

Duel in Savannah

By Jeannette Holland Austin



duel

If you are tracing your family history during the colonial years of the colonies, you may wish to consider the possibility that their loyalties to the king carried over into the Revolutionary War, when there were two sides; Patriots and Loyalists.

Throughout the Revolutionary War there were known loyalists in the colony, those who sided with the British. On December 29, 1778 Savannah fell to the British forces and the rebel defenders were routed, losing 550 captured or killed. As Patriot forces were swept from the State, a bitter civil war ensued between the Patriots and the Loyalists.

Only a year later, during the fall of 1779, the Continental army with help from French forces, attempted to liberate the city from its occupation without success.

One of the most valiant Generals in the colony, **Lachlan McIntosh** came under criticism for his family connections. In 1770 Lachlan was a leader in the independence movement in Georgia and during January of 1775 helped to organize delegates to the Provincial Congress from the Darien District.

In January of 1776 he was commissioned as a colonel in the Georgia Militia and raise the First Georgia Regiment of the Georgia Line, which was organized to defend Savannah and help repel a British assault at the Battle of the Rice Boats in the Savannah River.

He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in the Continental Army, charged to defend the southern flank of Georgia from British incursions from Florida. During 1776 and 1777, McIntosh was embroiled in a bitter political dispute with Button Gwinnett, the Speaker of the Georgia Provisional Congress and a radical Whig leader.

The dispute began when McIntosh succeeded Gwinnett as commander of the Georgia Continental Battalion. The two men represented opposing factions in the Patriot cause and Gwinnett was asked to step aside after his election was called into question by opposition within the movement. However, Gwinnett went on to become a delegate to the Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of Independence.

He returned to Georgia after his allies gained control of the Provisional Congress and succeeded in electing him speaker and commander-in-chief of the Committee of Safety. Hence, he began purging the government and military of his political rivals. His target was George McIntosh, the brother of Lachlan. He then ordered General McIntosh into British Florida on a poorly planned military expedition which failed. Gwinnett and McIntosh publicly blamed one another for the failure.

Meanwhile, in January of 1777, George McIntosh was placed in irons in the Savannah jail. His brother, Lachlan McIntosh, angrily fought for his release, finally obtaining it for 20,000 pds. George McIntosh was married to a daughter of Sir Patrick Houstoun (loyalist) and previously held positions of honor and trust. In 1766 he was a surveyor appointed by the General Assembly to lay out roads, and in 1776, a member of the Commons House Assembly.

During 1777, George became unpopular in political circles when a proposal was made by Governor John Treutlen to unite South Carolina and Georgia. His contemporaries accused him of collaborating with the British during the war and shipping 400 barrels of rice down the St. John's River for use by the enemy. A Midnight Duel A Popular Site for Dueling