

THE BRITISH EVACUATE SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

By Georgia Society Compatriot Gordon B. Smith

Next to the public sidewalk along the south side of Park Extension in Savannah there stands a small, coquina marker.¹ To the strollers and joggers who pass by it, the little stone pedestal presents a bare face, carrying neither inscription nor symbol to tell of its purpose. On the street side, however, it bears a small brass plaque, covered with a dark patina. Upon close inspection one can read upon it:

COMMEMORATIVE
OF THE
BRITISH EVACUATION OF SAVANNAH
1782
PRESENTED TO THE
CITY OF SAVANNAH
BY THE
LACHLAN McINTOSH CHAPTER
DAUGHTERS OF
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
1904

The inventories of Savannah's historical monuments and other markers make no mention of this little plaque or the reason for its solitary vigil there. In fact, it once

was the dedicatory inscription on a beautiful fountain commemorating the end of Georgia's nightmare of British occupation during the American Revolution. The story of this little plaque and the event it memorializes follows.

EVACUATION DAY, JULY 11, 1782

On May 23, 1782, just over seven months after Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown, Sir Guy Carleton in New York sent a message ordering the evacuation of Savannah and the province of Georgia, notifying the authorities when transports would arrive. The Royal Council in Savannah responded on June 16 by expressing to General Alexander Leslie in Charleston its "astonishment" at the news. Nevertheless, General Alured Clarke, garrison commander in Savannah, ordered his troops to begin embarkation, starting with the heavy baggage. Consequently, on June 20 the British and Hessian soldiers moved the whole of their heavy regimental baggage to the waterside below Fort Prevost. From June 22 to June 23 they began ferrying the heavy baggage down the Savannah River to Tybee Island in large boats and schooners. From there they took it to



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the transport ships.

Meanwhile, General Anthony Wayne defeated British efforts to break out of Savannah. In July of 1782, as General Wayne's corps lay at Sharon plantation just west of British-occupied Savannah, the Loyalist militia in the city sent a flag of truce out from the British lines "with some overtures." Wayne returned an answer and empowered MAJ John Habersham to offer the following terms: those who chose to enlist in the Georgia Continental Infantry for two years or for the duration of the war in Georgia could rest assured of Wayne's "exerting every influence 'in my power with the Civil Authority, that all past offences (except murder) shall be buried in Oblivion.'"

Whig Governor John Martin issued a proclamation that certain Loyalist merchants had agreed to stay in Savannah for at least six months after the evacuation. This agreement provided the Whigs with an immediate source of supplies and, incidentally, enabled those merchants to dispose of their inventories.

General Wayne gave the terms of evacuation to MAJ Habersham to put in writing, and issued the following orders:

"HEAD QUARTERS, CAMP AT GIBBONS, July 10, 1782.—As the enemy may be expected daily to evacuate the town, the troops will take care to be provided with a clean shift of linen, and to make themselves as respectable as possible for the occasion. The officers are particularly called upon to attend to this order and see it executed in their respective corps. No followers of the army are to be permitted to enter the town until the main body has marched in. Lieut. Col. [James] Jackson, in consideration of his severe and fatiguing service in the advance, is to receive the keys of Savannah, and is allowed to enter at the western gate, keeping a patrol in town to apprehend stragglers who may steal in with the hopes of plunder. Marauders may assure themselves of the most severe and exemplary punishment."

The British began their evacuation of Savannah on July 11, 1782, the whole British garrison marched out of Savannah under the command of Brigadier General Alured Clarke. They moved to the area below Fort



General Anthony Wayne played an important part in forcing the British to evacuate the City of Savannah.



General Nathanael Greene established the terms for the British evacuation of Savannah.

Prevost, where they embarked in 60 large boats in the river.

That evening, LTC James Jackson and his Georgia Legion received the honor of being the first Whigs to re-enter that city. On July 12 the British completed their move to a cantonment area around the lighthouse on Tybee Island. On the 20th of that month a fleet set sail for the West Indies, carrying the Loyalist Militia and the "King's negroes." On the 21st a similar fleet set sail for St. Augustine with the Indians on board who had served with the British, together with the "crackers," as they called their Loyalist allies. On the 23rd the Hessians and rest of the British embarked for New York. During this period the entire British garrison at Savannah, amounting to 1,200 regulars and Loyalists, besides Indians, women, children, and slaves, sailed from Tybee Roads. There remained in the city 240 houses and 750 white inhabitants. The number of black inhabitants is uncertain, since the Loyalists carried away so many of them off when they left.

On July 13 the members of the Georgia House of Assembly gathered in Christ Church. In a symbolic session, these representatives of the revived state reclaimed the mother parish.

LAST FIGHT: DELEGAL'S PLANTATION JULY 25, 1782

General Nathanael Greene feared that the arrival in Charleston of the enemy troops withdrawn from Savannah would give the garrison in Charleston a military advantage over his forces. Therefore, he ordered Wayne to march to Charleston as soon as the British evacuation of Savannah had been completed. For his part, Wayne was reluctant to leave Savannah, since LTC Thomas ("Burnt Foot") Brown and his rangers were on Tybee Island and within a day could return to Savannah, where the Georgia Whig Assembly had gathered.

The last battle of the Revolution in Georgia took place on July 25, 1782 between LTC James Jackson's Georgia Legion and British Marines and others at COL Philip Delegal's Plantation at the southeast point of Skidaway Island². James Jackson, commanding the Georgia Legion, described the fight in the following words:

"The last skirmish in Georgia between the Troops of the two nations was on Delegal's point in Skidaway Island, where Col. Jackson had taken post by order of Genl. Wayne with a few militia, who were compelled to retreat after taking an armed Boat with her crew from the superior numbers of the enemy, supported by two armed Gallies & several large armed vessels, who destroyed the buildings on Delegal's plantation on the 25th July 1782."

General Anthony Wayne reported that the British "grand Fleet" had sailed from Tybee on the 24th of July, and that he soon received an express informing him that LTC "Burnt Foot" Brown and his "motley Crew of regular[s], Indians, and Tories," some 500 strong, had landed on Skidaway Island. Having ordered Jackson to meet them, Wayne advanced to join him with his light infantry, artillery, and dragoons. Following their fight with Jackson, Brown and those who accompanied him re-embarked and proceeded to Ossabaw Island, where they remained for some time. On August 9th, Wayne left Georgia for Charleston. Even before its completion, Wayne best summarized his Georgia campaign as follows:

"The duty we have done in Georgia is more difficult than that imposed upon the children of Israel. They had only to make bricks without straw, but we have had provision, forage and almost every other apparatus of war to procure without money: boats, bridges &c. to build without materials except those taken from the stump; and what was more difficult than all, to make Whigs out of Tories..."

In August of 1782 Governor Martin reported that the work, "which I think very essential," of leveling the earthworks around Savannah was nearly complete. That month, however, CPT Matthew Scallion's row galley H.M. *Arbuthnot*, sailing out of St. Augustine with a mixed force of British regulars and Loyalists aboard, again raided the Georgia coast. This time the raiders sailed into an inlet of Ossabaw Island, burning a new vessel on the stocks—nearly completed, capturing 33 slaves, burning John Morel's plantation buildings, and taking away 2,000 weight of indigo.

On December 14 of that year the last British troops left Charleston. Thanks to Nathanael Greene, it was an orderly transition. On January 20, 1783 Great Britain signed preliminary articles of peace with France and Spain.

