

William Preston — Revolutionary (1779–1780)

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Editor's Note. The following article is drawn from the first part of Chapter 7 of a 1990 Ph.D. dissertation entitled "William Preston 1729–1783: The Making of a Frontier Elite." The author of the dissertation, Richard Osborn, was a graduate student at the University of Maryland, where his advisor was Emory Evans; Osborn is now the President of Pacific Union College in Angwin, California. The second part of Chapter 7 will be presented in the 2009 issue of *The Smithfield Review*. The entire dissertation will appear online in *The Journal of Backcountry Studies*.

As the Revolution entered its final years, William Preston's status as one of the major revolutionary leaders of southwest Virginia placed him in a vulnerable position. Earlier he had been forced to answer questions about his patriotism, but now as an undisputed revolutionary leader, he faced dangers posed by his Loyalist and disaffected neighbors — a problem that was compounded by continued threats from Indians. In the midst of these two challenges, Preston also had a desire to help the broader cause of the Revolution by leading his county's militiamen against British forces in the Carolinas. During these crucial years, state and regional leaders looked to Preston as a key leader in their efforts to win the war, and his task was made extremely difficult by the fact that Montgomery County had the largest population of Loyalists in Virginia. At times the situation could only be described as verging on a "civil war."¹

In facing these issues, Preston's role as colonel of the Montgomery County militia provided the major context for all of his actions. In this position, the state made him responsible for coordinating not only the response of Montgomery County to the Indians, Loyalists, and English but, in some cases, for the entire southwestern region for which he had carried militia responsibilities before the most recent division of counties. And so when Loyalists and disaffected neighbors refused

to serve in the militia and had to face court martial, he coordinated the county's efforts to bring them to justice. When Loyalists threatened bodily harm or military action, he had to call out the militia not only of Montgomery County but of adjoining counties, with the help of fellow colonels George Skillern in Botetourt County and Arthur and William Campbell in Washington County, if the threat got too intense. In his role as the senior justice of the peace in Montgomery County, he also had to deal on a legal basis with those refusing to take loyalty oaths to the American cause. When Indians attacked, he bore responsibility for coordinating the militia's response for the region. Virginia also had its own regular state soldiers, and, of course, the Continental Army relied upon men from Virginia for its regular army. At times Preston would be called upon to help in efforts to bolster these military units either through the draft or through volunteers. In carrying out these orders for help, he had to balance the need to have enough men to protect his own borders and the obligation to help the broader effort. While his militiamen primarily defended their own region, Preston, as their commanding officer, also led them into the Carolinas to bolster the efforts of the Continental Army. As will become evident, Preston's life for the remaining years of the Revolution was defined around his role as colonel of the Montgomery County militia.²

Dangers from Indian Attacks

In April 1779 the Indians began to attack ever closer to Smithfield; two residents were killed at Clover Bottom about forty-five miles away, and six members of one family were killed near Muncy's Fort on Walker's Creek, only eighteen miles away. As a consequence, Preston reported that neighbors began to gather in groups around protected homes, placing them in a real dilemma: "Should the People remove it will ruin them, & to stay is dangerous." Preston had no militiamen or provisions to help any of them so he was forced to appoint officers from among those coming together in an attempt to put a minimal defense together. Given the threat, Preston immediately canceled the scheduled general muster for the county so that the men could stay home and protect their families. Even his own family's situation was "far from being agreeable. Indeed it is such that I believe the greatest Enemy I have, even on Holston, will not envy."³

Loyalist Threats and Plots

Preston's allusion to enemies on the Holston did not mean Indians but Loyalists, because in the midst of these Indian attacks, Preston received disturbing accounts of a concerted Loyalist plot against him and other Patriots. One account reported that a group of twenty Loyalists would join with the English and Indians in an effort to kill Patriots before proceeding to destroy the Lead Mines near Fort Chiswell. More ominously for Preston, one of the plotters, Duncan O'Gullion, vowed to scalp Preston and James McGavock. The reports made sense. Because the state and Continental Army were relying on the Lead Mines for much of their ammunition supply, the mines represented a likely target. And because Montgomery County's arms supply was located at Smithfield, it also represented a natural target for attack. And what better way to damage the Patriot cause than to kill Preston, the major revolutionary leader of southwest Virginia? The threat came even closer home when word arrived that only three miles from Smithfield, in the general vicinity of Michael Price's home, oaths of loyalty were being taken by the King's supporters.⁴

The whole question of loyalism or disaffection continued to pose a real problem of identifying which individuals belonged in each category. The variety of motivations can best be illustrated through depositions taken from individuals captured as Loyalists in this period. Informant Michael Henninger told a story of Loyalist plotting in which they would assist the English and Indians in "destroying the Country." But an ethnic element entered the picture. He reported that John Griffith, a key Loyalist leader who lived on the South Fork of the Holston River, had already gotten at least twenty citizens in that area to swear allegiance to the King; many of those mentioned bore German names such as Weiss, Kittering, Vant, and Bronstedder. Many Germans felt more comfortable with the status quo and had no reason to support the Patriot leaders, with whom they had experienced poor relationships over the years. Some of the depositions showed the wild nature of rumors being spread throughout the area to raise unfounded fears. Henninger reported that Matthias Crumb told of 4,000 men who had subscribed to a paper that placed them against the Patriots and warned that "the dispute . . . would shortly be finished."⁵ Given the population in the region, no such number was remotely possible. After giving his testimony, Henninger asked that it not be

divulged until after all of the accused were in custody because he feared for his own life.⁶

John Henderson's confession revealed still another motive used by English recruiters to get people on their side. The recruiters reminded him that the French, Virginia's recent enemy, had joined the American cause, leaving him to ponder what the French might do, even if the Americans defeated the English.⁷ Would they try to get back their old lands and seek revenge against the colonists who had defeated them in the recent war? As other Loyalists said at the time, "they may as well fight under the King of Great Britain as to be Subjects to France."⁸ Henderson revealed an even stronger motivation. He was asked to draw up lists of those on each side because when the Americans suffered the defeat that most expected, a distinction would be made between Whigs and Tories — clearly a case of the victors getting the spoils of lands and property.⁹ But the English also held out a "carrot" as a strong motivating tool. Those who joined the Loyalists were promised £0.20.6 per day and 450 acres of land without any obligation to pay quit rents for twenty-one years. Such incentives give a hint that those involved in loyalism may have been individuals without much land who resented the wealthy Preston and others of his elite group, who had controlled land sales for years in the southwest.¹⁰ Another group did not feel comfortable taking oaths, some for reasons of conscience, others not willing to undertake the strong promises made in the required oaths. To keep them quiet, these "non-jurors" were allowed to put up bonds of £1,000 pledging they would not support England.¹¹ So ethnic diversity, resentment against Preston and those like him who played such a dominant role in the economy of the area, desire for more land, loyalty to the King, religious conviction, and just plain confusion about what was going on all played a part in motivating the disaffected.

It is difficult to determine what motivated those plotting that spring to capture the Lead Mines or to kill Preston. To counteract such plots, local militia officers were authorized to move immediately on major threats if warranted and then inform Preston, the county lieutenant, of their actions. Illustrating the seriousness with which this plot was taken, Major Walter Crockett of the Montgomery County militia sent fifty militiamen to help the sheriff arrest the suspected Loyalist plotters. As required, he immediately sought Preston's ad-

vice.¹² When nine suspects were brought in by James McGavock, some were released on bond so that the investigation could continue, while others facing the most serious charges, including O’Gullion, were placed in irons to keep them from escaping. After hearing the charges against recruiter John Griffith, they also arrested him but soon released him on bail while the investigation proceeded. McGavock reported that those hearing the testimony of these captured Loyalists became “alarmed, and Expected themselves to be in great danger.” Even some of the county militia helped heighten these apprehensions by playing jokes on their fellow citizens. Preston had to arrest two men returning from duty for

hanging a Blanket on a Stump & setting a hat on it: & Laying by the road side with their Arms ready to Fire; and at another Place firing their Guns & Hallowing like Indians in the night amongst the Inhabitants to alarm them.¹³

As Loyalists increased their strength throughout Montgomery County, area leaders began to feel isolated. “We seem,” said James McGavock in a letter to Preston, “but a handful in the Middle, and Surrounded by a Multitude. Just Consider your own Quarter, and we are much the Same.” To help counteract these growing problems, he requested that Preston call for assistance from other counties. And Preston, who as senior county justice was needed to try accused Loyalists at Fort Chiswell, felt so threatened that he hesitated to leave his family to attend the trials. Some worried they would not make a quorum without his attendance, but, more important, others felt that with so many young justices on the court not well versed in law a “Good Steady old Gentleman” was needed to help guide them to a “fair cool and Impertial tryal.”¹⁴ When the young justices heard the nineteen cases against the Loyalists on May 5 without Preston’s presence, they generally treated them with leniency, which became the prevailing practice in the county. Most of those charged put up a £1,000 bond guaranteeing their support of the American cause while others were fined and sentenced to jail.¹⁵ Such leniency would, on the surface, appear to make Edward Johnson’s prediction to Preston more difficult to achieve: “The Tories I imagine were only a little perplexing as I shou’d suppose your Courts have long since put it out of their power to be dangerous.”¹⁶

Preston Attempts Mediation

Ever the man of direct action, Preston early on decided to confront his neighbors directly with some of the rumors he had been hearing. In the late spring and early summer of 1779 he invited several heads of family, "whom I have long respected," to a meeting at the home of a Mr. Shull for a "neighbourly" visit to which he did not bring any arms. At the meeting, they assured him that none of them intended to "disturb the tranquility of the State or to injure me either in my Family or Reputation" and agreed to inform him of any future problems that might be "in the Way to our good Neighborhood and Social Intercourse." After getting further reports which led him to believe he had been duped, he asked for another meeting to clear up and disprove the rumors from the previous time. He pledged to "Pawn my Honour, my Life and everything that is" not to disturb them either in coming, or while attending the meeting, or on their return home and that he would treat them "Collectively with that same Respect & good manners I ever did any one of you Singly." He wondered why anyone would doubt his good intentions in this regard. He reminded them, after all, that he was raising his family among them and that he had "labored incessantly for several years, in all our troubles, without Reward for the Protection of all against a savage Enemy." In fact, his good treatment of those who refused to support the American cause had subjected his own character to charges that he was part of them. He assured them that his goal in having the meeting did not come from any "mean, low Motive as fear or the like." But rather he wanted to "remove Doubts and to lay a lasting foundation for Social Intercourse and Confidence amongst Neighbours, & to prevent all rash or hasty Measures by either Party which are generally attended with bad Consequences."¹⁷

In this letter Preston revealed his belief that all one needed to do in dealing with suspected Loyalists or the disaffected was to sit down and reason with them as neighbors. In later months, even when the Loyalists took more aggressive actions, he still used a moderate approach in punishing them, hoping to maintain some semblance of community and neighborliness through the conflict.¹⁸ No evidence exists that any of his neighbors accepted his offer to have another meeting.

After the May 1779 court session, the Loyalist problem persisted. Reports continued to come to Preston from his regional officers about attacks on Patriot families. A group came to William Phips' house and fired bullets through both his front door and upstairs where they heard people talking, and then tried to set the house on fire. At the home of James McGavock they killed several sheep and then stayed around with the probable intention of killing him and burning his house.¹⁹ In July more detailed reports about possible plots by the Loyalists came from William Campbell, who had led a group of Washington County militiamen to guard the Lead Mines at the request of Montgomery County. He had recently been joined by Captain John Cox, who had been taken by twenty-five Loyalists. Cox had been pressured after several days of captivity to take an oath of loyalty to the King to save his life. While he was in the camp, he was told of their plans. Thousands of Loyalists on the western waters were ready to attack the Patriots at any moment. After he was released to return home, Loyalists showed up at his home twice, once merely to threaten him into continued silence and another time to take money and clothing from him. He also witnessed the wide diversity of opinion when more than one hundred Loyalists gathered to discuss strategy. Some argued for compromise, so a letter was developed for Preston which Cox felt was "only done with a design to amuse those against whom their designs are concerted, and to gain time to collect a large number of Men of their Party." They agreed to return home in order to organize larger groups for the purpose of seizing the principal militia officers in their various neighborhoods at a "prefixed time." If these officers would not take a loyalty oath to the King, they would be taken to the English army in Georgia.²⁰ Giving credence to this plot, Loyalists assembled up the New River, where they took two men as prisoners who had been sent to spy on them. These spies, released after twenty-six hours of captivity, reported that the Loyalists had 105 men with them and another 400 nearby prepared to take the Lead Mines. Preston now decided to test an officer suspected of Loyalist leanings. He asked Colonel William Ingles, "as a Touchstone of his Sincerity in the American Cause," to draft men into the militia in order to reinforce the forty-eight men already at the Lead Mines with Colonel William Campbell of Washington County.²¹

As Preston reacted to this new plot, one senses a change in his tone. Now he referred to Loyalists as “disorderly Deluded Wretches.” Surprised by the quick response of Washington County to assist a neighbor, Preston thanked Campbell. Surely this aid “must convince those stupid Wretches that they have more Counties than one to contend with, and consequently deter them from any future attempts of that kind.”²² Apparently these efforts worked for awhile because another six months would pass before the Loyalists would pose a further threat to Preston.²³

Challenges from the Indians

If the Loyalist problems were not enough, the Indians represented a similar challenge. Earlier in the spring, Virginia’s General Assembly passed a law to guard the frontiers against Indian attack by creating two state batallions to protect the state from eastern and western enemies.²⁴ In accord with this law, Governor Thomas Jefferson instructed Preston to “hold themselves [the militia] in readiness on the shortest warning to proceed to such post on the Southwestern frontier” if an attack was to occur.²⁵ In stationing the men on the western frontier, General Andrew Lewis, brigadier general of Virginia’s forces in the Continental Army, decided it would be best to place them nearer the Shawnee tribes rather than close to where Virginians lived, in order to prevent the Indians from entering Virginia’s territory. They assigned Preston’s Montgomery militia to the mouth of the Big Sandy River with another group to be located at the mouth of the Guayandot River.²⁶ Their fears materialized in October when Indians killed six people in the Clinch River area and took as captives the two daughters and slave of Bryce Russell.²⁷ Even these attacks did not help raise Montgomery County soldiers for the approved batallion. Colonel Joseph Crockett reported to Preston in December that only six men showed up to march to their assigned area. With the “number being To Small, and the Weather bad,” he asked to delay the march until January 1780 when he would be able to write to the “defiant” companies.²⁸ It was with great difficulty during the last months of 1779 that Preston dealt with any such problems due to a severe illness he suffered.²⁹ By December, although he still had a weak appetite, probably from a lack of exercise according to Edward Johnson, he reported to friends that he had mostly recovered.³⁰

