

North Carolina Loyalist Overview (This document provides no direct details on Rice Bass. It is intended to provide context and information on the Loyalists' role in the war and conflicts between Patriot and Loyalist, Colonial Americans.)

From: <https://www.ncpedia.org/loyalists>

Loyalists

by Carole Watterson Troxler, 2006
Additional research provided by Laura Morgan.

See also: [Act of Pardon and Oblivion](#); [Brown's Marsh, Battle of](#); [Highland Regiment, North Carolina](#); [Lindley's Mill, Battle of](#); [Llewelyn Conspiracy](#); [Moore's Creek Bridge, Battle of](#).

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Part 1: Introduction



"Inspection: A few of the colonial loyalists stand ready for inspection."

Loyalists, or Tories, were residents of the colonies who supported the British during the [American](#)

Revolution. Popular imagery has created the Loyalist stereotype as the local rogue-the drunkard, the miser, the wild man in the woods, the robber, or the sly trader in any line of work. Although some North Carolina Loyalists might be classed as rogues, most belonged to segments of society that would be expected to remain attached to the British government, including merchants whose businesses were seated in Scottish trading centers, English officeholders serving their time in colonial administration (and on the side making property investments in America for their extended families), and immigrants recently arrived from various parts of Europe (but largely from the British Isles). Others declared their allegiances as a result of personal rivalries and experiences or issues faced in their immediate setting.

North Carolina's Loyalists were as varied in their interests, occupations, origins, education, ambitions, and expectations for the future as those who believed in and fought for American independence. Most of them had a deep love for North Carolina and the social ties that they enjoyed there, and they were undoubtedly troubled by the divide between them and many of their fellow citizens. However, they were willing to fight for a principle. Loyalist Jonas Bedford, who was born in 1735 in Elizabethtown but later lived in the western part of the colony, expressed the sentiment of many Loyalists in his response to a Patriot officer urging him to sign an oath: "I have been Sworn as an Officer and Magistrate under my lawful Sovereign. I never will turn my back to my King's cause and perjure myself. I shall remain a loyal Honest Subject during my life and to my King and Country." For five years Bedford lived quietly and unmolested-until the British arrived in the neighborhood in 1781. It was then that his insecure neighbors burned his house. He was forced to flee, leaving his wife and eight children behind.

Loyalists who could afford to do so often left the colony. Many officeholders who owed their position to the royal government simply packed their possessions and went into exile. Large numbers of **Highland Scots** who had been in North Carolina for a generation or less moved to Nova Scotia or Florida, neither of which was involved in the **American Revolution**.

Some historians have argued that there was a higher proportion of Loyalists among North Carolina residents than in any other colony, but this appears to be false. North Carolina's proportion seems to have been greater than that of Pennsylvania and Connecticut, but the colony seems to have lagged behind New York's and Georgia's Loyalist population. The excellent port facilities at New York Harbor, New York City's concentration of wealth, and the fact that it offered refuge to Loyalists from elsewhere may explain its large number. Georgia, as the youngest English colony in America, was not as completely weaned from the mother country as the older colonies had been.

Part 2: Loyalists' Role in the War

In the weeks before the **Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge** in February 1776, Loyalists responded to **Governor Josiah Martin's** call to arms to oppose the "illegal" actions being taken by revolutionaries. The British troops that the government had promised to Martin failed to arrive, and the Loyalists who still remained in the rendezvous area (predominantly Scottish Highlanders) were dramatically defeated and humiliated. As a result, for some time thereafter men whose positive response to the governor's call was known or suspected found it unsafe to remain in their homes. Ethnic resentments against "Scotch" people in various areas worsened their position.

During the time between the Declaration of Independence in July 1776 and the arrival of British forces in Charles Towne (now Charleston, S.C.) in May 1780, many men who later would take a Loyalist stand served in the new state militia as it evolved from the colonial militia. Some militia

leaders and their followers arranged compromises by which they agreed to fight [Native Americans](#) but not the British government. Others refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the state, which during these years became a requirement for participation in the militia. Service in the militia was required from every able-bodied man, except [Quakers](#), [Moravians](#), Dunkards, and [Mennonites](#), who paid higher taxes instead. So refusal to take the oath of allegiance generally meant that a man would have to hide in the woods to evade capture or else leave the area.

The years 1780, 1781, and even much of 1782 saw bitter civil war, sometimes called the "Tory War," led by men such as infamous Loyalist leader [David Fanning](#). There was also much side-switching among Loyalists and Patriots. In 1781 it was said that British commander [Lord Charles Cornwallis](#) and American general Nathanael Greene fought each other with armies composed largely of the other's deserters. For prisoners of war, service in the captor's forces was a working option, and men were still joining the Continental Army in 1782 after having been captured as Loyalists in battle or its aftermath.

Part 3: African American Loyalists

For black slaves, the presence of British forces presented an opportunity for independence and a new life as Loyalists. At the start of the conflict, British commanders offered freedom to enslaved blacks who would join them. Such proclamations were pragmatic efforts to weaken the rebels. They were framed by military and political considerations, not humanitarian ones. Even so, during and after the war philanthropists and advocates of emancipation in Britain provided practical assistance to former slaves who had managed to leave with the British and maintain their freedom. For black North Carolinians, the chief opportunities to escape slavery in this way came near the beginning and the end of the war, when British forces were nearby. The pro-British Black Pioneers originated with the 1776 exodus. Black sergeants Thomas Peters and Murphy Steel were crucial leaders in this corps, although their commanding officer was a white North Carolinian, Allen Stewart. For larger numbers of [African Americans](#), however, the British installations at [Wilmington](#) and Charles Towne were magnets during 1781 and 1782.

For a self-emancipated black Loyalist, serving in the British war effort did not guarantee either personal liberty or eventual economic independence. For one thing, white Loyalists might claim them as property, legally or not. In addition, once the war's outcome became clear, victorious revolutionaries tried to bargain with the departing British and Loyalists for the return of former slaves. The fact that revolutionaries and Loyalists had stolen slaves from each other throughout the war increased confusion and complicated official efforts to sort out ownership.

Black Loyalists served in many capacities: as artillery workers, laborers for myriad tasks of construction and military engineering, trumpeters, drummers, guides, sailors, laundresses, cooks, personal servants for privileged officers, foragers, and pilots for other fugitives. A few black men ended the war as privates in the Royal North Carolina Regiment. From Charles Towne and New York, black North Carolina Loyalists dispersed as free people largely to East Florida and Nova Scotia, where they faced further threats to their independence.

Part 4: Loyalist Fate at War's End

Historians have described North Carolina's treatment of Loyalists as "light." There were many trials and imprisonments, but large numbers of Loyalists were merely paroled to their neighborhoods. Serious offenders against the trend to independence, or those who continued to wage attacks in the

state after the war had officially ended, had their property confiscated, but as often as not provision was made for wives and dependent children to continue in possession of adequate resources. Individuals who were potentially dangerous, however, were rounded up and transported out of North Carolina to an area that was more securely in American hands.

When [Cornwallis](#) went into Virginia, a number of North Carolinians, mainly militia, accompanied him. Some of them were captured after Yorktown, and they were exchanged for transport to the British post at New York and went from there to Nova Scotia. Similarly, other North Carolina Loyalists who happened to be with British forces at the time of their departure went with them to East Florida, England, Scotland, Ireland, British North America, the Bahamas, the West Indies, and the Mosquito Coast. Many of them returned to North Carolina; probably far more Loyalists remained in North Carolina than left it. On the other hand, in the early 1790s a few Loyalists moved from [Rowan](#) and [Orange](#) Counties to present-day Ontario, Canada.

In general, the perception and treatment of Loyalists in North Carolina depended on local relationships and circumstances. This was as true after the war as it was during the conflict. Wartime legislation gave authority to district commissioners to sell property owned by persons named in the Confiscation Acts. Later, those named in the acts were specifically excluded from the pardon that the 1783 [Act of Pardon and Oblivion](#) provided. The law also denied pardon to anyone who had held a British commission.

After the war, American Loyalists could have their claims concerning lost land, property, money, and salary reviewed by a special committee in England. A great many whose losses were only moderate probably made no effort to recoup anything. There were 243 people, however, who took the time and trouble to obtain the evidence necessary to support their claims. The majority of the claims were rejected, and the claimants who were paid received only about 10 percent of the value of their losses.

The final arbiter of property owned by Loyalists seems to have been the district and county courts. Particularly on the county level, persons accused of Loyalism stood to lose their property by debt suits and resulting sheriffs' sales unless they were protected by friends and family with local authority. Several wives petitioned the legislature for ownership of their departed husbands' property. A wife's ownership was not a protection against debt suits, however. On the other hand, some Loyalists returned to their home areas and resumed peaceful lives, and many never left their North Carolina homes.

by Carole Watterson Troxler, 2006



Black Sailor's portrait painted during the American Revolution. Portrait by unknown artist, c. 1780. Original in the Newport Historical Society. Image courtesy of Learn NC.

Additional research provided by Laura Morgan.

See also: [Act of Pardon and Oblivion](#); [Brown's Marsh, Battle of](#); [Highland Regiment, North Carolina](#); [Lindley's Mill, Battle of](#); [Llewelyn Conspiracy](#); [Moore's Creek Bridge, Battle of](#).

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The Highland Scots

by Kathryn Beach

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Tar Heel Junior Historian Association, NC Museum of History

See also: [Scottish Settlers](#); [Argyll Colony](#); [Highland Games](#); [Gaelic Language](#); [Crofter Immigration](#)



"Donald MacDonald dancing the Highland Fling while girl plays accordion at first Highland Games in 1956 near Grandfather Mountain, NC." Photographed by Hugh Morton. Image courtesy of UNC- Chapel Hill Libraries.

The surnames Campbell, McNeill and Stewart, and the prevalence of Presbyterian churches are two of the legacies of Highland Scots who immigrated to North Carolina. Highlanders are descendants of [Celts](#) who settled in the northern mainland and islands of Scotland, which is part of Great Britain. The Highland Scots are unique in the way they moved in large, organized groups directly from their homeland to the North Carolina colony.

The Highlands are a beautiful but rugged land of mountainous, rocky terrain and harsh winters. In the 1700s it was a poor region where the staple foods were oatmeal and beef. The landscape promoted isolation and independence, and as late as the early 1700s, Highland society was structured along a tribal clan system. The clan chief—who was related by blood to clan members—provided land for members to farm. They, in turn, gave him obedience, military service, and land rents.

Scotland experienced changes in the mid-1700s that resulted in thousands of Highlanders emigrating. Many Highland clans supported Charles Edward Stuart—whose grandfather had been King James II of England—in his attempt to take the English throne from King George II. The Highland army of “Bonnie Prince Charlie” was defeated at Culloden Moor in 1746 by Scottish and English forces. The aftermath of this defeat included the victors’ taking weapons from the Highlanders; forbidding clan members to give military service to their chief; putting clansmen under the jurisdiction of the law, rather than their chief; forbidding the wearing of Highlanders’ native tartans, or plaids; and requiring all schooling to be conducted in English, rather than the Highlanders’ native [Gaelic language](#).

Other forces contributed to emigration. A marked increase in population—due to the introduction of the smallpox vaccine and the building of roads that allowed easier availability of imported food during times of starvation—put pressure on a region that already had meager resources.

Improvements in farming methods, such as the introduction of the metal plow, and a change in the allocation of land to tenants enabled the production of food by fewer people. Shepherding, a profitable industry that took land away from farming, was also introduced to the Highlands. The combination of these changes resulted in the displacement of many people from the land.

The first organized immigration of Highlanders to North Carolina came in 1739, when 350 people from [Argyllshire](#) journeyed to [Wilmington](#) and up the [Cape Fear River](#) to settle in what became [Cumberland County](#). Letters written back to Scotland encouraged further immigration. [Alexander McAllister](#) wrote to relatives urging them, “Well to take currence [sic] and com [sic] to this country it will be of benifite [sic] to the rising generation.” Others did follow. By 1775 thousands of Highlanders had come to the colony. British officials interviewed departing Highlanders in 1773 as to their reasons for emigrating. Laborers stated that they hoped for better employment in North Carolina. Tradesmen expected better business. Farmers cited high rents and oppressive service to their landlords as reasons for moving to the Americas. The hope for a better future for oneself and one’s children was a major force behind immigration 230 years ago and remains so today.

Immigrating to North Carolina was a hard journey, requiring weeks on a sailing ship that was subject to the whims of nature. [James Hogg](#) organized a group of 264 immigrants to travel to North Carolina in 1773 on the ship Bachelor. Ship’s passage for individuals age eight and above was three pounds and ten shillings—approximately \$553 in current U.S. funds, adjusted for inflation. Hogg contracted with the shipowner to provide healthy food. Weekly adult rations consisted of: 2 lb. meat, 2 lb. barley, 5 lb. bread biscuit, 4 lb. oatmeal, 1 lb. molasses, and 6 gal. water. Passengers gathered at the end of June for their journey, but the ship did not arrive at port until the end of August. Sailing at the beginning of the Atlantic storm season, the Bachelor was immediately hit by a gale and had to seek shelter. Upon sailing the second time, the ship encountered another storm. Then smallpox broke out on board. The ship was harbored in the [Shetland Islands](#) in northern Scotland when a third storm caused severe damage. Months later the passengers were taken not to [Wilmington](#) but to [Edinburgh, Scotland](#), where those who still had money booked passage to North Carolina on a different ship.

Highlanders were encouraged to settle in colonial North Carolina by royal governor [Gabriel Johnston](#). Johnston, himself a native Lowland Scot and the colony’s governor from 1734 until 1752, granted the immigrants a ten-year exemption on paying public or county taxes. Most Scots coming to the colony were farmers who needed land, so this tax exemption offered a strong incentive. When the Highlanders arrived, their priorities were to select land, have it surveyed, and then plant a crop. The native longleaf pines allowed crops to be planted without the backbreaking work of first removing all trees. Settlers removed a ring of bark from the pines, killing the trees; this caused needles to fall and sunlight to reach crops.

The Scottish Highlanders had many adjustments to make in their new home. North Carolina was an English colony; consequently, English was the language used by many settlers and the only language used by government and the courts. Highlanders spoke Gaelic. Only educated Scots spoke and read English. The Highlanders were [Presbyterian](#). Because North Carolina was a royal colony, its official religion was Anglican, or [Church of England](#). Marriages by Presbyterian ministers were not considered legal. Although Highlanders did not attend Anglican services, they were taxed to support Anglican churches throughout the colonial period.

The Highlands are a cold, rocky land where many areas have no trees. New immigrants had to adapt to a very warm, swampy, and forested [Coastal Plain](#). Scottish homes were made of stone; most early North Carolina homes were made of wood. The thin soil and short growing season of the Highlands

made oats and barley the main crops. In their new home, Scots grew corn and wheat and raised hogs rather than cattle. They also produced **naval stores**—pitch and tar rendered from the sap of pine trees and used to protect the hulls and rigging of wooden ships.

Despite differences in language, religion, and traditions, the Highland Scots integrated into North Carolina society. They were involved in both local and **colonial** government. When the colonial assembly called for a Revolutionary Congress to meet in 1774, two Highlanders represented **Cumberland County**. Concerned over the thousands of Highlanders immigrating to the colony in 1774, the **Provincial Congress** asked a group of Highlanders, including Farquard Campbell and Alexander McAllister, to meet with new arrivals and explain the nature of the colonists' grievances with England. In 1775 McAllister wrote to relatives in Scotland that "All colonies [are] fully determined to fight to the last before they give up their most valuable privilege which is their liberty. If Parliament persists in putting the acts [Intolerable Acts] in force, they will have a severe battle."

Many books portray the Highlanders as **Loyalists** (individuals who remained loyal to England) during the **American Revolution**. The war divided neighbors into **Patriots** and Loyalists, and so it did with the Highlanders. Many newly immigrated Highlanders, as well as some long-established colonial Highlanders, joined the Loyalist cause. Some, like McAllister, were Patriots. For many, the Revolution was spent just trying to survive the demands and actions of both groups. Throughout the war and after it, some Highlanders left to settle in **Canada** and **Bermuda** or to return to Great Britain, but many stayed to become Americans. After ceasing during the Revolution, Highland immigration to North Carolina began again within months of the war ending and continued well into the 1800s.

Yearning for land and better employment, forced to flee their own country because of "improvements," the Highland Scots came to North Carolina with hopes of a better future. They were forced to learn a new language, faced prejudice against their religion, and initially felt isolated from the general society. They adapted and became an integral part of the communities in which they settled, adding parts of their own heritage to our American culture. The Scottish presence continues to be felt in the **Cape Fear region** and across the state through the influence of the Presbyterian Church; the number of North Carolinians who carry Scottish surnames and claim Scottish ancestry; the counties, towns, and even streets with Scottish names; and events such as **Highland Games**.

At the time of the publication of this article, Kathryn Beach is associate curator at the Museum of the Cape Fear Historical Complex in Fayetteville. Visit the museum's Web site at <http://museumofthecapefear.ncdcr.gov/>.

Additional Resources:

McAllister Family Papers, 1860-1897, UNC-Chapel Hill Libraries:
http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/m/McAllister_Family.html

James Hogg, NC Highway Historical Marker G-108, North Carolina Office of Archives and History.

Image Credit:

"Donald MacDonald dancing the Highland Fling while girl plays accordion at first Highland Games in 1956 near Grandfather Mountain, NC." Photographed by Hugh Morton. Image courtesy of UNC-Chapel Hill Libraries. Available from http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/morton_highlights/id/3916 (accessed August 15, 2012).

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Comments

Living in Highland Scotland,

[Permalink](#) Submitted by Alison Drew (not verified) on Wed, 12/16/2020 - 16:58

Living in Highland Scotland, I would like to clarify a few points. In the 1700's a very large number of Highland Scots would still have been Catholic. The Scottish Reformation, leading to the establishment of the Presbyterian church, had begun 2 centuries earlier, but Catholicism remained strong in many parts of the Highlands.

The major factors driving Highland Scots to emigrate in the mid 1700's included the well documented violence of the Cumberland led English troops seeking to eradicate those loyal to the Jacobite cause, followed then by the Clearances. That was a deliberate policy to clear the land of tenant farmers, seen as unprofitable by landowners, usually loyal to the English crown. People were burned out their homes and forced to seek a living in Scottish cities or for many, they emigrated. The principal replacement on the land was sheep, seen as a much more profitable use of the land. The idea that Highland Scots would have largely been Loyalists sits as unlikely. Slaughtered at Culloden by the English, hunted down afterwards then forcibly evicted. Many were even forcibly put onto the emigrant ships. Yes, some would have been loyal but from a Highlander perspective, few would have felt much loyalty to a Crown that had so systematically attempted to eradicate them. Clans were not based on familial blood relationship. There is far too much poorly informed information out there on this topic. Family clan tartans are a 19thc. invention. Clans evolved over centuries as system of strong local leaders to whom farmers owed fealty in return for protection. Many families, no fancy tartans. People changed allegiances not family. I could go on. But won't.

Tory

by David A. Norris, 2006

See also: [Loyalists](#); [Moore's Creek Bridge, Battle of](#).

"Tory" was a political term originally applied to members of the political party in England that favored the policies of the monarchy and the established church over the king's opponents in Parliament. During the [American Revolution](#), adherents of the royal government who opposed the Revolution were called "Tories" or "[Loyalists](#)." The province of North Carolina was believed to have had one of the highest percentages of Loyalists of all the rebellious colonies. It is not surprising that many wealthy merchants and planters with financial ties to England were Tories, as were many Crown officials and Anglican clergymen. However, Tories were members of every level of society

and lived in every part of the colony. Some Tories were [German immigrants](#) to the [piedmont](#). In addition, many former [Regulators](#), Piedmont frontiersmen who had rebelled against the colonial government, were Tories during the war. The former Regulators had no serious grievances against the Crown itself, but they believed that the provincial government was dominated by corrupt and powerful eastern planters.

Another strong Tory element was the [Scottish immigrant population](#) concentrated along the [Cape Fear River Valley](#). Despite their participation in a failed rebellion against the British monarchy in 1746, many Scots in North Carolina remained loyal to the British. Some held to an oath they had taken to support the king; many others thought that a monarchy was the only practical kind of government and feared repression or anarchy without it; and some prominent Scottish leaders still had estates in Scotland. Loyalist forces included black soldiers; some were legally freemen, but many were former slaves. In exchange for military service, the British offered to emancipate the slaves of Patriot owners.



Photograph of a monument to Loyalists killed in the Battle of Moore's

Creek Bridge. Image from the North Carolina Museum of History. Early in the Revolutionary War, Governor [Josiah Martin](#) was optimistic about the prospects of raising Tory military units in North Carolina to join British regulars in putting down the rebellion. The Tories, mostly [Highland Scots](#) with some former Regulators who were to join Martin, were defeated and dispersed at the [Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge](#) on 27 Feb. 1776. From then until the arrival in North Carolina in September 1780 of British forces under Lord Charles Cornwallis, Tory resistance in the colony was

limited, such as the avoidance of loyalty oaths or military service for the Whigs, clandestine plots, and sporadic armed conflict.

