

CHRISTOPHER KIRBY
A Soldier at the Battle of Kings Mountain
[For additional information see The Greene County Pioneer, Volume 9 Number 1]

Christopher, or Kit, Kirby, born in Halifax Co., Virginia on September 10, 1760, was a son of Henry Kirby. Christopher's mother, it is said, without supporting evidence, to have been a lady of Huguenot ancestry, Ann Witt. Christopher had at least three brothers: Philip was born in 1763, and married Jeriah Potter. Josiah was born 1766. Joseph was born in 1770. Their surname is also spelled Kerby, Kerbie or Curby in old documents.

Henry Kirby was a son of John Kirby (c 1714-) and Joanna Owen (1710-1772). Henry died in 1803 in Rutherford Co., TN, leaving Ann as his administrator.

Bartholomew Owen (c 1630-1677), the grandfather of Joanna Owen Kirby, had emigrated to Surry Co. Virginia after the capitulation of the royalist governments of Maryland and Virginia to Cromwell's Protectorate in 1652, but before the restoration of Charles II in 1660. Bartholomew was a warden in Southwarke Parish in 1661 but he is said to have supported the Old Parliamentary Party. Philip Alexander Bruce, in "Social Life in Old Virginia," page 32, speculates that Bartholomew may have been a Quaker because he was cited in 1675 by the Surry Co. grand jury for non-attendance at church. A Thomas Owen, from Lower Norfolk Co, had been arraigned by the General Court in 1662 for subversive activities as a Quaker. Bartholomew is said, also without supporting evidence to be related to the London gun founder, Robert Owen.

Christopher's father and grandfather, Henry and John Kirby had belonged to the South River Monthly Meeting of Friends in Virginia. The weekly gathering of Halifax Co. Quakers was called either the Dan River or Kirby's Particular Meeting.

In the hierarchical society of 18th century Virginia, the Quakers were subversive. Their silent meetings generally in homes, contrasted with elaborate Anglican vestments and liturgy. Their plain speech and simple dress made no distinctions of class or "quality." Because their word could be trusted, the Quakers were widely respected. Their dealings with Indians were as scrupulous as with other Europeans. Many refused to keep slave. Quakers held that two essential tenants of Christianity were (1) service to one's fellow man, which precluded all violence, and (2) rigid obedience to the "inner light" of one's own conscience, regardless of worldly advantage.

In 1768, Christopher's grandparents were disowned by the South River Meeting for worshipping with Baptists.

During the American Revolution, Quakers had to choose between breaking their vow of non-violence or losing the trust and respect of their neighbors. Many changed denominations and fought. During the Revolution, Christopher Kirby served in several companies drawn from Wilkes and Surry Counties in North Carolina.

In 1776, Lt. William Lenoir and Benjamin Cleveland served in a mixed force of 5300 men from South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia, which attacked the Catawba Cherokee village. After the battle of Kings Mountain, Lt. Lenoir wrote memoirs of his Revolutionary experience, which I have not read. His career must have arrayed that of many serving from the same area. Lenoir was born in Virginia in 1751 and settled on Fishing Creek, 4 miles east of present-day Wilkesboro, NC, after 1771. At that time, the only church within 40 miles was at Mulberry Fields, now called Wilkesboro. Baptists built the church, but allowed other Christian congregations to use it. I do not know if church records are extant. This may be the church in which Christopher was married. I do not know the religious affiliation of his wife.

In July 1779, Christopher enlisted in the Surry Co., NC militia at the Old Store near the Yadkin River. For two months he served as a Private before he was commissioned as an Ensign in the light horse Dragoon Company of Captain William Underwood. He served four months as Ensign under Captain Underwood. The regiment was commanded by Colonel Martin Armstrong and Joseph Williams, who signed Christopher's first commission as Ensign. / The regiment pursued a part of North Carolina Tories who terrorized Henry, Patrick, Wythe and Washington counties in Virginia. Christopher's company was discharged in December 1779, at Capt. Garland's home, near Flower Gap, Virginia.

Lyman Draper described the Revolutionary Militia in his book, "King's Mountain and its Heroes": "Mostly armed with the Deckard Rifle. . . . They were little encumbered with baggage—each with a blanket, a cup by his side . . . and a wallet of provisions, the latter principally of parched corn meal, (which) mixed.....with maple syrup, (made) a very agreeable repast . . . an occasional skillet was taken along for a mess, in which to warm up in water their parched meal, and cook such wild or other meat as fortune would throw in their way." Draper notes that "The Deckard or Dickert rifle was largely manufactured at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It was, for the period, a gun of remarkable precision for a long shot, spiral grooved, with a barrel some thirty inches long, and, with its stock, some three and a half or four feet."

