



WHERE INDEPENDENCE WAS WON

By DANIEL E. HARMON

Under the shade at Wagstop Plantation near Pa-colet, a modern militia, some 50 strong, assembles from across two states en route to a Revolutionary War battleground. Men and women of various ages, they're uniformed in hiking attire. Their field equipment: notepads, maps, cameras and insect repellent. They're prepared to trod miles beyond four-wheel accessibility, if need be, to investigate yet another site of a little-known skirmish in America's War for Independence.

Why? Because arguably, the war was won here. These places are important to members of the Corps of Discovery, an arm of the Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution (SCAR) organization based in Camden. They include scholars and authors as well as amateur historians and history hobbyists. The trees and clearings they find little resemble the scenarios that existed long ago, but it stirs their blood just to be there, to take in the sights, sounds and ambience, to hear authorities explain, onsite, what took place.

The outing is led by Camden lawyer Charles Baxley. Although he earns his living in the halls of justice and legal records, Baxley's passion and heart are on bygone battlefields. The same is true of another Camden lawyer, David Reuwer. Few Revolutionary War historians and enthusiasts are engaged more actively in broadening public interest in the conflict.

Baxley, a Lugoff native, took an interest in local history only about 20 years ago. His initial dabbling naturally led him into a deepening study of the Revolution because of Camden's prominence in the conflict and its location as a bustling frontier crossroads. The great Philadelphia Wagon Road (previously known as the Waxhaw Trail and, before that, the Catawba Trading Path) included part of what is now Camden's Broad Street. Two major battles were fought here.

Reuwer has been a history buff most of his life. Growing up in Maryland, he became interested in Civil War history and was actively involved in preservation at an early age. "Revolutionary War history



Editor David Reuwer (opposite) at work on *American Revolution* magazine. Above: Charles Baxley, who edits *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, at the *Battle of Camden* marker for fallen hero Baron DeKalb.

TWO CAMDEN LAWYERS CAN PRESENT A PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT THAT IT WAS WON IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

grew on me immediately upon coming to South Carolina in 1990 because of the breadth, depth and range of the untold truths of what happened here.”

After Reuwer opened his litigation practice in Camden in 2000, mutual acquaintances pointed out their common interest to Reuwer and Baxley. “People were telling me I needed to meet Charles, and people were telling him he needed to meet me.”

When they did meet, they by no means agreed on Revolutionary War history, but they merged their zeal and knowledge, founding SCAR on Reuwer’s dining table. “We’re like Laurel and Hardy,” Reuwer muses. “We’re opposites. We think differently. Yet, we’re a good team. That’s what makes it work. We see that we’re opposite sides of the same coin. We disagree all the time. Our styles are different, too. I’m hyperactive; he’s more methodical. That blends beautifully.”

SCAR began producing a newsletter, *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, now an online magazine edited by Baxley. Baxley and Reuwer

organized formal bus tours to battle sites, created the Corps of Discovery for informal field trips, and established the Southern Campaigns Roundtable, a quarterly gathering at which professional and amateur researchers share their findings.

“It grew from there,” Baxley says. “It’s become a network of interested individuals all over the world. We’re not that organized; it’s an interesting experiment in different organizations. It’s evolved. It’s almost too weird to describe.”

Nonetheless, authors, archaeologists, battlefield preservationists, re-enactors, local historians, photographers and casual history buffs have banded beneath the SCAR banner.

The interests and activities of Baxley and Reuwer reach far beyond the scope of SCAR. They are involved in the Archaeological Reconnaissance and Computerization of Hobkirk’s Hill, Inc. (ARCHH), which is documenting artifacts found at the site of the second Battle of Camden in 1781; Hobkirk’s Hill



At a gathering of The Kershaw County Historical Society, archaeologist Tariq Ghaffar (below) discusses an artifact found on Hobkirk's Hill and Willard Polk displays one of the commemorative signs he designed.

today is at the heart of Camden's historic district. They also participate in the Historic Roads Mapping Congress, which is developing an online system to compile and share information about colonial roads, paths and trails. Baxley is particularly interested in a project to develop the original Battle of Camden site, eight miles north of the city, as a state or national park. Reuwer, meanwhile, is president of the American Revolution Association (ARA), based in Camden, and is founding editor of its new magazine, *American Revolution*. Gradually, he hopes to transition his law practice so he can devote full time to the ARA.

Their consuming passion for Revolutionary War history draws them to meetings, lectures and battle sites all over the Southeast and beyond. In the course of their research, they've come to realize how much is *not* known about the Revolution—and how much misinformation is on record. Baxley points out that the exact locations of many skirmishes have not been determined and that some commemorative markers and even a few established history parks almost certainly are in the wrong places.

Famous anecdotes can be misleading, too. Andrew Jackson claimed, for instance, to have watched the Battle of Camden through a knothole in the wall of the local gaol as a boy while being held captive by the British. Actually, the gaol was well out of view of the fighting. "He may have observed soldiers and horses moving to and from the battleground," Baxley allows.

Both lawyers share one conviction about the American Revolution: that it was won in the southern campaigns. Maryland regulars factored prominently in more than one patriot victory in South Carolina. Reuwer proudly quips that in a sense, "Maryland won the war for the country in South Carolina." Baxley's assessment: "We beat the British in the South, and the South oughta be proud of it." They concur that



most South Carolinians are unaware of the colony's importance in the struggle, which is why education is central to their mission.

Remarkably, Baxley and Reuwer never have faced off in court, though they sometimes help each other in legal matters. A courtroom clash between the two friends may occur yet. They figure it's inevitable, in fact, and they seem to relish the probability. After all, what's a Revolution without a conflict? ❖

For details concerning related Revolutionary War and preservation projects and organizations, visit the Web sites of Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution (www.southerncampaign.org), the American Revolution Association (www.americanrevolution-association.com) and ARCHH, Inc., the Hobkirk's Hill project (www.hobkirkhill.org).