The Battle of Brier Creek

The Battle of Brier Creek was the pivotal encounter which decided the fate of Georgia for three years in the American Revolution. The disparity in preparedness, military training, and intelligence about the enemy's movements gave a superior advantage to the King's army. The British skillful battle maneuver encircling the Patriots, successful decoy and surprise charge into the Patriots camp ensured the British victory. The total rout of the Patriots re-established Georgia as a Royal Colony—the only one of the Thirteen American Colonies to do so --- until the British were forced to evacuate in 1782.

Col. Samuel Elbert, commanding Georgia Continentals and Georgia Militia, made one of the most gallant stands against overwhelming odds during the Revolutionary War. After Patriot Gen. Ashe's militia had been routed, Elbert, with his back to Brier Creek and surrounded on the other sides, attempted to fight his way through the British lines. It was only after British reserves intervened that he surrendered the remnants of his courageous command. Of the 150 Americans killed in the Battle of Brier Creek more than half were Elbert's men. His life was spared but he was captured and imprisoned for two years. When exchanged, he took part in the Battle of Yorktown where he was promoted to General. After the Revolutionary War in 1785, Samuel Elbert was elected Governor of Georgia.

The Battle of Brier Creek Historical Marker is located off Brannen Bridges Road in the Tuckahoe Wildlife Management Area, in Screven County, Georgia.

American Revolution in Georgia

1. Elbert County — Fight at Van(n)'s Creek
   GPS: N34.162 W82.744

2. Wilkes County — Battle of Kettle Creek
   GPS: N33.691 W82.886

3. Lincoln County — Elijah Clarke & John Dooly: Heroes of the Hornet’s Nest
   GPS: N33.856 W82.410

4. Augusta — Sieges of Augusta and Revolutionary Capital of Georgia
   GPS: N33.476 W81.964

5. Screven County — Battle of Brier Creek
   GPS: N32.811 W81.466

6. Savannah — Battles of Savannah, Royal & Revolutionary Capital of Georgia
   GPS: N32.076 W81.100

7. Liberty County — Sunbury, Fort Morris & Midway
   GPS: N31.764 W81.279

8. St. Simons Island — Frederica Naval Action
   GPS: N31.224 W81.393

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Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution

Design — Ed Fluker, GASSAR

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Annual Celebration of Battle of Brier Creek
Saturday prior to March 3rd
“Battle Site” Screven County, GA
GPS: N32.811 W81.466

March 3, 1779

Brier Creek was the pivotal encounter which re-established Georgia as a Royal Colony.
The New Bern N.C. Militia was to the left against Brier Creek with Col. Samuel Elbert and his Continentals in the center and the Edenton N.C. Militia to the right. Seventy yards behind were the Halifax and Wilmington N.C. Militia. Facing the Patriots were Sir James Baird's Light Infantry on the left, Prevost's 2nd Battalion 71st Highland Regiment in the center, and Carolina Loyalists to the right. The Florida Grenadiers, Light Dragoons and Rangers were in the rear.

The British opened with artillery fire into the Patriots’ center. As Prevost ordered Elbert forward and to the left within thirty yards of the Highlanders, but this movement cut off many in the New Bern Militia. The Edenton Militia advanced, but with the threat of being flanked, opened a gap in the center. The Highlanders surged into the gap with a bayonet charge, and the Patriot militia began to break and run in a disorderly retreat. Almost alone, Elbert's men stood and fought, pressed against Brier Creek. So fiercely did these Georgians fight, the British had to bring up reserves that quickly overwhelmed Elbert's men. Elbert was knocked to the ground by a Highlander for dispatch by bayonet, but was saved by a British officer after making the Masonic sign of distress.

Ashe pursued his retreating troops on horseback in an attempt to rally them, but to no avail, and escaped at Matthew's Bluff with many others. The total dead on the Patriot side were at least 150 with over 200 captured, including Col. Elbert and Lt. Col John McIntosh. An unknown number were drowned attempting to cross the river. Col. John Dooly and his Wilkes County Militia arrived on March 4, and buried the Patriot dead most likely in a mass grave. The British only lost five men with eleven wounded.

Following the Battle, Lt. Col. Prevost was made acting Royal Governor of Georgia until Sir James Wright's return to Savannah. Patriot Gen. Ashe was acquitted at court martial but was censured for his failure to prepare his soldiers against attack.

Prepared by Rabun A. (Alex) Lee, Mill Creek Chapter, and edited by Bill Ramsaur, Marshes of Glynn Chapter, Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution,