

Fort Congaree II: British Outpost in the South Carolina Midlands, 1748-1756

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More than two hundred fifty years later, little remains but the rusty cannonball on display at the Cayce Historical Museum. Few people know that a palisaded British fort once stood on a vacant lot in a residential neighborhood just across the Congaree River from Columbia, South Carolina. In the tall grass and bamboo, surrounded by 1950s-era homes in a residential neighborhood in the Riverland Hills neighborhood of Cayce is the site of an almost forgotten frontier outpost: “The Congaree Fort,” “Fort Congaree II.”

The Congarees and the Kidnapping of George Haig

In 1718, South Carolina built the first permanent British structure in the Midlands on Congaree Creek. It was a fortified Indian “factory” (trading post), attracting visitors from throughout eastern North America. But Indian populations in the region declined due to fatal diseases. And the area proved susceptible to flooding. The fort fell into disuse and was abandoned a few years later in 1722. In 1735, Governor Robert Johnson created the “Township System,” a plan for the settlement of the South Carolina backcountry. He established Saxe Gotha Township near the confluence of the Broad and Saluda Rivers, with its center at “the Congarees,” the head of navigation for the Congaree River. There, at the sparsely populated Saxe Gotha Town (in present Cayce) traders and settlers trickled into the region, many of them German and Swiss.¹ By the 1740s, the area became an important crossroads.

¹ James L. Michie, “The Discovery of Old Fort Congaree,” *South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology Research Manuscript Series* 208 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1989). In the 1730s, King George II gave instructions that 11 Royal Townships be marked out as potential settlement areas. Saxe Gotha was laid out in 1733 at the Congaree River. Settlers began arriving as early as 1734. The town of Granby was laid out in 1735 and during that time, this became the most important inland commercial town east of the Mississippi. Rachel Steen, *Cayce: “Cradle of the Midlands”* (Cayce, S.C.: Cayce Historical Museum, 2005), 1.

In 1746, France and Britain were at war. France's Indian allies in North America attacked and kidnapped Catawbas and other tribes under Catawba protection. South Carolina Governor James Glen sent George Haig, deputy surveyor, justice of the peace, and a militia captain in the Congarees, to the Cherokee Lower Towns with Colonel George Pawley. The men journeyed to insist that the Cherokees stop the French Indian raids. On the way, Haig rescued some Catawba captives. Two years later, Haig embarked on a secret mission to the Catawba Nation. Fellow traders William Brown, the half-breed son of a trader taken prisoner two decades earlier, and Haig's indentured servant William Wrightknower joined him. On March 17, 1748, forty miles north of the Congarees, fifteen Nottowegas, French allies from the Ohio Valley, "all at once bolted into the Tent" where the trio camped.²

The Indians robbed the three men. Haig offered his assailants his horses, but the Indians did not accept them. "Mr. Haig then did by many Signs & Motions intreat them that he might return to his Family which they absolutely refused." The assailants bound Haig and Brown. "Mr. Haig could not refrain from Tears & still intreated to be permitted to return." The Indians set Wrightknower free. Haig begged him to spread the news, so Glen or any of the other colonial governors might secure his release. Wrightknower fled to Saxe Gotha Town while the Indians carried Haig and Brown to the Ohio Country.³

²George Haig moved to Sandy Run Creek in 1737. He lived in the Congarees a mile below the crossing of the Cherokee Path. He laid out much of Saxe Gotha and Orangeburg. He acquired 1140 acres of land from 1737 to 1746. He traded with the Catawbas and corresponded with Governor Glen. With George Pawley, he negotiated South Carolina's 1746 land purchase from the Cherokees at Ninety Six. Robert L. Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina, 1729-1765* (Kingsport, Tenn: Southern Publishers, 1940), 58, 193-198; *Memorials of 17th and 18th Century South Carolina Land Titles*, Vol. 7, p. 485-86 (microfilm at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC (hereafter SC Archives); Alexia Jones Helsley, *Unsung Heroines of the South Carolina Frontier* (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1997), 64, 70n; T.F. Brewer and J. Baillie, "The Journal of George Pawley's 1746 Agency to the Cherokee," *Journal of Cherokee Studies*, 16 (1991):3-22.

³ *Journals of His Majesty's Council* (Early State Records Reel E1p/4): 1744-1748 (microfilm at SC Archives). Unit 4: 1747 June 4-1748 July 20, p.183-185 (March 29, 1748).

When she heard the news, Haig's wife Elizabeth begged Governor Glen to rescue her husband. The Governor insisted that "upon perceiving that they were pursued," the Indians would "immediately...kill & Scalp their Slaves." He expressed his sympathy and promised to do everything he could to free George Haig.⁴ He then wrote to Stephen Crell, the Saxe Gotha militia captain and justice of the peace, to "keep up the Spirits of the People in your Parts." He continued: "endeavour to Comfort Mrs. Haig & Assure her that nothing shall be Omitted for his Service."⁵ Elizabeth Haig petitioned the Council on April 8 to send troops to the Congarees, "for they [the Indians] are lurking about this Nieghborhood & more or less of them...which make many of the People afraid."⁶

The same day, Governor Glen informed the South Carolina Assembly of the kidnapping and of the growing boldness of the "Norward" Indians. The Assembly provided for two parties of Rangers consisting of an officer and twelve men each. Glen announced that he intended "to order a Detachment of at least thirty Men from the Independent Companies to or near the Place where the old [1718] Congree Garrison was formerly kept and [insisted] that a pallisaded Fort be made there, with proper Accomodation for their Reception." He immediately sent thirty men to Fort Moore (Beech Island, near North Augusta), with an officer and sergeant and gunpowder and bullets to repair the barracks there, and ordered them to travel to Saxe Gotha afterward, to build the new fort.⁷

⁴ Glen to Elizabeth Haig, March 22, 1748, in *Journals of His Majesty's Council, 1744-1748*, Unit 4, p. 185 (March 29, 1748).

⁵ Glen to Stephen Crell, March 22, 1748, *Ibid.*, p. 186 (March 29, 1748).

⁶ "Letter & Petition of Mrs. Elizabeth Haig," Saxe Gotha, April 8, 1748, *Ibid.*, p. 214-215 (April 16, 1748). Haig petitioned a few days later, begging Glen to halt the Cherokee trade "till they send away those Northward Indians...& oblige them to bring back Mr. Haig." South Carolina authorities did not act on the second petition. For more on Elizabeth (Seawright) Haig Mercier Webb, see Helsley, *Unsung Heroines of the Carolina Frontier*, 63-70.

⁷ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, January 19, 1748-June 29, 1748* [Vol. 8], J.H. Easterby, ed. (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Archives Department, 1961), p. 172 (April 8, 1748); James Glen to the Board of Trade, April 14, 1748, in *Records in the BPRO relating to SC*, 35 vols., William L. McDowell, ed., (microfilm) (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1955), 23:110.

The Independent Companies

Like other Independent Companies, the British Regulars posted in South Carolina and Georgia since 1720, had no parent regiment. Independent Companies manned and maintained fortifications throughout the British Empire as they had done for centuries. Until or unless the Crown specified otherwise, colonial governors traditionally controlled the affairs of soldiers posted in their jurisdictions.⁸

Officers and non-commissioned officers wore scarlet colored coats, waistcoats, and breeches. Privates wore a less-brilliant brick red shade. “Popinjay green” coat linings, cuffs, and lapels accentuated the uniform. White lace edged the turned up brims of the soldiers’ black cocked hats. Lace – silver for officers and sergeants and white for privates – edged the buttonholes, pockets, and lapels on the coats and waistcoats. Officers and sergeants wore silver buttons and privates had buttons made out of pewter. Both officers and sergeants wore crimson sashes, but sergeants had a narrow stripe of the facing color running the full length. A silver aiguillette worn on the right soldier and a gorget, a large crescent-shaped silver medallion hanging from the neck, further distinguished the officers. Officers also wore riding boots, whereas privates wore white gaiters.⁹

Arms and accoutrements included the standard issue Long Land Pattern “Brown Bess.” A flintlock musket, it was the main weapon of British and colonial militias. With a 46-inch barrel, it measured 62.5 inches overall. It weighed just over ten pounds. Often soldiers affixed a bayonet to it. The Brown Bess was notoriously unreliable beyond 75 or 100 yards, and even

⁸ William A. Foote, “The American Independent Companies of the British Army, 1664-1764,” (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1966), 6-8.

⁹ Fitzhugh McMaster, *Soldiers and Uniforms: South Carolina Military Affairs, 1670-1775* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), 51-52.

then, hitting a target was no easy task. Standard infantry tactics ordered volleys at a range of about fifty yards. One could fire at most three rounds per minute.¹⁰ Officers carried an infantry hanger (sword) and privates carried a belt axe (tomahawk). Accoutrements included a leather waist belt, a black leather cartridge box with a strap, a kidney-shaped tin canteen, a linen haversack, a leather knapsack, and a wool blanket. On the march soldiers carried a mess kit with a wooden trencher, tin cup, wooden spoon, and knife, an extra shirt, hat, and coat, and perhaps gloves or mittens.¹¹

The Construction of Fort Congaree II

Six weeks later after Governor Glen sent the Independent Company detachment to Fort Moore, it completed its work there. Glen reappeared before the Assembly and elaborated on his plans for a new fort at the Congarees. Assisted by the “Inhabitants of those Parts,” and “without any Manner of Expence to the Public,” the Independent Company troops would build a palisade fort and barracks. “Mr. Campbell, the Engineer” would “shew the Method and direct the Work.” Per Glen’s request, the Assembly granted funds for “Hoes, Axes, Saws, and other Tools as may be wanting” for the project.¹²

Several delays stalled the project.¹³ On July 20, the engineer presented an “Inventory of such things as wd. be necessary for the Erecting the Fort at the Congrees.” The commissary

¹⁰ “Brown Bess Musket: British Infantry Flintlock Musket, 1722-1838,” <<http://militaryhistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/brown-bess-musket#ixzz0q77vAZVE>>. Accessed November 1, 2010.

¹¹ “Items for a Private of the Independent Company of South Carolina, Garrison of Fort Loudoun,” last updated 2010. http://fortloudoun.com/?page_id=741. Accessed November, 2010.

¹² *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, January 19, 1748-June 29, 1748*, 281, 282, 285 (May 20, 1748).

¹³ Five weeks later, the Assembly asked the Governor if he had actually sent up the officer and thirty men to the Congarees to build the fort. *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, March 28, 1749-March 19, 1750* [Vol. 9], J.H. Easterby, ed., (Columbia, S.C.: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and

general for the Independent Company estimated potential costs. The South Carolina Assembly deemed both proposals excessive. Glen summoned “Mr. Campbell,” James Campbell, Royal Engineer for South Carolina and Georgia, to discuss cutting costs. The clerk of the Council wrote to Stephen Crell in the Congarees, “Desiring he would prevail as far as in him lay upon the Settlers, near the Congrees to Assist in Building the said Fort.” By August, construction finally began. By the following February the fort stood complete.¹⁴ The project cost South Carolina only five hundred pounds.¹⁵

An earthen ditch and a moat surrounded the fort, and a palisade enclosed it, probably with gun holes at regular intervals in the wall. An officer’s house stood inside. At least three barracks slept the standard 12-20 persons each. A 1748 plat suggests that the fort also had four bastions, with small cannon, and possibly carriage or swivel guns, mounted in each. A storehouse, guardhouse, corn crib, and workshops for craftsmen probably stood inside the palisade walls. Apparently there was no gunpowder magazine.¹⁶

History by the University of South Carolina Press, 1962), p. 360 (June 25, 1748); *Journals of His Majesty’s Council, 1744-1748*, Unit 4, p. 374-375 (July 20, 1748).

¹⁴ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, March 28, 1749-March 19, 1750*, 328 (December 8, 1749); Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 199. On James Campbell, see Whitworth Porter, *History of the Royal Corps of Engineers*, Vol. I (London: Longmans, Green & Co., and New York: 15 East 16th Street, 1889), 166; Hennig Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), 63.

¹⁵ “For the building of a Fort at Saxe Gotha Township, alias Congrees, five hundred Pounds,” and “An Account of Mr. John Fairchild...” which included “the Residue for the hire of Labourers to work on the Congree Fort.” *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, March 28, 1749 – March 19, 1750*, 369 (January 31, 1750). Most of it was denied. *Ibid.*, p. 209 (28 January 1751), 253 (27 February 1751).

¹⁶ The fort probably resembled newly-renovated Fort Moore. Harold S. Maness, *Forgotten Outpost: Fort Moore & Savannah Town, 1685-1765* (Beech Island, S.C.: Harold Maness, 1986), 69-70; Barton J. Redmon, *The British Barrack Institution in North America, 1755-1774* (West Carrollton, Ohio: by the author for Fort Loudoun, 1999), Fort Loudoun Library Collections, Vonore, Tennessee; Larry Ivers, *Colonial Forts of South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 44-45. A committee considered the building of powder magazines at Beaufort, Jacksonburgh, the Congarees and George Town. *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 12, 1754-September 23, 1755* [Vol. 13], Terry Lipscomb, ed. (Columbia, S.C.: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History by the University of South Carolina Press, 1986), p. 125 (February 26, 1755); “Saxe Gotha,” *South Carolina Department of Archives and History Town and Township Plans*, <http://www.palmettohistory.org/exhibits/Town%20Plans/images/SaxeGotha.pdf>, Accessed November 1, 2010.

South Carolina authorities called the new outpost “the Congree Fort” or “Fort Congaree.” Local historians refer to the structure as “Fort Congaree II” to distinguish it from the 1718 fort. Fort Congaree II stood on the west bank of the Congaree River just below the fall line, and just north of the town of Saxe Gotha in present-day Cayce. Today the site sits on Riverland Drive, just south of an access point to the Cayce Riverwalk. Across the river, a trail, now US-1, headed towards present Camden, north to the Catawba Nation and towards present Durham, North Carolina. Fort Congaree II lay 133 miles from Charles Town (Charleston) along the Cherokee Path, a 250 mile long wagon road from Charleston to Keowee village in the Cherokee Lower Towns. Keowee now lies under the lake that bears its name.¹⁷ A few hundred yards south of the fort, the recently flood ravaged and abandoned Saxe Gotha town featured some homes, taverns, trading posts, and government buildings. At the time of the fort’s construction, only a few hundred settlers populated the entire surrounding region. As late as 1759, fewer than 800 or 900 white and black people lived in the Upper Congaree Valley, growing wheat and corn, raising cattle, and shipping goods to and from the South Carolina upcountry and Charles Town.¹⁸

Shortly after the completion of the fort, the story of Haig’s demise reached South Carolina. As Pennsylvania Governor Anthony Palmer wrote to Governor Glen, sickness and fatigue overtook him as his captors carried him to the Pennsylvania frontier. Haig refused to go any farther and dared his captors to kill him. They did. Shortly afterward, Pennsylvania Indian agent Conrad Weiser arrived with presents intending to ransom the men. He freed William Brown and learned the news of Haig’s murder. Brown, whether traumatized or mentally

¹⁷ “The Stages and Distances of the most remarkable Places on the North-American Continent from Charlestown, with the intermediate distances, in computed miles,” in *The South Carolina Almanack for 1762...*(Charlestown: Robert Wells, 1761), no page given, *Early American Imprints*, Series 1, #41184 (microfilm).

¹⁸ Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 61.

challenged as some sources suggest, returned with little information.¹⁹ Haig left his wife a widow with three small children, John, Elizabeth, and George, Jr., all under age ten.²⁰

The Garrison at Fort Congaree II

Ensign Peter Ormsby became the first commander of the Fort Congaree II. Ormsby was a veteran of the War of Jenkins' Ear, Britain's most recent conflict against the Spanish. Before coming to South Carolina, he had served in the early-1740s in the Caribbean and Central America against the Spanish in Gooch's 61st Regiment of Foot.²¹ Ormsby commanded a sergeant, corporal, drummer, and thirty privates. It appears probable that these were the same when who had repaired Fort Moore.

In May 1749, the British Crown disbanded the Independent Companies and redistributed James Oglethorpe's 42nd Regiment of Foot (stationed in Georgia) into three newly created Independent Companies. When he heard of this upcoming change, Ensign Ormsby petitioned the South Carolina Assembly. He sought reimbursement for marching to Fort Moore and to the Congaree Fort. The Assembly granted him twenty-seven pounds, ten shillings. He had built himself a house to live in at the fort at a cost of £218.15.9. A committee investigated whether

¹⁹ Anthony Palmer to James Glen, Philadelphia, November 1748, and "Journal of Conrad Weizer, Esqr, Indian Interpreter to the Province of Pennsylvania, being his proceedings at Ohio," in *Journals of His Majesty's Council* (Early State Records Reel E1p/5): 1748-1750 (microfilm at SC Archives). Unit 1: 1748 Dec. 20-1749 Dec. 6, p. 230-231, 231-253 (March 18, 1749); W.H. Mitchell, "George Haig's Capture by the Seneca Indians, 1748: An Historical Sketch from Original Documents," *The Historical Magazine, and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America*, Vol. 4 (New York: Charles B. Richardson & Co., 1860), 357-360.

²⁰ Haig left John James Haig (b. 1739), Elizabeth Mary Haig Leger (b. 1739), George Haig, Jr. (b. 1743). Elizabeth Seawright was b. 1719 in Londonderry, Ireland. George Haig, b. ca. 1699. Mercier b. ca. 1699. John James Haig, b. 1739, Elizabeth Margaret Mary Haig, b. 1740, George Haig, Jr., b. 1743. Widowed, she had three children under the age of ten. Helsley, *Unsung Heroines of the Carolina Frontier*, 68, 70n.

²¹ W.R. Williams, "British-American Officers, 1720-1763," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 33:4 (October 1932):290. Ormsby was commissioned ensign in the Independent Company on December 25, 1744. See also René Chartrand and David Rickman, *Colonial American Troops, 1610-1774, Vol. 1* (Oxford, Eng.: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 18-20.

Ormsby had the proper authorization to build the house.²² The Assembly finally settled with Ormsby in 1752 and paid him £150 current money.²³

In June of 1749 the three South Carolina Independent Companies were discharged as planned. Three new Independent Companies of one hundred men each were created from Oglethorpe's disbanded 42nd Regiment of Foot. New detachments replaced the old ones stationed at Fort Moore and Fort Congaree II.²⁴ Several discharged soldiers who had served at Fort Congaree II remained in the area. Elisha Atkinson and John Taylor, for instance, received land grants. So did Mary King, the widow of a corporal at the Congaree Fort.²⁵

A detachment with a sergeant and thirty men replaced Ormsby's detachment, beginning a new chapter in the fort's history. The sergeant briefly commanded the fort and lived in the Ormsby House. A new commander, Lieutenant Peter Mercier, arrived some time after from Georgia once he could settle his affairs there, perhaps in early 1750.²⁶ We know little about him. Of French Huguenot descent, he had served in Oglethorpe's 42nd Regiment of Foot at Frederica, Georgia in the 1740s. In 1744 a soldier writing to the Georgia Trustees claimed that Mercier was present when another soldier allegedly raped a woman at the fort.²⁷ In 1748 Mercier received a land grant south of the Ogeechee River in Georgia. He was unmarried and childless.²⁸

²² *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, March 28, 1749-March 19, 1750*, p. 61 (May 8, 1749), 72 (May 10, 1749), 128 (May 18, 1749), 328 (December 8, 1749).

²³ "Resolved, That the Sum of one hundred and fifty Pounds Curr. Money be allowed to Mr. Peter Ormsby, an Ensign in one of His Majesty's Independent Companies lately disbanded, for his Disbursements in building the Officers House at the Congree Fort." *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 14, 1751-October 7, 1752* [Vol. 11], Terry W. Lipscomb and R. Nicholas Olsberg, eds., (Columbia, S.C.: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History by the University of South Carolina Press, 1977), p. 267 (May 1, 1752).

²⁴ Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 199; Foote, "Independent Companies," 314.

²⁵ Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 148.

²⁶ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, March 28, 1749-March 19, 1750*, p. 328 (December 8, 1749).

²⁷ Captain William Horton named Ensign Samuel Mackay, Ensign Peter Mercier, and Doctor Bailliffs as onlookers to a rape. Ensign Probart Howarth allegedly "Comitted this Outrageous Action on the Body of Margaret Fletcher a Soldiers Wife And wth a horse whip while she Lay Naked." Mrs. Fletcher did not press charges. Captain William Horton to John Terry, June 2, 1744, enclosed in Terry to the Board of Trustees, August 27, 1744, in *The*

In the spring of 1750, tensions on the frontier flared again. Norward Indians killed four traders bringing deerskins away from the Cherokee Nation. Another war party attacked the Catawbas, but lost sixteen killed and four captured. Because South Carolina openly aided the Catawbas, by January 1751, white settlers feared a massive invasion. A crisis of unprecedented proportions loomed. No part of South Carolina was safe. Traders abandoned the Cherokee country. Upcountry settlers scattered to private forts and even to the northern colonies. All sides spread rumors and prepared for a war that never came.²⁹

In April a gang of Nottowega Indians appeared in the Congarees. As militia captain Stephen Crell reported to the governor on May 2, the Indians killed “several Cattle and Horses and Mares.” They “took by Force a Negro Boy away out of John Geiger’s House” in the Congarees, “when there were but 2 Women in it.” The women resisted until the Indians threatened to shoot them.³⁰ About a week later, the Cloud (also Gloud) Family had entertained two Indians in their home near present War-Ridge Spring, South Carolina. At sunrise the next morning, the Indians shot Mary Cloud’s husband and another man. They tomahawked Mary on the arm and twice upon the knee and left her for dead. Then they killed both of her children and robbed the house. She lay for two days among the dead, weak and unable to move. “By the help of Providence,” one of her horses happened to come near the House, and she rode to Martin

Colonial Records of the State of Georgia, Vol. 24: Original Papers, Correspondence, Trustees, General Oglethorpe and others, 1742-1745, Allen D. Candler, ed. (Atlanta: Chas. P. Byrd, State Printers, 1915), 253-257.

²⁸ Mercier had been commissioned Ensign on July 30, 1745 and promoted to Lieutenant on April 25, 1747. He received a land grant of 500 acres in Georgia in 1748, but what became of that property is unclear. Allen D. Candler, ed., *Colonial Records of Georgia, Vol. VI: Proceedings of the President And Assistants, from October 12, 1741, to October 30, 1754* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1906), p. 227 (November 3, 1748); W.R. Williams, ed., “British-American Officers, 1720-1763,” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 33:3 (July 1932):193-194; Arthur Henry Hirsch, *The Huguenots of Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 192.

²⁹ Gregory Evans Dowd, “The Panic of 1751: Rumors on the Cherokee-South Carolina Frontier,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 53:3 (July 1996):528.

³⁰ Stephen Crell to Governor Glen, Saxe Gotha, May 2, 1751, in William L. McDowell, ed., *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, Vol. 1:1750-1754* [hereafter *DRIA*, I] (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 46.

Fridig's (Friday's) house in the Congarees, waking the family in the middle of the night. Militia captains Stephen Crell and Daniel Shyder (also spelled Sellider) passed on the news of the "Cloud Massacre" to Governor Glen on May 8.³¹

The inhabitants of Saxe Gotha Township were "greatly alarmed at the Hostilities committed by the Indians." Residents sent Herman Geiger "in hopes his Excellency would be pleased to order a supply of Guns, Bayonets & Ammunition," all of which remained in short supply, "to be carried up with all possible dispatch. Else they would be all obliged to leave those Parts, and to come amongst the lower Settlements with their Wives & Children &c." creating a massive refugee crisis.³²

Reinforcements from the Independent Companies marched to the Congaree Fort.³³ South Carolina created two Ranger Companies to scout the frontier from Saxe-Gotha. Rangers patrolled South Carolina's frontiers from 1716 to 1764. Rangers fought like dragoons and used stockade forts only as bases. They wore their own civilian clothing and provided their own horses and provisions. Despite the high pay, Ranger service was dangerous and unpopular.³⁴ Roger Gibson's Rangers, men largely from the present-day Camden area, and John Fairchild's Rangers, from Saxe Gotha Township, patrolled in opposite directions. With Fort Congaree II as a base for their scouting operations, Gibson and Fairchild's Rangers traveled from the Cherokee

³¹*The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, April 23, 1750-August 31, 1751* [Vol. 10], R. Nicholas Olsberg, ed. (Columbia, S.C.: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History by the University of South Carolina Press, 1974), p. 442-443 (May 13, 1751). Cloud received medical care in Charles Town on the public expense. 487 (June 12, 1751.)

³² *Ibid.*, p. 441 (May 13, 1751).

³³ "John Dart, commissary general, be ordered to pay out the monies for the expenses incurred for "the carriage of the Baggage of the Soldiers detached from the Independent Companies to reinforce Fort Moore and the Congree Fort." *Ibid.*, 510 (June 14, 1751).

³⁴ Ivers, *Colonial Forts of South Carolina*, 32-35.

Path to Ninety Six and across the river and along the path to the Catawba Nation.³⁵ The backcountry suffered little from the raids, and reports were often overblown. But several people were killed. “The Inhabitants of 96, Seludy and upper Inhabitation of Congree River, are fled to the Congree Fort for Safety,” Gibson reported to Governor Glen in early-May 1751.³⁶

Though Cherokee warriors had killed just one trader (caught in the crossfire of a Creek-Cherokee skirmish) and wounded just three others, all traders, in June, Glen briefly halted the Cherokee trade and planned a military campaign against the Cherokees.³⁷ During the summer and autumn Iroquois warriors murdered a white man and killed cattle near Orangeburg. Gangs of warriors skirmished with residents on the Santee River and on Lady’s Island near Beaufort. The Indian assailants even clashed with a militia party on the coast in Christ Church Parish.³⁸ Eventually Indian raids slowed, and peace returned to the Carolina frontier. Life at the fort settled back into a normal routine.

Daily Life at the Fort

Life at the fort resembled life in other garrisons throughout the British Empire. A drummer was stationed at the fort until the Commons House paid and discharged him on April 2, 1756.³⁹ Each morning at 6 A.M. he beat out reveille, and the garrison awoke. Any soldiers not on guard duty formed at 8 A.M. for work, cutting firewood, repairing tools and weapons.

³⁵ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, April 23, 1750-August 31, 1751*, p. 433(May 11, 1751); James Glen to John Fairchild, [May 10, 1751], John Fairchild to James Glen, [May 1751], McDowell, *DRIA*, I:49-50; 58-59; Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 103.

³⁶ Roger Gibson to Governor Glen, Wateree, May 9, 1751, McDowell, *DRIA*, I: 50.

³⁷ Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 200-202.

³⁸ McDowell, *DRIA*, I:7-15, 18-20, 28-29, 29, 31, 32-33, 41-60, 61-84, 90-91, 100-102, 107-108, 109, 112-118, 129-133; Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 199-203.

³⁹ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 20, 1755–July 6, 1757* [Vol. 14], Terry W. Lipscomb, ed. (Columbia, S.C.: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, by the University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 195-196 (April 2, 1756).

According to British military custom, women lived with the soldiers in the garrison. They tended the sick, cleaned and swept the barracks, sewed and repaired uniforms, and did laundry. Some women stacked and hauled wood to the barracks for an extra income.⁴⁰

Soldiers and families ate together in the barracks. Typical rations included seven pounds of bread or flour, seven pounds of fresh, salted beef or 3.5 pounds of salt pork, a half pound of rice, three pounds of peas, six ounces of butter, biscuits when available, and fresh bread baked in larger garrisons. All people received a half gill of rum (about two ounces) per day. Quartermasters may have issued cabbage and vinegar.⁴¹

Furniture was sparse: four foot by six foot bunk beds with straw-stuffed mattresses, a wooden table, and benches. Gun racks and wooden pegs protruded from the unfinished wooden walls. Each room had a pair of iron tongs, a shovel, a broom, a bucket, a hatchet, a candlestick, iron pots, a ladle, two kettles, two platters, two bowls, twelve trenchers (large plates), two pitchers for cider, beer and spruce beer, and two mugs.⁴²

Each night, the members of the garrison returned to the dimly lit barracks. They sat by the light of the fireplace, singing, dancing, playing the jew's harp (jaw harp) and telling stories. Issued only one candle per day, soldiers may have purchased their own candles, oil and fat lamps. 10 P.M. was bed time. Soldiers slept two to a bed. Married couples shared beds in the corners of the barracks, known as "The Married Corner" and tacked up a blanket for privacy. If the room had two couples, each couple took a berth in the same bunk bed. Children shared their parents' beds, slept in the beds of soldiers on guard duty, or curled up on the floor. Women

⁴⁰ Herman Gaston De Watteville, *The British Soldier: His Daily Life from Tudor to Modern Times* (New York: Putnam, 1955), 185. Officers inspected the barracks daily, looking for cleanliness and order, to ensure that rations were properly cooked and the fireplace maintained, that wood was chopped outdoors, that linens were clean, and women did all laundry outside. Redmon, *The British Barrack Institution*.

⁴¹ Redmon, *The British Barrack Institution*.

⁴² Redmon, *The British Barrack Institution*.

washed the sheets only once a month, so waking up at 6 A.M. to begin the routine anew, one hoped the “itch” from the mites that burrowed into the dirty linens was minimal.⁴³

At times, visitors stopped by the fort. The farms and trading posts nearby in Saxe Gotha Township ensured a ready supply of fresh food for the garrison. Farmers, and merchants like Robert Steill, the Geigers, and Stephen Crell sold milk, berries, beer, fish, and other items not issued by the quartermaster.⁴⁴ African slaves from area plantations visited the fort, piloted flatboats in the river, and sold crops and wares to the soldiers. Anglican minister John Giessendanner of Orangeburg visited the fort, as the Congarees had no settled Anglican minister. Giessendanner married William Berry and Mary King at the garrison in 1750.⁴⁵ Throughout the 1750s, Giessendanner also held services at Elizabeth Mercier’s home, where he baptized several dozen local children.⁴⁶ The fort became the center of the community in the Congarees.

In 1751, when residents of the Saluda River, Ninety Six, and Saxe Gotha Township settlements, then sparsely populated, fled for refuge to the fort, they lived within its walls and aided the troops and the wives with day-to-day work at the fort. The fort bustled with the addition of more Independent Company troops. Captains Roger Gibson and John Fairchild and their Ranger units frequented the fort, the base of their scouting operations for repairs, resupply, reports, and rest.⁴⁷

⁴³ Watteville, *The British Soldier*, 184-185; Redmon, *The British Barrack Institution*.

⁴⁴ Redmon, *The British Barrack Institution*.

⁴⁵ “On Monday May 21st in the Congree Garrison by Banns / William Berry and Mary King, widow, both in Saxa / gotha Township; Present: Archibald Campbell Esqr. / Herman Gyger, Henry Gallman.” in “The Giessendanner Record,” trans. A.S. Salley, Jr. [originals in the “Gissendanner Record,” South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC; Manuscripts I&O.], in A.S. Salley, Jr., *The History of Orangeburg County, South Carolina: From its First Settlement to the Close of the Revolutionary War* (Orangeburg, S.C.: R. Lewis Berry, Printer, 1898), 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 63. On Saturday May 19, 1750, he baptized Edward McGrae; on Sunday May 20, Naomy Fritz, Elizabeth Fritz, Grace Murphy, Gabriel Clements, and Sirrah Chevy (122-123). On Sunday September 16, Giessendanner baptized Margaret Mercier and William McGrue (140). He baptized John Danly, John Aifrid, John ?, Malachy Howell, Thomas Hodge, William Berry, Sarah Lane, and Sarah Gibson on February 22, 1756 (159).

“Hugh son of” was baptized on Sunday August 8, 1756 (163) On Sunday October 6, Giessendanner baptized Martha Ann Partridge, Nathaniel Partridge, John Snelling, James Danly, Isabella Eberhardt, and Rose Danly (240-41).

⁴⁷ Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina*, 103.

Catawbas frequented the fort to receive ammunition and supplies and visited on their way to and from Charles Town. Lieutenant Mercier often distributed those presents and hosted Catawba visitors at the fort.⁴⁸ In 1753, Mercier asked for £700 for entertaining Catawbas and for sending an express to Charles Town. The Assembly challenged Mercier's "most extravagant" request for reimbursement and referred the matter to a committee.⁴⁹ Mercier unsuccessfully pled his case before the committee in April 1753. He eventually received £187.10.⁵⁰

Peter Mercier wed Elizabeth Haig at the Congaree Fort in 1751 or 1752. He leased a small plantation from Martin Sollom in Craven County but never became wealthy. In July 1753, Elizabeth gave birth to their only child, a daughter they named Margaret.⁵¹ Years later, in 1777, Margaret Mercier married Captain John Blake and lived at "the Bluff," the Blake family estate on Wappoo Creek. Formerly owned by Colonel George Lucas, Eliza Lucas Pinckney had experimented on indigo here a few decades earlier before the Lucas family sold the property to Captain Edward Blake. Edward Blake was naval commissioner during the Revolution, and John Blake was his fourth and youngest child.⁵²

⁴⁸ Report of Lieutenant Mercier, Stephen Crell, and Robert Steill, February 14, 1752, McDowell, *DRIA, I*: 216-217; *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 21, 1752-September 6, 1754* [Vol. 12], Terry W. Lipscomb, ed. (Columbia, S.C.: Published for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History by the University of South Carolina Press, 1983), p. 286 (August 22, 1753), 324 (January 19, 1754).

⁴⁹ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 21, 1752-September 6, 1754*, p. 93 (February 20, 1753), 111 (February 27, 1753).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117 (February 27, 1753), 120-121 (February 28, 1753), 162 (April 4, 1753), 170 (April 6, 1753). "Resolved, That Lieutenant Peter Mercier be paid the Sum of Four pounds," for articles supplied for the use of the forts. *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 12, 1754-September 23, 1755*, p. 531 (May 10, 1754).

⁵¹ Salley, Jr., *The History of Orangeburg County*, 140; "Sollom, Martin, Shoemaker, to Peter Mercier, Esq., of Saxegotha Township...Lease and Release for a Plantation on One Hundred and Fifty Acres in Craven County..." *Secretary of State. Recorded Instruments. Miscellaneous Records, 1732-1981*, S213003, Vol. 2I, p. 388 (microfilm at SC Archives)

⁵² "Marriage: Capt John Blake to Miss Margaret Mercier, daughter of the deceased Capt. Peter Mercier" (Thursday Nov. 27, 1777), *Marriage Notices in the South-Carolina and American General Gazette, From May 30, 1766, to February 28, 1781 and in its Successor the Royal Gazette, (1781-1782)*, A.S. Salley, Jr., ed. (Columbia: The State Company, 1914), 28; "Inscriptions from the Blake Burying-Ground at "the Bluff," on Wappoo," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 20:2 (April 1919):149.

From time to time the Congaree Fort hosted Cherokee diplomats who stopped there on their journeys to and from Charles Town (Charleston). In March 1753, Glen proposed to review the militia and to meet with Creek and Cherokee headmen at the Congaree Fort.⁵³ The following month he again proposed to march a detachment of 100 Independent Company troops to the Fort Congaree II for the conference. He hoped to “make a handsome Appearance” and to convince the Indians “that it would be no easy matter to attack even our Out Parts.” Informed that thirty “Norward” Indians had been spotted lurking in the Congarees and in Amelia Township (Orangeburg), and another sixteen or twenty had murdered a man forty or fifty miles from Charles Town, Glen revised, and eventually cancelled his plans. The Assembly sent presents to Fort Moore and Fort Congaree II for “friendly” Indians.⁵⁴ In 1755, Glen planned to meet Cherokee diplomats at Fort Congaree II, but pressed by the Indians who had to carry their disabled and ill headman Old Hop to the conference, Glen probably stopped at the fort before continuing to Saluda Old Town.⁵⁵

In 1750 no regular ferry operated “within ten Miles of the Congree Fort.” Petitioners suggested that the government grant a license to Jacob Geiger, who ferried goods across the Congaree on a canoe and had begun to build a flatboat. Other petitioners asked for a ferry license for Martin Fridig (Friday), a tanner and miller who lived on the west side of the Congaree River a half mile above the fort on the road that leads to the Catawba Nation.⁵⁶ Nothing came of these proposals, though both provided at least informal ferry services.

⁵³ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 21, 1752-September 6, 1754*, p. 153-154 (March 5, 1753).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 216, 222-223 (April 16, 1753)

⁵⁵ *South Carolina Gazette* [hereafter SCG], June 12, 1755, p. 2, July 24-July 31, 1755, p. 1-2 (microfilm at SC Archives).

⁵⁶ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, January 19, 1748-June 29, 1748*, p. 399 (February 9, 1750).

In 1752, Robert Steill, a storekeeper on the main road from the northern colonies across the Congaree River from Saxe Gotha started a ferry service “to the Landing near the Congaree Fort.” The South Carolina Assembly licensed him in March. The same day, they licensed Elizabeth Haig, who also ran a ferry further downstream nearer to her house.⁵⁷ After her husband’s death, Elizabeth Haig had operated her husband’s trading post. She entertained Catawba and Cherokee Indians on their visits to and from Charles Town and their villages.⁵⁸

In May 1754 Governor Glen granted Friday a license and a monopoly on the public ferry. Friday’s Ferry, situated north of the Fort just below the Fall Line, transported cargoes, animals, and travelers across the Congaree at all hours of the day and night. Ministers, Indians, and public servants floated for free.⁵⁹ By 1754, a new road opened from Augusta to Saxe Gotha Town, and the Fort featured prominently in the increased river traffic and settlement to the town.⁶⁰ Whether looking out on the Cherokee Path, on Saxe Gotha Town to the South, or on the river to the east, where slaves and ferry operators plied canoes and flat-bottomed, two-masted sailing boats called piraguas, activity in the area had noticeably increased by 1754.

Lieutenant Peter Mercier and the Independent Company at Great Meadows

During the unstable peace that ended the latest imperial war in 1748, the French began building forts to assert their claim to the North American interior. This endangered the plans of

⁵⁷ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, April 23, 1750-August 31, 1751*, p. 242 (February 9, 1751); *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 14, 1751-October 7, 1752*, p. 138 (March 10, 1752).

⁵⁸ George Haig left Elizabeth his estate of almost £570, including two silver watches, fifteen packhorses, forty-four horses, eighteen slaves, and forty-two gallons of rum. Helsley, *Unsung Heroines of the Carolina Frontier*, 68, 70n; “To Elizabeth Haig, for Indians’ Provisions, forty-six Pounds and fifteen Shillings £46.15.00.” *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, March 28, 1749-March 19, 1750*, p. 229 (May 22, 1749).

⁵⁹ “The Friday Family,” <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~msitawam/families/friday.pdf>. From J.S. Friday, *The Genealogy and History of the Friday Families from Switzerland, Colonial, and Southern America, 1535-2003* (Georgia: J.S. Friday, 2003). Accessed May 26, 2010. The price list: One person: 1 shilling, 3 pence (75 cents in 2000), empty cart: 5s; loaded cart: 10s; empty wagon: 7s6p; loaded wagon: 20p; hogs, sheep and cattle: 6p each. The ferry had two men always on duty, one white, day and night.