More Loyalist Plots

Loyalist plots grew even worse in early 1780. John Griffith, now free on bail, plotted to “disarm the Friends to the Country & kill some” and then “destroy the Lead mines” followed by joining with the “Indians & with them to burn Destroy & cut their Way to the English Army and assist them in reducing the Country.” But he ran into one problem. While successful in administering oaths of loyalty to the King to many individuals, others doubted his authority to carry out such actions and requested that he bring an English officer to reassure them. He promised to return by the end of March with a Colonel Robinson who would give them what had been promised by other recruiters — 2/6 sterling a day and 450 acres of land clear of quit rents for twenty-one years. When Robinson did not show up, some of the residents grew so angry at Griffith that he fled.³¹ When Preston heard about these plots, he reported to Jefferson that fifteen men were roaming that area commissioned to swear the people’s loyalty to the King. The nearly seventy-five residents in one location who had already responded favorably to the Loyalists were now in the process of communicating with like-minded people in Washington County, North Carolina, Georgia, and throughout America. Their plan called for “Individuals in Authority” to be murdered and that once the English arrived with troops in South Carolina, they would join with them “to disturb the Peace of this unhappy Frontier.” As militia commander, Preston immediately ordered his captains to disarm the suspected individuals and to seize the ringleaders of the movement. Since the confiscated arms were to be taken to the Lead Mines, Preston requested that a guard be placed there, as this would be one of the first attack points in any Loyalist uprising. But Preston’s biggest question was over what to do with the prisoners. Montgomery County did not have a prison where they could be kept. Since there was only circumstantial evidence against the ringleaders, he doubted Augusta County would allow them to be imprisoned in their county without solid written evidence.³² Even in those perilous times they tried to observe rules of law in regard to suspected criminals. Jefferson warned Preston to avoid any “irregularity” in order to prevent the suspects from averting punishment. Since the requirements for treason involved greater evidence as a capital crime, he suggested they be tried for a lesser crime that would involve

only a fine and imprisonment, unless they could get the strong evidence needed. He agreed that the Lead Mines needed strong protection and authorized Preston to use newly recruited soldiers to guard that area.³³

While concentrating on the Loyalists and disaffected, Preston also kept the Indian threat in focus. To Jefferson he worried about how he could confront both groups at the same time if the Indians chose to disturb them in the spring. But Jefferson assured him that “nothing which I have heard gives me reason to fear any disturbance in your quarter with the Indians.” Unbeknown to either of them, even as they wrote, Indians scalped seven children and the wife of James Roark seven miles from the head of the Clinch River.³⁴ Within weeks more disturbing news came of the Cherokees supplying Loyalists with twenty horse loads of ammunition in preparation for a joint attack on April 25 along the frontier from Georgia to Virginia. Martin Armstrong wrote from North Carolina, appealing to Preston for immediate assistance to keep the frontier residents from fleeing before a defense could be made.³⁵ However, this was the wrong time of year to get busy farmers away from planting their spring crops.³⁶ Besieged on every hand by Loyalists and Indians, Preston felt completely frustrated when Letitia, his sister, wrote requesting immediate help. Usually very solicitous of any family members, this time he complained about how “ungrateful” she was for some unidentified issue, but promised:

Tho' destitute of a good horse, Money, Cloathing or what is dearer than all good Health & tho' I quit Business of great Consequence at our Court . . . & leaves my Numerous but helpless Family . . . to the Barbarity of Savages & ye Resentment of more than Savages, Tories with which I am Surrounded. Under all these & many more Inconveniences I hope to be at your house on Saturday.³⁷

Three Fronts

In addition to problems with the Loyalists, Virginia now faced the prospect of three fronts. Indians from the northwest continued to pose the first threat, leading to a meeting at which Preston joined his fellow commanding officers from Botetourt, Greenbrier, Rockbridge, and Washington counties in creating a plan that called for a unified command of their 3,500 militiamen to make a concerted attack against

the Indians.³⁸ Reports began to trickle in confirming the prospect of a joint attack by the English and Iroquois in the Ohio region.³⁹ A second front had been developing in the South over a period of months, beginning in May 1779 when Commodore George Collier led a successful British naval invasion into the Chesapeake against Hampton, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Fort Nelson just outside of Portsmouth. The British left almost as quickly as they came, but General Henry Clinton, on orders from England, returned to the South in 1780, where they hoped to take advantage of the large number of Loyalists who resided in the Carolinas and Georgia. With the opening of this second front, southwest Virginia became more directly involved in the broader war effort. British forces moved at will throughout the South, raising the specter of a possible invasion of eastern Virginia. The surrender of Charleston on May 12, 1780, probably the greatest single defeat for the Americans in the entire Revolution, followed by another British victory at Waxhaws, South Carolina, on May 29, increased such a prospect.⁴⁰ And with John Floyd in Kentucky reporting weekly scalplings by Indians to such an extent that he had gotten “too cowardly to travel about the woods without Company,” a third front seemed inevitable.⁴¹ With so many arenas to contend with, Jefferson informed Preston that Montgomery and Washington counties would have to bear responsibility for operations against the southern Indians since the rest of the state would need to focus elsewhere. He ordered him to raise one hundred men from Montgomery in order to cooperate with the Carolina militiamen in an offensive attack against the Cherokees. He was also to post guards at the Lead Mines to replace the militia from other counties who were now needed elsewhere.⁴²

In the midst of these military preparations against the Indians in late June, the Loyalists attacked Patriot families. Twenty Loyalists appeared in an area known as the Glades at the head of the south fork of Holston River, close to the Lead Mines, where they robbed five men. And another group of one hundred Loyalists killed nine individuals in the New River area. Preston’s field officer, Walter Crockett, decided to reinforce the most likely target of their efforts, the Lead Mines, and planned to organize an attack against them.⁴³ Further reports indicated that these were not just isolated attacks but part of an organized effort to take not only property but key men. James McGavock reported to Preston that John Griffith, still loose on bail, promised

“that whoever would take some of the principal men of this County, (your name and mine being particularly mentioned) should be rewarded with a large number of Gunias.” He also reportedly told the Loyalists in the Walker’s Creek area that he would soon return from Ramsour’s Mill, North Carolina, with a large body of Loyalists who would help their effort. A further indication of an organized plot was the fact that many Loyalists who had recently left their homes did not take any property with them, seeming to indicate they planned to be back soon. Obviously Preston needed to solicit help from neighboring counties to put down this insurrection.⁴⁴

What none of them knew yet was that 250 Patriots had defeated 700 Loyalists on June 20 under the command of Colonel John Moore at the same Ramsour’s Mill in North Carolina where Griffith was headed.⁴⁵ Still unaware of this recent defeat, Preston ordered out fifty men with officers to head toward the Lead Mines and while on the way to disarm the disaffected who lived in the Walker’s Creek area and other areas beyond the New River where Griffith had recently been recruiting.⁴⁶ In addition, he called for assistance from Botetourt and Washington counties, a move supported by Jefferson. With problems growing in Carolina, Jefferson promised no further help, but encouraged Preston to undertake offensive measures against the Loyalists by suppressing them in their own settlements rather than waiting for them to come since “time and Space to move in will perhaps increase their numbers.”⁴⁷ He also placed Colonel William Campbell in command of the joint militias of the three counties, and he instructed them to “take in hand those Parricides” and to “take such effectual Measures of Punishment as may secure the future safety of that Quarter.”⁴⁸

Hopes for Reconciliation

In spite of the murders and robberies committed by the Loyalists, Preston still hoped for reconciliation with them. Patriot officers such as Charles Lynch did not have a reputation for kindness, but Preston generally encouraged benevolence toward the very enemies who had vowed to kill him, as a way of contrasting the Loyalists and Patriots.⁴⁹ He instructed Captain Isaac Taylor:

That the friends to American Liberty may be distinguished from its Enemies; and even to the latter, I would hope that no cruelty or unnecessary outrage be committed upon them or their Property Especially on the Women & Children or the old & helpless.

