

Augusta in the American Revolution

In 1774, Augusta's inhabitants were opposed to rebellion against England, but news of the fighting at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts on April 19, 1775, swayed many to support an Association of the Colonies seeking redress of grievances. When the Provincial Congress met in Savannah in July 1775, Augusta sent delegates, including George Walton who was elected Secretary. From this date forward, Georgia had two competing governments- one, Tory with allegiance to the King and the other, Whig focused on Independence. In December 1775, George Walton was elected President of the Council of Safety which supervised the affairs of the Whig government.

One prominent local resident, Thomas Brown, announced his loyalty to the King and refused to sign the Association. In August 1775, he was tarred and feathered, the soles of his feet were burned, and he was driven out of town. Sometimes referred to thereafter as "Burnt foot" Brown, he would return to Augusta with a vengeance.

The arrival of British warships in Savannah in January 1776, drove the Provincial Congress to convene in Augusta where they created Georgia's first constitution, called "Rules and Regulations." This provided for an elected executive but still recognized the King of England as head of state. Later in July 1776, George Walton was one of Georgia's three signers of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia.

Georgia became a State in February 1777, with the adoption of a Constitution, election of a Governor and establishment of eight Counties, including Richmond where Augusta was located.

A British expedition from New York took possession of Savannah in December 1778, and red-coated troops marched into Augusta without any opposition on January 31, 1779. With them was Lt. Col Thomas Brown with a regiment of Florida Rangers. When threatened by Patriot Militia, British Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell withdrew from Augusta after only two weeks. This welcomed news to backcountry Patriots, was followed by the Patriot victory at Kettle Creek in February. But only two weeks later, the rout of the Patriots at Brier Creek allowed the re-establishment of Georgia as a Royal Colony.

The Whig government collapsed in May 1780 when Gen. Andrew Williamson evacuated Augusta and withdrew to South Carolina. The British returned to Augusta in June, this time with Thomas Brown as commander of the Loyalist-Indian garrison, determined to bring all the backcountry under Royal control.

In September 1780, Lt. Col. Elijah Clarke led his Georgia and South Carolina militia in an attack on Brown's garrison. Approaching Augusta from the west, Clarke surprised an Indian camp on 14 September and drove the warriors into a trading post known as the "White House." The Indians were joined there by Brown, Col. James Grierson, commander of the Richmond County Loyalist Militia, and a company of Rangers.

Clarke besieged Brown for four days and cut off the water supply, but he was not able to take the position by assault. On 18 September, a British relief force appeared on the Carolina side of the Savannah River. Clarke had to break off the siege and was forced to leave behind many wounded of whom thirteen were hanged by the Loyalists. Twenty-one Patriots were held in irons for several months at the British Fort Cornwallis in Augusta.

Then Elijah Clarke lead seven hundred men, women and children with limited rations over two hundred miles into the Carolina mountains for refuge. His withdrawal was instrumental in luring British Lt. Col. Patrick Ferguson and his troops to their defeat at Kings Mountain in October 1780.

By the spring of 1781, Patriot fortunes had improved in the Carolinas and the new commander of the Southern Department, Continental Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene ordered another attack on Augusta. Elijah Clarke and Gen. Andrew Pickens of South Carolina led their respective Patriot militias. Lt. Col. Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee brought his Continental Legion to join the militia with a battalion of North Carolina troops under Maj. Pinketham Eaton.

Following the British defeat at Kings Mountain, Thomas Brown built Fort Cornwallis, near St. Paul's Church, to house his garrison, and James Grierson fortified a house about a half-mile west of Cornwallis. Lee first captured nearby Fort Galphin in South Carolina on 21 May. Fort Grierson was captured in an assault on 24 May, an event in which Major Eaton lost his life. Brown in Fort Cornwallis held out until 5 June. He was finally induced to surrender when Lee's men mounted a canon on a "Mayham Tower" that fired over the high wall into the fort.

The liberation of Augusta freed the Georgia backcountry from British control. In August 1781, the Georgia Assembly reconvened in Augusta and re-established the state government. Augusta remained the capital, on and off, until 1796, where the new U.S. Constitution was ratified by Georgia in January 1788.

William Few, a Richmond County resident served as a Colonel in the Georgia Militia, and delegate to the Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention where he was one of Georgia's two signers of the U.S. Constitution. Few hurried home to ensure that the Georgia Legislature ratified the new constitution.

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