *Revolutionary History of North Carolina*, compiled by William D. Cooke, (New York, 1853), 168; Daniel A. Tompkins, *History of Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte*, (Charlotte, 1903), I, 62-63; Howard Peckham, *The Toll of Independence* (Chicago and London, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> Stedman, *History*, 218, 216.

<sup>8</sup> Legette Blythe and Charles Raven Brockman, *Hornets' Nest: The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte, 1961), 87.