Furthermore, he did not want any Loyalist property being sold until the courts allowed the accused individuals a chance to defend themselves. He moralized: "As true Bravery & humanity are inseparable; Your Company Exercising the latter on every Occasion will convince Mankind that they are possessed of the former."⁵⁰ In at least two instances, Preston guaranteed protection to known Loyalists in an effort to get them to change sides. One of those men, Thomas Heavin, had even accepted a commission in the British service and enlisted others to serve the King. Yet in spite of these treasonable acts, Preston offered to withdraw from investigating and punishing him and other similar individuals because Virginia, "being full of Mercy and ever willing to forgive her rebel & Disaffected Sons would rather Reclaim & Pardon a Number of them than Punish one." He invited Heavin and others to "return to his or their Allegiance to the Commonwealth" without the loss of property or punishment.⁵¹ In another case, Preston offered Philip Lambert "lenity" and protection from injury if he would give himself up.⁵²

In his own neighborhood, Preston decided to make one more effort to get eight of his Loyalist enemies together for a visit. He reminded them that resentment ran high against their behavior but that he had restrained those feelings "not from any love to your Political Sentiments but from a Regard to you as Neighbors." He could no longer tolerate their "Dark, Sullen, disgusting, Suspicious and Offensive" behavior. For years he had attempted to warn them of their "folly & Danger" to no avail. But now a storm was gathering against them "from every Quarter, which will surely burst upon you without prudent & Speedy Measures be fallen upon to prevent it." He requested them to meet at his home in two days

to consult in a Neighbourly way, the Proper Steps for you to take for your own Peace, Safety & security, & at the same time to secure the Peace of the Community so far as relates to You & others in the same situation in this Company.

If they did not appear, he would “take it for Granted that you have farther Views which are destructive to the Peace of the Country.”⁵³ On the appointed day, July 22, John Heavin, one of those getting the letter, defended himself in writing rather than appearing in person. He denied any wrongdoing and claimed all of his accused neighbors only wanted peace. But he did not want to swear any oaths to the American cause — “I Never meddled with war from the first moment and Cant think of Intangleing my self with it now.” If he was being truthful, he was clearly aligning himself with the disaffected rather than with the Loyalists. He pled for compassion for his wife and children and vowed that neither he nor his neighbors planned to raise arms against Preston.⁵⁴

It is not known whether Preston ever got to use the speech notes he made for the meeting, but they reveal many legitimate grievances against the disaffected. Among his concerns were reports about gun purchases and preparations for war, plans to divide up his lands by blazing and marking trees, offers of money “to an Assassin to Murder me in this Neighbourhood,” threats against his life if the sheriff collected taxes from certain individuals, threats against his son’s life, and a “Purse of Guineas offered for me on Walkers Creek & Elsewhere.” He planned to ask, “For what these Threatnings? what have I done?” He wanted to remind them: “Although the Troubles were Extensive, no One came to consult his own or his friends Safety, but listened to false reports.” They kept a “Suspicious Distance” from him and then made “Preparations for extending the Trouble.” He planned to conclude his speech by asking his neighbors:

What can you promise yr Selves by standing out? The Tories are used by the British as Draught Horses or beasts of Burden. Can a few dispersed people without a Leader fly in the face of Continent? it is true some Secret Stabs may be given, & some Murder committed, but will it not end in the Destruction of the Perpetrators & their Adherents?⁵⁵

Relationships between Loyalists and Patriots continued to deteriorate, and there were more reports of threats against Preston’s life. John McDonald reported one such threat when he declared that he would pay no taxes and if they were taken away from him by force, Preston should be warned to “take care of himself & if any harm followed he might blame himself.” He further predicted there “would

Soon he Supposed be a king in every County,” a reference to leaders such as Preston.⁵⁶ Conditions finally got so intolerable that Preston and his fellow leaders decided in July to infiltrate the Loyalist movement by sending two spies to discover their plans. The spies posed as British officers and quickly discovered “a most horrid conspiracy” by the Loyalists to capture the Lead Mines on July 25, kill the leading men of that area, and then to “over run the Country with the Assistance of the british Troops.” They would head over the mountain to Charlottesville to release British prisoners being held there from the Saratoga battle, and the two groups would join together to “subdue the whole state.”⁵⁷

Preston immediately set in motion two approaches to the problem. Not only did he call on Montgomery County’s militia, but he asked for assistance from Washington and Botetourt counties, the result being that more than four hundred men were on duty by early August to suppress the plot. The other part of the plan resulted in the rounding up of more than sixty Loyalists throughout Montgomery County for trial. Some were released from the charges soon after their arrest, based on confessions they made and bonds they put up to Governor Jefferson amounting anywhere from £5,000 through £20,000, pledging they would no longer aid the English in any manner.⁵⁸ Robert King wrote directly to Preston, who headed the Montgomery County Court, admitting his guilt in working for a wrong cause but appealing for them to “Look over it as Easey as You posablely Can.”⁵⁹

Trials of Loyalists

In early August 1780 actual trials took place in an unprecedented joint meeting involving fifteen justices of both Montgomery and Botetourt counties with Preston acting as the chief justice. As the trial proceeded, new prisoners were brought in “every hour and new Discoveries making.” Eventually fifty-five men were tried for treason at this one court session, which extended into early September.⁶⁰ The court acquitted five men, three of those being required to put up a bond, as high as £100,000 in one case, guaranteeing their support of the Patriot cause. Seven were found guilty and sent to the Augusta County jail for a further trial. Illustrating once again Preston’s emphasis on leniency, three individuals, including fifty-eight year old Joseph McDonald, were found guilty of being Loyalists but due to age their

sons were allowed to enlist in the Continental Army in their place. In three situations, they took into consideration the condition of the accused men. To illustrate, since Gasper Garlick appeared to be a "Simple Fellow," they acquitted him even though they felt the charge of treason was substantiated and ordered that he receive thirty-nine lashes. Similarly Abraham Morgan, "an Ignorant Poor Man with a small Family," received thirty-nine lashes. Three youths who actually joined the British service were acquitted on the basis they were too young to know what they were doing and had been improperly persuaded to enlist in the enemy's cause. Two men found guilty agreed to enlist in the Continental Army, and another ten took the same route without their cases being heard. Nine men agreed to enlist after their cases were not proven. In a real boon to the Continental Army, Preston later reported that he had been able to enlist eighty additional soldiers whose property served as a guarantee of their faithful performance.⁶¹ Still others escaped; the Patriot soldiers sold and divided up their property as plunder. When informing Jefferson of an officer's approval for such sales, Preston admittedly had questions and sought counsel.⁶²

While the trials proceeded, Loyalists continued their resistance by killing at least one man and stealing horses. To counteract these actions, loyal militia already in the field continued their march through the New River area looking for more Loyalists and, more important, sending a message that the Patriots were pursuing them aggressively.⁶³ Pendleton wrote his friend Preston several weeks later, wishing him success in rooting out "those paricides, who have kept their Country from peace for some time past, and if they could be extinguished I believe we should soon Enjoy that blessing."⁶⁴ While the number of Loyalists remained very high in Montgomery County, perhaps as much as half the population, never would the Loyalists mount another organized effort in southwest Virginia, in part because both sides became more involved in supporting their respective causes in the Carolinas.⁶⁵

The War in the Carolinas

The initial news of August was terrible for the American side. General Horatio Gates with a force of 4,000, including 2,800 Virginia and North Carolina militiamen, suffered a crushing defeat at Camden,

South Carolina, on August 16 by a British army under the command of Lord Cornwallis. But the frontier leaders were not discouraged. After being informed by Preston of the loss, William Campbell wrote encouragingly, “We must exert ourselves, to retrieve, if possible that Misfortune.”⁶⁶ Preston seemed determined to be upbeat as he summarized his feelings to Colonel Martin Armstrong from the Carolinas, who had requested immediate help:

The general defeat of the Southern Army, and the unhappy and dangerous Situation of your States are Considerations truly alarming to every friend to the Liberties of America. But I trust in God that the neighbouring States will give you every assistance in their Power & that these Disasters, tho’ great, will not be decisive, but only tend to rouze the Americans from their late Langour. Be this as it will it is our indispensable Duty to continue the glorious Struggle while there is the least probability of Success.

But Preston did more than talk. First he sent two wagonloads of lead from the Lead Mines to help Gates. And he also ordered two companies of men from Montgomery County to go south under the command of William Campbell.⁶⁷

He kept thinking about how he could be of more tangible help. To Jefferson he sent a proposal calling for Augusta, Botetourt, Montgomery, Rockbridge, and Washington counties to raise five hundred soldiers to be paid by the state and commanded in an overall sense by Virginia’s commander-in-chief. Each man would provide his own arms, and the counties would provide an infantry unit with horses. He proposed that they rendezvous by October 15. Preston was so optimistic the plan would be accepted that he asked George Skillern to start raising soldiers. Showing even greater optimism, he also predicted they could easily raise one thousand volunteers, which would “at least, be equal to the like number in any part of America.”⁶⁸ On September 21 the Virginia Council responded favorably to Preston’s proposal by approving two regiments.⁶⁹

The plan initially failed. Preston blamed the governor for not “fully” adopting the proposal, a factor recognized by Jefferson, who wrote of their failure “on account of some circumstances contained in them” which failed to attract volunteers.⁷⁰ Apparently the volunteers did not want to be under Gates’ command. And they did not like the

provision that only two companies would have rifles while the rest of the regiments would fight with the much less accurate muskets, a plan later modified by Jefferson “as we found that absolutely necessary to induce them to go.”⁷¹ Despite Preston’s optimism it became increasingly difficult to raise soldiers. Walter Crockett wrote Preston on October 2 that he had “try’d all in my power to raise the Militia of this County, but never saw them so backward before.” He had raised only 150, including two light horse companies which he sent south under Major Joseph Cloyd to join the other soldiers already helping Gates.⁷² As Robert Fristoe reminded Preston, the more crucial problem was “the Losses I must sustain and to Leave my Family Exposed to every Distress is what I hope you will consider.”⁷³

But all was not despair. While Preston struggled to get men into the field, William Campbell — who was in North Carolina with 400 Virginians aided by Isaac Shelby, John Sevier, Benjamin Cleveland, and Charles McDowell — assembled more than 1,000 militiamen from frontier counties at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga River on September 25 to stop the continuing advance of the English and Loyalists. Only a few days earlier, the British had sent Major Patrick Ferguson into the Tryon County area of North Carolina for the purpose of organizing the Loyalist allies in the Gilbert Town area into an effective fighting unit. Cornwallis eventually hoped to consolidate these Loyalists with others in the eastern part of the state. The 900 frontiersmen under William Campbell’s command began to track Ferguson with his nearly 1,800 Loyalist soldiers and eventually fought a battle at King’s Mountain, South Carolina, on October 7.⁷⁴ According to William Davidson, lieutenant colonel of the North Carolina militia, the battle lasted forty-seven minutes with a clear victory for the “mountain men,” as they were called. In writing Preston, he summarized his deep feelings: “the Blow is great, and I give you my Joy upon the Occasion.”⁷⁵ In the battle, the Loyalists lost 157 killed, 163 badly wounded, 698 taken prisoner, and 1,500 weapons captured, compared to a loss of only 28 frontier Patriots killed and 90 wounded.⁷⁶ Everyone was excited to hear the news, especially Preston, whose frontier militiamen had contributed to the victory. He congratulated Gates:

The important news . . . ought to give the most heart felt Joy to every Friend to the Liberties of America. The Bravery & Conduct of the Frontier Militia deserves the greatest Applause; and

there is reason to hope that the happiest consequences to the American arms in the Southern department will ensue so complete a Victory.⁷⁷

The victory also represented good news for George Skillern, who had been busy recruiting men throughout Montgomery County.⁷⁸ He now assumed Preston did not need the 100 volunteers he had raised in early October.⁷⁹ But Preston informed him otherwise after Jefferson and other county lieutenants wrote Preston requesting that they continue efforts to send soldiers to the southern front in order to give a needed “decisive blow.”⁸⁰

The King’s Mountain victory also presented Preston with another problem when General Gates asked Preston to become commissary for the prisoners and prepare for them to be kept at the county courthouse in Fincastle, where he was to build a strong pallisade eighteen feet high.⁸¹ Preston, “on considering Age and Inability for such service together with exposed situation of my numerous Family & the several Avocations in which I am necessarily engaged,” declined the position, although he admitted the “emoluments arising therefrom” would be pleasing. But, more important, he did not like the idea of putting the prisoners at the courthouse. First, he was “sorry to inform you [Gates] that we have more Tories in this County than any other I know of in Virginia” with great time, trouble, and expense expended by the militia in trying to suppress them. In addition, with that area being so close to the frontier, it would be possible for Indians and Loyalists from the Carolinas to make it difficult to secure them. And finally, the farmers did not have enough provisions to supply the prisoners with food because so many had been out on militia duty protecting themselves from Indians the previous summer and fall that crops had not been grown. He recommended Botetourt be considered instead where another barrier of mountains would protect them. In the meantime, he promised to raise provisions to care for the prisoners as soon as they entered Virginia.⁸² By this time Montgomery County had a strong reputation for having problems; Jefferson accepted Preston’s arguments, calling that area “the most disaffected part of our State.” He also worried about their being located so near the Lead Mines, placing them in greater danger. He recommended that the prisoners be marched further north where they might form an American batallion in exchange for being released.⁸³

From the fall of 1780 there were no further coordinated Loyalist plots, but the problem of disaffected people did not go away. Thomas Madison was, for example, premature when he congratulated Preston “on the Reformation of the Tories.”⁸⁴ The job of pacifying Loyalists continued. The Montgomery County court began that same November to restore property to several individuals who had been accused of loyalism. In at least one case, they accepted a promise of good behavior in a proven incident of “offences as an Enemy to his Country.”⁸⁵ Their efforts were nevertheless only a “drop in the bucket,” and Preston was to assert the following spring that nearly half of the militia were disaffected. Most of them could not be drawn into service “either by threats or otherwise.” And those Loyalists who had earlier been forced into militia service deserted quickly.⁸⁶

With the approach of winter, the frontier leaders faced two problems. Gates needed soldiers in the South to keep Cornwallis and his army in the Carolinas from moving northward. Further rumors began to circulate that the Cherokees planned an imminent attack against the frontier. Plans redoubled to raise volunteer militiamen. Some of the adjoining counties were successful in their efforts to get their militia motivated, but Preston, in spite of strong appeals for help from his counterparts, experienced no such success, because most of his men were “out hunting” until Christmas.⁸⁷ It now became clear that the Cherokees would attack, but Virginia put off any offensive plans due to winter conditions and a lack of ammunition. Rather, they put themselves into a defensive posture and, as the situation worsened, Preston began to draft every fifth man from the militia and ordered them to Washington County to help Colonel William Campbell’s defensive efforts.⁸⁸ In December Jefferson approved Preston’s plans to build a fort at the Lead Mines rather than relying for protection on Fort Chiswell located eight miles away.⁸⁹ In addition to being called to provide men for the American army in the Carolinas now commanded by General Nathanael Greene, Preston and his colleagues in southwest Virginia worried about the attacks they expected from the Cherokees as soon as the weather improved.⁹⁰

— *to be continued in the next issue, Volume XIII*

Endnotes

Abbreviations used in the endnotes:

DM = Draper Manuscripts, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

LoV = Library of Virginia, Manuscript Division

PP-DM = Preston Papers, Draper Manuscripts, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; transcription by S. C. Stuntz is available at The Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky

PP-LC = Preston Family Papers, 1727–1896, “f” series at Virginia Historical Society as microfilmed and catalogued by the Library of Congress

VMHB = *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*

WP = William Preston

1. Historians have recently focused on the problem of Loyalism in southwest Virginia including Emory G. Evans, “Trouble in the Backcountry, Disaffection in Southwest Virginia during the American Revolution,” in *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution*, ed. Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985); Albert H. Tillson Jr., “The Localist Roots of Backcountry Loyalism: An Examination of Popular Political Culture in Virginia’s New River Valley,” *Journal of Southern History* 54 (August 1988): pp. 387–404; Brenda Lynn Williams, “Thorns in the Side of Patriotism: Tory Activity in Southwest Virginia, 1776–1782” (M.A. Thesis, Virginia Tech, 1984). In addition, see Patricia Givens Johnson, *William Preston and the Allegheny Patriots* (Pulaski, Va.: B.D. Smith & Bros., 1976), pp. 217–57. For similar problems in the Shenandoah Valley, see Freeman Hansford Hart, *The Valley of Virginia in the Revolution, 1763–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), pp. 112–13. General overviews of loyalism can be found in Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans. The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1969); Isaac Samuel Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia: Chapters in the Economic History of the Revolution* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1965; reprint of 1926 ed.); and Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats. A Study in British Revolutionary Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964).
2. John McBride’s dissertation on manpower policies outlines the multiple roles played in the Revolution by an individual such as Preston who was forced to balance the needs for regional defense against the broader effort to defeat the English elsewhere. John David McBride “The Virginia War Effort, 1775–1783: Manpower Policies and Practices” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1977).
3. WP to Colonel William Fleming, 4 April 1779, DM, 3ZZ 18; Frederick B. Kegley, *Virginia’s Frontier* (Roanoke, Va.: The Southwest Virginia Historical Society, 1938), pp. 649–50.
4. WP Acquittal of George Patterson, 24 April 1779, PP-DM, 5QQ 2.
5. Deposition of Michael Henninger to Colonel William Campbell, 18 April 1779, “Preston Papers,” *The John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College*, IV (June 1915), pp. 304–5; hereafter referred to as “Branch Papers.”

6. William Campbell to WP, 19 April 1779, PP-LC, 1018.
7. John Henderson Confession, 1780, "Preston Papers," VMHB 26 (October, 1918), pp. 375–6, hereafter referred to as "Preston Papers"-VMHB.
8. James McGavock to WP, 15 April 1779, PP-LC, 1017; "Branch Papers," pp. 303–4.
9. Sometimes the threat of losing land was made very directly. James McGavock reported to Preston on 25 April 1779 about a conversation between George Parks and John Cox. After being asked by Cox whether he was for the King, Parks responded that he had taken the state oath and "had no reason to be against his Country." Cox then warned that he was "sorry for him, and if that was his sentiment he never would enjoy a foot of land in America, and what little he had gathered would be taken from him." "Branch Papers," pp. 306–7.
10. Walter Crockett to WP, 7 April 1779, "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 371–2. William Campbell in writing to Preston had also heard of the plan to kill Preston: "You are, it seems, yourself a principal Object of those Wretches hellish Contrivance." 19 April 1779, PP-LC, p. 1018. Preston also served as the target of another death threat later in the year when Samuel Ingram was arrested for saying he would "Shoot and maim" Preston (21 and 23 October 1779, Montgomery County Records, Misc. Records, Correspondence and personal papers, LOV, Folder O). In regard to land ownership, Emory Evans ("Trouble in the Backcountry," pp. 208–9) argues on the basis of land-tax and personal-property records that 85 percent of the disaffected brought into court were landholders. In comparing their landholdings with the county justices, Evans found little difference between the two groups. He concluded: "It is reasonable to assume that those charged with treason or lesser crimes differed little in economic terms from the rest of Montgomery County's population. Class conflict — if wealth can be seen as an adequate index to class — does not appear to have fueled this opposition to the Revolution." Albert H. Tillson Jr. in "The Localist Roots of Backcountry Loyalism" (pp. 395–6) took the same figures used by Evans but argued that there were major landholding differences between the justices and the Loyalists. However, he conceded that the Loyalists did not differ much from other settlers in their landholdings "except for the large number of them who did not appear on the land tax rolls."
11. Twenty-nine individuals signed such a bond in Montgomery County. Of this number, ten could not sign their names but placed a mark on the paper. "Bond of non-signers to oath of allegiance," 26 April 1779, Montgomery County, Original Records, LOV. Evans in "Trouble in Backcountry," pp. 207–8, found very few individuals using conscience as a reason not to take an oath. In at least one case, Preston received a report that non-jurors in his area planned to join with those from Walker's Creek and Red Creek to fight against the Patriots. James McGavock to WP, 15 April 1779; PP-LC, p. 1017; "Branch Papers," pp. 303–4.
12. Walter Crockett to WP, 7 April 1779, "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 371–2.
13. 22 April 1779, Montgomery County, Original Records, Bonds, 1751–1797, LOV.

14. James McGavock to WP, 15 April 1779; PP-LC, 1017; "Branch Papers," pp. 303–4; Walter Crockett to WP, 24 April 1779, "Branch Papers," p. 306.
15. 5 May 1779, Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782, LOV.
16. Edward Johnson to WP, 29 May 1779; PP-LC, p. 1020.
17. WP to Neighbors [April through June 1779], PP-LC, p. 1023; "Branch Papers," pp. 344–5. This document is not dated but the context would place it near the time when the plot against Preston's life developed in April 1779.
18. Evidence of this approach can also be seen in Montgomery County court sessions attended by Preston. On 3 August 1779 several individuals who admitted to being part of the recent insurrection were allowed to take an oath of loyalty to the state after putting up bond for £200 (3 August 1779, Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782, LOV, 20:202–3). Evidently many individuals were also falsely charged, leading to several acquittals at other court sessions (5 August 1779, Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782, LOV, 20:260); 8 September 1779 (Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782, LOV, 20:266).
19. Field officers such as James Montgomery had few men to call upon to counteract these attacks. In this situation, he wrote for six men out of each of the companies led by Captains Pierce and Frances to be added to Montgomery's small detachment for the purpose of ranging two or three days until receiving additional instructions from Preston. James Montgomery to WP, 11 June 1779, PP-LC, 1022; "Branch Papers," pp. 307–8.
20. Deposition of Captain John Cox taken by Lieutenant Colonel William Campbell, 16 July 1779, "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 372–4. Cox asked Campbell to keep his testimony secret since he feared for his safety. Already under suspicion and threat of life and property, he had been unable to send earlier word of this plot. William Campbell to WP, 16 July 1779; PP-LC, p. 1026; "Branch Papers," p. 308.
21. WP to _____, 18 July 1779; DM, 3ZZ 19.
22. William Campbell to WP, 19 July 1779; PP-LC, p. 1027; "Branch Papers," pp. 308–9.
23. The Loyalist problem did not completely go away during this period. On 28 December 1779 Colonel Crockett wrote Preston about the growing problem of too few justices to handle the workload because "there are too many People Disaffected with the present government." He asked him to urge the Council to make some new commissions soon. PP-DM, 5QQ 15.
24. May 1779, "An Act for raising a body of troops for the defence of the commonwealth," William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia*, 13 vols. (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1969 reprint of 1819–1823 edition), vol. 10, pp. 32–4.
25. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 7 August 1779, in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–), vol. 3, pp. 62–3; hereafter referred to as *Jefferson Papers*.
26. General Andrew Lewis and Colonel William Fleming to Thomas Jefferson, 31 August 1779, Kegley, *Virginia's Frontier*, pp. 652–3.
27. William Christian to WP, 22 October 1779, PP-DM, 5QQ 11.