EVACUATION DAY FOUNTAIN, 1905

In 1904 Lachlan McIntosh Chapter, N.S.D.A.R., of Savannah proposed to commemorate Evacuation Day, July 11, 1782, the day the British and their Loyalist allies left the city. The Chapter selected a bronze drinking fountain as an appropriate monument, and chose the site for their fountain at the south end of Savannah's Park Extension. The intent was to terminate Bull Street, the city's long Avenue of Monuments of the Revolutionary War—to Nathanael Greene, William Jasper, and Casimir Pulaski—with a fitting memorial to the close of that war in Georgia. The Chapter held its dedication service on George Washington's Birthday, February 22, 1905. William Harden gave the dedicatory address, a band played patriotic airs, Master Frank Bisbee unveiled the fountain, and Mayor Henry Myers closed the celebration by accepting the monument on behalf of the city³.

In his dedicatory speech William Harden said:

"When, on the 11th of July, 1782 the enemy, having been vanquished in their efforts at subjugation, formally evacuated the town which they had stripped of her beauty and impoverished, great was the joy of the people. Other cities have in various ways done something to mark the event of the departure of the enemy from their borders, but here we observe no 'evacuation day' and there is nothing in the shape of a reminder of that event to be found on our streets or within our squares.

Today, however, the anniversary of the birth of him who led the armies of the American colonies to victory, the Lachlan McIntosh chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution deliver into your keeping this fountain—not only an ornament to the spot on which it shall stand to mark the



In the background is the Spanish-American War monument of "The Hiker" on the site of the earlier D.A.R. Evacuation Day fountain, dedicated in 1905, but destroyed in 1914. In 1930 the D.A.R. rededicated the surviving plaque on the coquina marker in the foreground.

epoch of rejoicing over the riddance of our city's enemies, but a source of relief and pleasure to the thirsty who will freely drink of the pure water which it abundantly dispenses, to be cared for as are the other memorials erected from time to time. The ladies do not claim that the value of their gift to suffering mankind is to be measured in proportion to the amount of money spent upon it.

They are in themselves a living answer to the prayer of the sacred writer that 'our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.' I beseech you, therefore, to look well to their desire to have this memorial of theirs well preserved, and so receive their smiles and hearty approval, having which we are all truly blessed, but without which we would be poor indeed."

In response, Mayor Myers said in part:

"I deem it an honor and a privilege on behalf of the municipality to accept this handsome gift,

tendered in commemoration of that momentous event, the evacuation of this city by the British forces. I can only promise on the part of the municipality that it will be taken the best care of. I am sure I voice the sentiment of all the people in tendering to you their grateful acknowledgement and thanks for this handsome gift."



The last battle of the Revolution in Georgia saw LTC James Jackson in command of the Georgia Legion fighting the British Marines and others.

This fountain lasted only a few years. What was attributed to either "malicious mischief" or "a heavy wagon" demolished the fountain in September of 1914⁴. A passerby notified the water department, which cut off the flow of the water. The fountain was too badly damaged to repair. In 1930 the Lachlan McIntosh Chapter re-dedicated the memorial tablet that had been attached to the fountain. The city provided the small, coquina slab for mounting the bronze plaque, which still stands at the foot of Park Extension.

FOOTNOTES

1. Park Extension is the old military park extending south of Forsyth Park in Savannah.
2. This location, once the plantation of Philip Delegal, became the conjunction of the Big Ferry Road along the western side of Skidaway Island and the Footpath Road along the eastern shore of Skidaway. The site is now known as Adam's Point, and features a golf course fronted by luxury homes facing out on Ossabaw Sound.
3. "To Present Fountain On Washington's Birthday," *Savannah Morning News*, February 2, 1905; "Will Present D.A.R. Fountain Wednesday," *Savannah Morning News*, February 20, 1905; "Ceremony of Unveiling The Fountain at Noon Today," *Savannah Evening Press*, February 22, 1905; "D.A.R. Fountain Formally Presented To The City," *Savannah Morning News*, February 23, 1905. The bronze tablet incorrectly gives the dedication date as 1904.
4. "Fountain Falls In Extension," *Savannah Evening Press*, September 15, 1914.