When the army of Cornwallis marched into North Carolina in 1780, a number of Tories joined the British. A substantial Tory force, under Maj. Patrick Ferguson, was raised to protect Cornwallis's left flank and end Patriot resistance in the west. Instead, on 7 Oct. 1780 Ferguson was decisively defeated at the [Battle of King's Mountain](#), just south of the North Carolina boundary.

Although Cornwallis was ultimately disappointed that more Tories did not join him, Loyalist North Carolinians were important participants in most of his battles. Lt. Col. John Hamilton's regiment of North Carolina Volunteers was one of the units that surrendered with Cornwallis at Yorktown. North Carolina Tories served in other British provincial regiments and in Loyalist militia units, as well. When the last British regulars left North Carolina on 18 Nov. 1781, armed resistance by Tories continued. Col. [David Fanning](#) led a force of North Carolina Tories who captured Governor [Thomas Burke](#) during a raid on Hillsborough on 12 Sept. 1781. Fanning's troops continued fighting as late as May 1782. A combined force of British regulars and Tories from Charleston, S.C., captured Beaufort on 5 Apr. 1782 and held it for a short time.

Tories in North Carolina were punished by Confiscation Acts, passed from 1776 to 1782, that allowed their lands to be seized. They also faced violent persecution from the [Whigs](#), especially in areas remote from British troops. However, many Tories who survived the war and remained in North Carolina were relieved by the Act of Pardon and Oblivion in 1783.

During and after the Revolution, thousands of Tories, including many from North Carolina, moved either forcibly or voluntarily to British possessions elsewhere, including Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Bermuda, the Bahamas, and Florida, or to England or Scotland. A few black Loyalists eventually immigrated to the British colony of Sierra Leone in West Africa.

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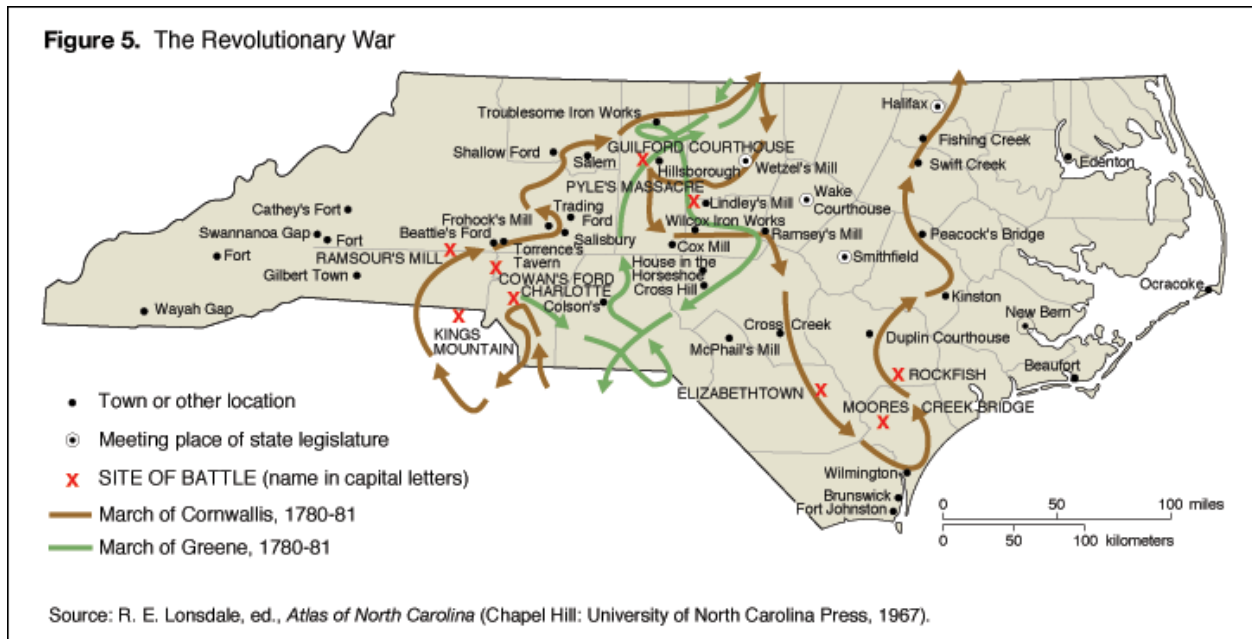
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