28. Colonel Joseph Crockett to WP, 28 December 1779, PP-DM, 5QQ 15.
29. Jefferson wrote Preston on 15 October 1779: "Having heard the disagreeable news of your illness, and that there was a doubt whether you would recover in time." Auditor's Accounts, William Preston Papers, LOV. John Brown Jr. on 20 October 1779 expressed similar concerns to Preston that "your great indisposition, has given me much uneasiness, & am truly impatient to hear of your recovery; which I hope will be speedy, & the knowledge of which would relive me." PP-DM, 5QQ 10. By 17 November 1779 Preston reported to a Mr. Boyd that he was on his way to recovery. Montgomery County Records, Misc. Court Records, 1772–1834, LOV.
30. Edward Johnson to WP, 2 December 1779; PP-LC, p. 1045. John Brown Jr. was happy to get word from Preston about his "partial recovery." 9 December 1779, PP-DM, 5QQ 14.
31. Reports on Nonjurors [March 1780?], PP-DM, 5QQ 27.
32. WP to Thomas Jefferson, March 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 28. Rumors of a possible Loyalist uprising were confirmed in a confession from John Henderson, who told of Loyalists being instructed to wait until a "Runner would come from the English" at which time they were to join up with the English in the South. "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 375–6.
33. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 21 March 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 24; *Jefferson Papers*, 3:325–6.
34. John Taylor reported this news to Preston on 23 March 1780. Most people in his area were gathered together in small parties at key homes. They were also experiencing a severe shortage of corn. PP-DM, 5QQ 26.
35. Martin Armstrong to [WP], 10 April 1780, "Branch Papers," pp. 310–1; "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 376–7.
36. Colonel Walter Crockett to WP, 15 April 1780, "Branch Papers," p. 310; "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 377–8.
37. WP to Letitia Breckinridge, 27 April 1780, Breckinridge Papers, LC, 1:72.
38. Proceedings of the Officers in Botetourt &c, 8 May 1780, "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 42–6. They were probably part of the effort by George Rogers Clark to take Detroit. When a series of debts came due from previous expeditions, Virginia decided to cancel his plans. Meanwhile Clark on his own withdrew and built a fort where the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers meet. John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775–1783* (Williamsburg, Va.: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), p. 198.
39. Arthur Campbell to WP, 7 June 1780, "Branch Papers," pp. 311-2; "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 46–7.
40. Arthur Campbell feared that the loss of Charleston would encourage the Loyalists. Arthur Campbell to WP, 7 June 1780, "Preston Papers"-VMHB, p. 47.
41. John Floyd to WP, 31 May 1780, DM, 17CC pp. 127–9. Arthur Campbell wrote Preston about the serious scarcity of beef and ammunition in Kentucky with a joint company of English and Indians expected any day. 13 June 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 33. To help get flints for Kentucky, Preston even offered to send his own son to Fort Chiswell. WP to Walter Crockett, 15 June 1780, DM, 3ZZ 21.

42. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 15 June 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 34; and *Jefferson Papers*, 3:447-8. On 15 June 1780 Preston wrote to Walter Crockett, asking him to raise one hundred men but doubted he would be successful. DM, 3ZZ 21. With so many demands on Virginia, Jefferson confirmed to Preston on 28 June 1780 that no further men could be expected for the frontier. PP-DM, 5QQ 36; *Jefferson Papers*, 3:469.
43. Walter Crockett to WP, 24 June 1780, "Preston Papers"-VMHB, p. 49. John Breckinridge confirmed rumors of a potential attack in a letter to Preston on 25 June 1780. His report also mentioned that British officers were leading the Loyalists. "Branch Papers," pp. 314-5; "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 157-8. Thomas Jefferson ordered William Campbell on 3 July 1780 to change his plans from going on an expedition against the Chickamaugas to helping defend the Lead Mines, which were seen as a higher priority. *Jefferson Papers*, 3:479.
44. James McGavock to WP, 30 June 1780, "Branch Papers," pp. 315-6; "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 159-60.
45. Captain James Byrn, writing to Preston about the Patriot victory, expressed the hope that this would "put an end to Toryism in this Country." WP to Captain James Byrn, 5 July 1780, "Branch Papers," pp. 316-7; "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 160-1.
46. WP to Captain James Byrn, 5 July 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 37. Preston also asked Captain Isaac Taylor to raise thirty men with horses who would help in this endeavor. Any captured Loyalists were to be kept at the Lead Mines until trials could be held. WP to Captain Isaac Taylor, 12 July 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 40.
47. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 3 July 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 38; *Jefferson Papers*, 3:481.
48. Thomas Jefferson to Colonel William Campbell, 3 July 1780; H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia*, vol. 2, *Thomas Jefferson* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1928), p. 138.
49. The word, "lynch," comes from the same Charles Lynch, who carried out justice without the benefit of courts through the process of lynching. Preston within a few weeks had to order him to stop trying Loyalists because of his cruelty. In responding to Preston's charges, Lynch wrote that he examined them strictly and released those who were innocent. But others he kept as soldiers or witnesses with the explanation: "Perhaps Justice to this Country May Require they Shou'd be Made Exampels of." Charles Lynch to WP, 17 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 57.
50. WP to Captain Isaac Taylor, 12 July 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 40.
51. WP Promise to Thomas Heavin, 14 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 55.
52. WP Court Order Granting Protection to Philip Lambert, 20 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 61.
53. The eight individuals to get the letter were Michael Price, John and Howard Heavin, James Beany, Jacob Shull, John Wall, a Mr. Harless, and Poopick Hoover. WP to Neighbors, 20 July 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 41.
54. John Heavin to [WP], 22 July 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 42. Perhaps this particular group best illustrates Albert Tillson Jr.'s argument in "The Localist Roots of Backcountry Loyalism" that local concerns prevailed over an ideological commitment to either side.

55. Speech Notes by WP for Neighbors, 20 July 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 41.
56. Joseph Gregg Arrest Warrant for Joseph McDonald, 24 July 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 43. Such talk gives credence to the argument that disgruntlement against such members of the elite as Preston fueled a lack of support for the Patriot cause among many disaffected individuals in the region.
57. One of the spies, John Wyatt, surrendered with Virginia's troops at Charleston, where he became an English prisoner for six months. Eventually he bought his way back to his home in Botetourt County, where he was convinced by Preston and others to become a spy for them among Loyalists in the New River area. He was given an altered captain's commission signed by Dunmore to serve as his identification as a British officer. He discovered the details of their plot, but the timing was so soon that he could not get back in time to warn Preston, so he convinced the Loyalists that British troops would be joining them shortly if they would only wait a few days. He rushed home with the information, giving them time to plan their defense. John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 351-3. Preston later asked General Muhlenberg to excuse John Wyatt from further military duty out of fear that some of the Continental soldiers who were serving as a penalty for not swearing allegiance to the American cause might kill him. WP to General Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg [September 1780], PP-DM, 5QQ 81; Kegley, *Virginia's Frontier*, p. 655. In an ironic twist to this story, Wyatt served two months of militia duty in the summer of 1781, paid by two of the Loyalists he had turned in. Part of their penalty was an obligation to pay men to perform their duty. Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, p. 353.
58. On 26 July 1780 several bonds were made by such individuals as Jacob Seiler, James Bane Jr. and Sr., and Robert and James McGee. PP-DM, 5QQ 44-6. On 29 July 1780 Thomas Burk and William McMullen gave a similar bond. PP-DM, 5QQ 47. On 8 August 1780 Samuel and James Robinson, Walter Stewart, James Norvell, and Thomas Giles also put up such bonds. PP-DM, 5QQ 49, 52.
59. Robert King to WP [1780], PP-DM, 5QQ 71. In his actual trial, the court waived judgment on the case since he had enlisted as a Continental Army soldier and pledged his own estate. Furthermore, his father-in-law also pledged his estate that King would find another good soldier. PP-DM, 5QQ 77.
60. On 26 August 1780 Preston wrote Colonel Martin Armstrong that he still had at least ten more days to go before being finished. PP-DM, 5QQ 62.
61. The disposition of another eleven men is unknown. Botetourt and Montgomery County Trials vs. Loyalists, August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 73-9; WP to Thomas Jefferson, 8 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 50; *Jefferson Papers*, 3:533-4; [WP] to Colonel Martin Armstrong, 26 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 62.
62. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 8 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 50; *Jefferson Papers*, 3:533-4. Dudley Digges responded on behalf of the Virginia Council to Preston's inquiry about plunder: "It is a point upon which it behoves us to be perfectly silent: since it is, and must remain altogether a judicial Matter." In other words, they would look the other way. With respect to Preston's other actions with the