⁶⁰ Michie, “The Discovery of Old Fort Congaree,” 16.

the Ohio Company, a group of wealthy investors from Britain, Virginia and Maryland with plans to sell their British land grant in the disputed territory. In 1753, Virginia Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie sent twenty-one year-old Major George Washington with the Augusta and Frederick County militias to investigate. Washington delivered a letter to the French military commander insisting that the French leave. The French commander politely declined. Dinwiddie then sent more militia under Captain William Trent to build a small fort at the forks of the Ohio in present-day Pittsburgh. French troops soon rushed in and forced the Virginians to abandon the site. The French then constructed Fort Duquesne on the ruins.⁶¹

An impetuous Dinwiddie immediately prepared to send troops back to the Ohio Country. He called Virginia's House of Burgesses into action and pressed the Crown, South Carolina Governor James Glen and the other colonial governors for aid. When Dinwiddie dispatched now Lieutenant Colonel Washington back to the Ohio Country, Glen cringed. He repeatedly called for a conference of the colonial governors. He offered to come to Williamsburg to talk. Dinwiddie declined.⁶²

Upon the orders of the British Secretary of State, Glen reluctantly sent a composite of one third of South Carolina's Independent Companies under Captain James Mackay to join Washington's force. A number of soldiers from the Congaree Fort joined the composite company, leaving their wives and children behind in early-1754. 110 redcoats embarked on the *Jamaica* and on April 6, sailed to Virginia. Twenty-six days later, they arrived in Hampton

⁶¹ Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie to Glen, Williamsburg, January 29, 1754, McDowell, *DRIA*, I:472-474; A.S. Salley, Jr., *The Independent Company from South Carolina at Great Meadows*, Bulletins of the Historical Commission of South Carolina, No. 11 (Columbia, S.C.: Printed for the Commission by the State Company, Columbia, S.C., 1932), 4-7; see also *The Journal of Major George Washington* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1959), 16-17.

⁶² McDowell, *DRIA*, I:472-474, 477-479, 480-81; *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 21, 1752-September 6, 1754*, p. 395-396 (March 5, 1754), 410-411 (March 9, 1754). For Dinwiddie's April 15 letter, see 489 (May 7, 1754), 490 (May 7, 1754), on the Assembly's recommendations, 524-527 (May 10, 1754); see also *The Journal of Major George Washington*.

“after having been beat off that Coast three times,” and with a damaged rudder and sails. The officers, reduced to a quart of water per day, “were in a very weak Condition when landed.” On May 12, much refreshed, they then boarded two schooners and sailed to Alexandria. Then they proceeded overland to southwestern Pennsylvania.⁶³ While the troops were deployed, Elizabeth Mercier fed and clothed the wives and children and petitioned the Commons for reimbursement.⁶⁴

Mackay was actually officially Washington’s superior, but to avoid a conflict, he agreed that the two would, in effect, exercise a joint command.⁶⁵ By the time the Independent Company detachment arrived on June 12, Washington and some of his men had already skirmished with a party of French. The Virginians and the South Carolina Independents hastily erected a small palisaded fort, Fort Necessity, at the Great Meadows, thirty-seven miles from Fort Duquesne. Prepared for the worst, Lieutenant Mercier wrote his last will and testament, leaving everything to “my dear & Loving Wife.”⁶⁶

Governor Glen was incensed. Events in the Ohio Country “greatly alarmed” him, he wrote to the Secretary of State. “A small Spark may kindle a great Fire, and [we] are affraid that if the Flame bursts out all the Water in the Ohio will not be able to extinguish it, but that it may

⁶³ Many of these men had just built Fort Prince George, opposite the Cherokee village of Keowee. Glen equipped them with good weapons from the public armory. *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 21, 1752-September 6, 1754*, p. xxxii; Governor Glen to Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie, Council Chamber, March 25, 1754, McDowell, *DRIA* I: 482-484; William Harden, “James Mackay, of Strathy Hall, Comrade in Arms of George Washington,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 1 (June 1917):77-98; Governor Glen to Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie, South Carolina, June 1, 1754, McDowell, *DRIA*, I: 528; Salley, Jr., *The Independent Company from South Carolina at Great Meadows*, 4-5; *SCG*, Tuesday, April 2-Tuesday, April 9, 1754, p. 2; Thursday, June 20-Thursday, June 27, 1754, p. 1; Thursday, July 18-Thursday, July 25, 1754, p. 2. Sometimes women were left behind. Other times, their numbers were limited per regiment and the decision was made by a lottery. Redmon, *The British Barrack Institution in North America*. Independent Company troops now garrisoned Fort Prince George, Fort Moore, Fort Frederick, Fort Congaree, Fort Frederica, and Fort Johnson.

⁶⁴ For Elizabeth Mercier’s petition, see *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 12, 1754-September 23, 1755*, p. 133 (February 28, 1755). The Assembly agreed to reimburse her for £109.14.1 on May 9: *Ibid.*, p. 281 (May 9, 1755).

⁶⁵ Salley, Jr., *The Independent Company from South Carolina at Great Meadows*, 13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-11; *Journal of George Washington*, 45-46; *Charleston County, South Carolina, Record of Wills, 1752-1756*, S213027, Vol. OO (microfilm at SC Archives), p. 290-291.

soon spread and light up a general Conflagration.”⁶⁷ He correctly predicted the French and Indian War. He also believed Virginia would pull the Cherokees into the conflict. This put the South Carolina frontier at risk of attack by French troops or French-allied Indians and undermined Glen’s Cherokee diplomacy. With many of the Independent Company troops gone to Virginia, white Charles Town residents feared a slave uprising. Glen begged Dinwiddie to send the Independent Company detachment back to South Carolina, but to no avail.⁶⁸

On July 3, 1754, Nine hundred French soldiers surrounded the three hundred Virginian militiamen and South Carolina Independents at Fort Necessity. “From the numbers of the enemy and our situation we could not hope for victory,” Mackay and Washington concluded. Firing from all sides in the pouring rain, the French drubbed the Anglo-Virginian army, killing thirty and wounding seventy. Among the dead was Lieutenant Mercier, “a gentleman of true military worth and whose bravery would not permit him to retire,” Mackay and Washington reported. “Though dangerously wounded,” he continued to fight, “till a second shot disabled him, and a third put an end to his life, as he was carrying to the surgeon.” Washington and Mackay surrendered after a nine-hour long battle.⁶⁹

When the news of Mercier’s death at the Battle of Great Meadows reached Charles Town, Captain Manly Williams, an Independent Company officer and a friend stationed there, published an elegy “To the Memory of Lieut. Peter Mercier, Esq; who fell in the late Battle near Ohio River in Virginia, July 3d, 1754,” in the *South Carolina Gazette*. The poem included the

⁶⁷ James Glen to Sir Thomas Robinson, Charles Town, August 15, 1754, McDowell, *DRIA*, I:532.

⁶⁸ *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 21, 1752-September 6, 1754*, p. 437 (April 23), 482-83 (May 4), 485 (May 4), 558 (May 11), 572 (September 6); James Glen to Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie, South Carolina, June 1, 1754, McDowell, *DRIA*, I: 528.

