Marking the Kettle Creek Battleground

In 1900, shortly after the Washington Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution was chartered, members purchased twelve and one-half acres, including War Hill where the Battle of Kettle Creek occurred. The United States War Department appropriated funds to create a Monument which was unveiled on June 6, 1930, with a program that elicited national recognition.

In Hearst's Sunday American, a review of the monument dedication reported, "The historical old town of Washington Wilkes has renewed its interest in the events and traditions which have surrounded it since Colonial days. It has become again a matter of real pride that there was one spot in Georgia utterly unconquerable in the days of 1776… ."

Mrs. Cornelia Fluker Jackson, secretary for the Kettle Creek Chapter of the D.A.R., Washington, Georgia is pictured at the newly unveiled Kettle Creek Battleground marker on June 6th 1930. Mrs. Jackson's great, great Grandfather Owen Fluker fought in the Battle of Kettle Creek.

After the 200th Anniversary Celebration in 1979, Kettle Creek DAR conveyed the Battleground to Wilkes County. Since 1998, the Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution have sponsored a Battleground Memorial Ceremony with Continental Soldiers and Militia, Battle Flags, Musket Salutes and Wreath Presentations, along with Battleground Tours and Battle Portrayal. Several Washington- Wilkes organizations participate in the Parade and Living History demonstrations held annually in the historic Washington Town Square, during the second weekend in February in a celebration called "Revolutionary Days."

Annual Celebration of Battle of Kettle Creek
"Revolutionary Days"
2nd Weekend in February
Washington, Wilkes County, GA
GPS: N33.691 W82.886

Georgia's Revolutionary War Trail

MAP OF GEORGIA. 1778

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
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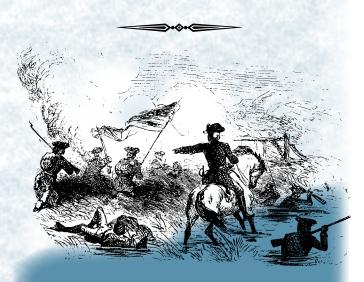
Georgia's Revolutionary War Trail
1775 1783

"Discovering Our Heritage and History"

Battle of Kettle Creek

February 14, 1779

"Kettle Creek was the severest check and chastisement the Tories ever received in South Carolina or Georgia."
— Colonel Andrew Pickens

Kettle Creek Battleground Wilkes County, Georgia, ten miles from Washington off SR 44

Battle of Kettle Creek

❧ February 14, 1779 ❧

In early 1779, Georgia was under British control, except for Wilkes County which the British called the "Hornet's Nest." Encouraged by the capture of Savannah, British Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell ordered Loyalist Col. (James or John) Boyd to raise a large force in the Carolinas, and then with Major John Hamilton rally additional Loyalists in Wilkes County. As Boyd crossed South Carolina, his ranks swelled to over 700 Loyalist militia.

It was early in February, when Col. Andrew Pickens with about 200 South Carolina militia and Col. John Dooly and Lt. Col. Elijah Clarke with about 160 Wilkes County Georgia Militia joined forces to pursue Hamilton. They caught up with him at Carr's Fort in Wilkes County, but as the siege continued, Pickens learned of Boyd's movements. Considering Boyd more important than Hamilton, Pickens led the Patriots back into South Carolina.

After his recruiting efforts, Boyd attempted to cross the Savannah River at Cherokee Ford, but Patriot Capt. Robert Anderson manned a small fortification and thwarted Boyd's approach. Boyd moved upstream and on February 11, was able to cross at Van(n)'s Creek, although opposition by Patriot militia weakened his forces by about 100 men. Crossing the Broad River on February 13, Boyd camped that night not far from present-day Washington. Mid-morning on Sunday, February 14, Boyd halted his troops for breakfast beside a flooded stream, called Kettle Creek -- less than a mile from Carr's Fort. The horses were turned out to graze and men were slaughtering stolen cattle in a flat area between a steep hill and Kettle Creek.

Following Boyd, Pickens had re-crossed the Savannah, and circled back into Wilkes County. Outnumbered more than two to one, Pickens attacked with his men in the center, Dooly on his right, and Clarke on the left. Boyd's pickets on the hill fired on the Patriot advance guard led by Capt. James McCall, and gave alarm to the surprised Loyalists below.

Clarke and Dooly became bogged down in swampy land on both flanks and provided limited support for Pickens' attack. Boyd directed Maj. William Spurgen to move most of the Loyalists across the swollen creek, and then Boyd personally led about 100 men up the hill to hold off Pickens. When three shots tore into Boyd, he fell mortally wounded; his troops panicked and fled toward the creek.

Spurgen crossed the creek and regrouped the Loyalists where fighting became very intense for over an hour. Clarke, freed from the swamp, was able to enter the fight with Spurgen during which Clarke's horse was shot; but quickly mounted another.

The Loyalists were routed with a loss of 70 killed or wounded, and 150 captured. Boyd died on the battlefield a few hours later. The Patriots reported 9 killed and 23 wounded or missing. Several Loyalist prisoners were later convicted of treason and five hanged, but the rest were pardoned. Spurgen was able to escape with about 270 men and rejoin Lt. Col. Campbell, the remainder probably returned to their homes.

Although the Battle of Kettle Creek was small in terms of terrain and the number involved, it was one of Georgia's most memorable victories during the American Revolution. More importantly, it demonstrated considerable flaws in the British Southern Strategy and helped suppress further rallying of Loyalists in the South at a crucial time in the War.

More Fighting in the Hornet's Nest

About a year after the Battle of Kettle Creek on January 23, 1780, the Georgia Commons House of Assembly passed an act declaring the "Town at the Court house in Wilkes County which shall be called Washington." During 1780 and 1781, Heard's Fort near Washington became the temporary Revolutionary Capital when Stephen Heard served as Governor.

After the British occupied Augusta in June 1780, they frequently sent raiders into Wilkes County where Patriots' homes were burned and many held prisoner while their relatives were away fighting. One band of Loyalists brutally murdered John Dooly in his home; and Stephen Heard's wife and child died from exposure in a snowstorm after their cabin was burned. Elijah Clarke had to lead seven hundred men, women and children with limited rations over two hundred miles into the Carolina mountains for refuge.

In September 1780, Elijah Clarke was forced to leave behind many wounded when he ended the Siege of Augusta. Thirteen were hanged by the Loyalists, but this was considered merciful when compared with the fate of others turned over to the Indians. Twenty-one were held in irons in Augusta for several months

In May1781, the Wilkes County Militia assembled for the last time and helped drive the British from Augusta. One year later the British evacuated Savannah and in September 1783, The Treaty of Paris was signed, ending the War for American Independence.