- Loyalists, they approved of all he had done to suppress the conspiracy. Dudley Digges to WP, 17 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 56.
63. Colonel Walter Crockett to [WP], 6 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 48.
64. Edmund Pendleton to WP, 11 October 1780, VHS, Mss2 P3743 a2; in *The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton*, 2 vols., ed. David J. Mays (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), p. 316; hereafter referred to as *Pendleton Papers*.
65. Evans writes, "It is safe to estimate that more than 40 percent of both the militia and the population of Montgomery County did not support the patriot cause." "Trouble in the Backcountry," p. 207.
66. William Campbell to WP, 22 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 61.
67. [WP] to Colonel Martin Armstrong, 26 August 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 62.
68. WP to George Skillern, 13 September 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 80; PP-LC, p. 1099.
69. Order in Council respecting Volunteers for the Southern Army, 21 September 1780, *Jefferson Papers*, 3:653.
70. WP to General Horatio Gates, 27 October 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 84; and Jefferson to County Lieutenants of Botetourt and Montgomery, 1 November 1780, *Jefferson Papers*, 4:85. Apparently Jefferson did not know about the failure of Preston's plan until the first of November because on 22 October 1780 he wrote to General Gates expressing the hope that the volunteers from Montgomery and Botetourt, "as proposed by Colo. Preston," would be a "useful reinforcement to you." *Jefferson Papers*, 4:57.
71. Thomas Jefferson to Horatio Gates, 10 November 1780, *Jefferson Papers*, 4:108. Because rifles were slow to reload and could not be used in hand-to-hand combat since they had no attached bayonets, smoothbore muskets were preferred by the officers. Generally the Tidewater militia used the muskets, but the backcountry militia did not like using them because they found their rifles more accurate. McBride, "Virginia Manpower Policies," pp. 15–16.
72. Walter Crockett to WP, 2 October 1780, "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 165–6; "Branch Papers," p. 319.
73. Robert Fristoe to WP, 2 October 1780, "Preston Papers"-VMHB, p. 166. Although undated, a petition came to Preston from the Clinch River area responding to orders to appear for a court martial because they had not participated in the Carolina invasion. They vividly outlined their "detached and exposed situation" in light of frequent Indian attacks on their homes. They explained: "Thus detached as we are and placed in so dangerous a situation, the Ties of Nature and Humanity forbid the leaving of our families, and the most dearest connexions we have upon Earth, thus exposed to the Mercy of the Cruel Savages, whose well known kind of Warfare are an indiscriminate destruction of all Ages and Sexes." They pled not to be drafted so they could protect their families and to serve as a "Barrier of Defence to the inner settlements." Petition from Inhabitants of Clinch to WP, [1780], PP-LC, p. 1097.
74. Detailed accounts of the battle at King's Mountain can be found in Lyman C. Draper, *King's Mountain and Its Heroes: History of the Battle of King's Mountain* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967 reprint of 1881 edition); Johnson, *Preston*, pp. 261–6; John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British*

- Campaigns in the Carolinas. 1780–1782* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1985), pp. 108–21; and Mark M. Boatner III, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 575–83.
75. William Davidson to [WP?], 10 October 1780, “Branch Papers,” p. 320.
 76. Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, p. 582.
 77. WP to General Horatio Gates, 27 October 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 84.
 78. George Skillern to WP, 13 October 1780, “Preston Papers”-VMHB, pp. 310–1.
 79. George Skillern to WP, 30 October 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 85.
 80. Jefferson to County Lieutenants of Botetourt and Montgomery, PP-DM, 5QQ 87; *Jefferson Papers*, 4:85.
 81. Horatio Gates to Officers, 12 October 1780, PP-VHS, Mss1 P9267c; Horatio Gates to Thomas Jefferson, 1 November 1780, *Jefferson Papers*, 4:86.
 82. Preston also sent estimates to Gates of how much it would cost to set up the prison area. WP to General Horatio Gates, 27 October 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 84. Gates wrote Jefferson, “I had no conception that the Setting Up Two hundred Yards of Picketing, could cost 100,000.” Horatio Gates to Thomas Jefferson, 3 November 1780, *Jefferson Papers*, 4:91.
 83. Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Huntington, 7 November 1780, *Jefferson Papers*, 4:98–100; Thomas Jefferson to Horatio Gates, 10 November 1780, *Jefferson Papers*, 4:108–9.
 84. Thomas Madison to [WP], 9 November 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 86.
 85. Eight individuals on 8 November 1780 received property back “as nothing appears against them with Regard of their being Enemies to the State.” Philip Dubton had his case dismissed and an order given that property taken by the militia of the counties be restored “whilst he behaves as a good Citizen otherwise he is to be tried for his past offences as an Enemy to his Country.” Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782, LOV, 20:302. Not all individuals were similarly treated. Peter Raizor was required to put up £5,000 while being investigated for his loyalties (Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782, LOV, 20:300). In 1781 similar actions took place when David Fulton had his goods returned since no evidence had been produced that he ever left the Patriot cause. 7 February 1781, Montgomery County Order Book 2, 1774–1782, LOV, 20:306.
 86. WP to Thomas Jefferson, 13 April 1781, *Jefferson Papers*, 5:436–7.
 87. Colonel George Skillern to WP, 23 November 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 88; Arthur Campbell to WP, 5 December 1780, PP-LC, p. 1091. Apparently this represented a state-wide problem. The Virginia legislature even considered taking slaves on a proportional basis from those who had a large number and then providing one slave and a small bounty of money to men who would volunteer to join the army. Thomas Madison to WP, 30 November 1780, PP-LC, p. 1090. WP to Colonels Arthur and William Campbell, 6 December 1780, Preston Family Papers, Gray Collection, FC. George Skillern from Botetourt County marched south on 12 December 1780 with sixty volunteers, “the finest Company I ever see.” George Skillern to WP, 13 December 1780, “Preston Papers”-VMHB, pp. 316–17.

88. The Deposition of William Springstone [December 1780], "Preston Papers"-VMHB, pp. 313–14; Colonel William Campbell to [WP], 17 December 1780, PP-DM, 5QQ 89; WP to Colonel William Campbell, 20 December 1780, PP-VHS, Mss1 P9267c23.
89. Thomas Jefferson to WP, 7 December 1780, PP-LC, p. 1093.
90. WP to William Campbell, 20 December 1780, PP-VHS, Mss1 P9267c23.