⁶⁹ Dinwiddie to Glen, McDowell, *DRIA*, I: 528-532; letter from Williamsburg, VA, July 19, 1754 in *SCG*, August 22, 1754, p. 1.; James E. Kibler, Jr. “George Milligen, Colonial Carolina Elegist,” *Early American Literature* 27:2 (1992):101-116; Salley, Jr., *The Independent Company from South Carolina at Great Meadows*, 14.

lines, “Ah! lost too soon — too early snatched away / To joys unfading, and immortal day!”⁷⁰

Elizabeth Mercier became a widow once more, now with four fatherless children.⁷¹

The Congaree Garrison after Fort Necessity

What became of the Independent Company troops after the battle of Fort Necessity?

They remained at Will’s Creek on the Pennsylvania frontier until two independent companies from New York joined them, one commanded by Captain Horatio Gates and the other by Captain John Rutherford. They built Fort Cumberland (Maryland). Captain Mackay and the South Carolina Independent Company officers returned to South Carolina. Captain Paul Demere (later commander of Fort Loudoun) replaced him. The composite company then accompanied General Edward Braddock on his ill-fated expedition to the Monongahela. Major General William Shirley then drafted the surviving privates into his 50th Regiment of Foot, against orders.⁷²

Meanwhile, back in South Carolina, South Carolina’s new governor, William Henry Lyttelton, drew troops from the three Independent companies stationed at the forts in South Carolina and Georgia to build and garrison a fort in the Cherokee Overhills, under Captain Raymond Demere. The remaining troops at Fort Congaree marched into the Cherokee Overhills. On the way to Cherokee Country, Demere noted the ruinous condition of “the Congaree Fort,

⁷⁰ See “To the Memory of Lieut. Peter Mercier, Esq; who fell in the late Battle near Ohio River in Virginia, July 3d, 1754” by M[anly] W[illiams], *SCG*, September 12, 1754, in Salley, Jr., *The Independent Company from South Carolina at Great Meadows*, 14; James E. Kibler, Jr., “George Milligen, Colonial Carolina Elegist,” *Early American Literature* 27:2 (1992): 106.

⁷¹ Elizabeth had 900 acres surveyed in her name and continued to submit claims to the Commons House for entertaining Indians. Helsley, *Unsung Heroines of the South Carolina Frontier*, 70n; *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 14, 1751-October 7, 1752*, p. 119 (March 6, 1752); *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 21, 1752-September 6, 1754*, p. 92 (February 20, 1753), 93 (February 20, 1753), 117 (February 28, 1753); *The Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, November 20, 1755–July 6, 1757*, p. 99 (February 11, 1756), 276 (July 2, 1756). Elizabeth married David Webb, in 1768. Webb, originally from Virginia, marched under Colonel John Chevillette in Lyttelton’s 1759 expedition against the Cherokees. Webb owned 150 acres in Saxe Gotha township adjacent to Elizabeth Mercier. Elizabeth predeceased Webb, who died in 1772 and left his estate to his parents, who still lived in Virginia. Helsley, *Unsung Heroines of the Carolina Frontier*, 70n.

⁷² Foote, “Independent Companies,” 317-318.

which is well known in Charles Town.”⁷³ Neither the British Crown nor the colony of South Carolina provided any additional funding for the fort after 1756, and troops never again garrisoned it.

The Decline of Fort Congaree II

In 1758 and 1759 Cherokee warriors and European settlers clashed on the southern frontiers. Diplomacy failed, and South Carolina declared war on the Cherokee Indians. The Congarees hosted British and Provincial soldiers on three separate military expeditions against the Cherokee. Governor Lyttelton visited the Congarees with 1,100 Provincials in 1759. Archibald Montgomery and his Scottish Highlanders, with four companies of the 1st Regiment of Foot (Royal Scots) camped at the Congarees in 1760 before their defeat in the Cherokee Middle Towns near present Franklin, North Carolina. Curiously enough, transferred from Regiment to Regiment, it remains possible that some of the privates who had served at the Congaree fort in 1754 before heading to the Ohio Country, the so-called “Lost Company,” actually returned to South Carolina with the Royal Scots in 1760!⁷⁴ Montgomery left the Royal Scots in the Congarees. Later that fall, Captain Benjamin Gordon reported that the Royal Scots found two caches of contraband goods in the woods, two miles “from the fort,” and on the path leading to Keowee (the Cherokee Path) so it still stood in late-1760.⁷⁵

⁷³ Foote, “Independent Companies,” 318n; Captain Raymond Demere to Governor Lyttelton, Ninety Six, June 9, 1756, and Demere to Lyttelton, Fort Prince George, July 6, 1756, William L. McDowell, ed., *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, Vol. 2: 1754-1765* [hereafter *DRIA, II*] (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1974), 119, 131.

⁷⁴ William A. Foote, “The South Carolina Independents,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 62:4 (October 1961):199.

⁷⁵ Captain Benjamin Gordon, Camp at Congarees, November 11, 1760, in *Journals of His Majesty’s Council* (Early State Records reel E1p/8): 1757-1762 (microfilm at SC Archives). Unit 4: July 1, 1760-Dec. 30, 1760, p. 53 (November 15, 1760).

The following year, Colonel James Grant led 2,900 British Regulars and South Carolina Provincials, including Francis Marion, John and William Moultrie, Isaac Huger, and Andrew Pickens – against the Cherokee Indians. For months before the campaign, soldiers camped along the Congaree River, but none of the sources that discuss any of these campaigns mention the Congaree Fort. Victorious, Grant’s Army, with the Royal Scots, embarked for the Caribbean. Presumably, Fort Congaree II fell into disrepair. A victim of South Carolina’s heat and humidity and of the frequent flooding of the Congaree River it probably decayed rapidly. It does not appear in any records beyond 1760.

Often forgotten and overshadowed by other colonial British fortifications in the southeast like Fort Loudoun in Tennessee, Fort Congaree II played a vital role in the history of the Midlands. It was built at a time of rapid growth and settlement in the area. It commanded a strategic position at an important crossroads: at the intersection of the Congaree River, the Cherokee Path and the northern limits of Saxe Gotha Town. In peacetime, its garrison bustled with activity. Farmers and merchants, African slaves, Catawba Indians, local settlers, and ministers visited often. Soldiers and settlers worshipped together, conducted business, and even married each other. The fort protected upcountry settlers from Indian attacks and gave them peace of mind. It helped South Carolina support the struggling but loyal Catawba Nation. Its soldiers left their wives and children behind and participated in the opening battle of the French and Indian War. And its commander made the ultimate sacrifice to the British cause. The story of Fort Congaree II offers a glimpse into an oft-forgotten chapter in the history of Cayce, and of colonial South Carolina.