In July 1780, Christopher re-enlisted in the "United States Army" at the Surry Co., NC Courthouse. Later he stated that he had no recollection of any regular officers being with the troops where he served, but that General Green and his staff were briefly with them in Guilford, NC. Christopher served for a month as a Private in horse dragoon company of Capt. James Shepherd. Shepherd's company proceeded to Freeman's house on the Yadkin River, where they joined the companies commanded by Joseph Phillips and Minor Smith. The 3 companies were then placed under the command of Major Joseph Winston, and proceeded to the Wilkes Co. Courthouse. There they joined Colonel Benjamin Cleveland's regiment of North Carolina Militia Volunteers. The combined force totaled about 800 men, but on a given day perhaps 350 men were present and able to fight according to Lyman Draper, who cites General Joseph Graham's account of those present at the battle of King's Mountain (p 547)

In August 1780, Christopher was appointed to replace Wm. Hewlett as Ensign of Capt. Shepherd's company at the Wilkes Co. Courthouse and he served another two and a half months as Ensign. Christopher later stated that Colonel Cleveland signed this second commission. Colonel Cleveland's regiment then moved to the Catawba River to join the regiments of Colonels Isaac Shelby, John Sevier and William Campbell. The four regiments then proceeded to Cowpens, a South Carolina village which got its name from the cow pens of a wealthy Tory named Saunders. There they were joined by a small force of South Carolina volunteers under Colonel James Williams.

1780, October 7: Christopher served as ensign in Captain Shepherd's company at the time of the battle at King's Mountain, North Carolina, in which backwoods hunters defeated Major Ferguson's professional British soldiers. This was a major turning point in the Revolutionary War. Christopher may not have been at the scene of the battle, however. A group of foot soldiers under Major Joseph Herndon, of Wilkes Co., NC, had been left behind on October 4 to bear the Green River to obtain beef for the army, which traveled on as lightly and quickly as possible to intercept Major Ferguson. Lt. Lenoir's company of foot was among those commanded by Major Herndon, but Lenoir had left his men behind when he joined the mounted advance guard. Herndon's orders were to obtain the needed beef and bring the foot men up to the main body of mounted troops as soon as possible. On October 9, the foot men met the mounted men just returning from the battle on the 7th and almost dead from fatigue and three days without food. It may be that others of Herndon's foot party left memoirs of their experience in their pension papers.

Three Lewis brothers, Major Micajah Lewis, Captain Joel Lewis and Lieutenant James M. Lewis, all officers in Cleveland's Surry and Willkes Co., regiment, were wounded at King's Mountain. Joel Lewis was born in 1760 in Albemarle Co., VA. A colored free man named Bowman in Joel's company claimed to have killed Major Patrick Ferguson, the British Commander.

After the great victory at King's Mountain, Christopher's company returned to head of King's Creek in Wilkes Co., NC. There Christopher was given command of a small detached party of men and charged to "disperse, take or kill a party of Tories near Fisher's Gap in Surry County, commanded by one Goins." By the time Christopher's party reached Fisher's Gap, however, Goins had already fled the area. Christopher returned to the Surry Courthouse, where he discharged his little party by October 31, 1780. The main body of troops had previously been discharged.

In the summer of 1781, Christopher served another 2 months as a volunteer in Captain Joel Lewis' horse dragoons. It was an honor to serve as a private again under this distinguished officer, who moved to Nashville in 1789 and held many positions of public trust before his death in 1816. Christopher's Revolutionary service totaled 9 months 20 days, of which he had acted as Ensign for 6 months and 20 days.

Postscript

By 1795, Christopher Kirby had sold his last 50 acres in Surry County and moved to Greene County, Tennessee, where he lived on Grassy Creek until 1831. Christopher was a Judge and a Justice of the Peace in Greene County.

About 1831, Christopher arrived by riverboat in Washington County, Arkansas, where he applied for and received Pension in Cane Hill, Arkansas, where so many future generations of Greene County men who fought for the Confederacy would go following the Civil War.

Christopher Kirby, a Soldier of the Revolution, died in 1837 and is buried in the Russell Cemetery at Clyde, Arkansas.