

# ***Moses Endicott in the Revolutionary War* ©**

by

LTC (Ret) Teddy H. Sanford, Jr.

## **Background**

On October 29, 1759, Moses Endicott was born in the colony of New Jersey<sup>1</sup>. He died nearly seventy-five years later, on May 8 of 1834,<sup>2</sup> and is buried at the Endicott Meeting House in Harrison County, Kentucky<sup>3</sup>. For almost four of those seventy-five years, he fought for freedom in the American Revolution.

Moses was the oldest son of Thomas Endicott (1737-1831) and his wife Sarah Welsh (1742-1790). While still a small child, the family left New Jersey and traveled with his father, mother, and younger brother Joseph (1761-1827) south through Virginia and settled on the Eastern slopes of the Appalachian Mountains in Surry County, North Carolina sometime after 1763.<sup>4</sup> Thomas, Sarah, Moses, and Joseph lived and farmed on the frontier between the Colony of North Carolina and the Cherokee Indians to the west. When the Endecotts first arrived, the British were making efforts to bring more settlers into the colony. In the summer of 1776, they tried to push the Cherokee over the mountains into present day Tennessee.

Then, with the Declaration of Independence on July 4<sup>th</sup>, the British changed their tactics. They sent agents to incite the Cherokee to attack those who had settled in the far western counties of the colony and who were decidedly for the American cause.<sup>5</sup> These attacks caused serious problems for settlers in Surry County as well, even though most of them were loyal to the British, as were settlers in Rowan County (to the south) and Guilford County (to the east).

As the drums of war began to beat louder, the Endicott family initially stayed close to home and probably did not announce to their neighbors that they were for Independence. That, however, was about to change as the summer of 1777 began to wane.

## **The War Years**

From the beginning of the American Revolution until June of 1778, there were sixteen major battles fought, and all sixteen were fought in the Northern Theater. During this time, supporters of the American cause who were living in the South carried on a guerilla war against the British, their Tory allies, and the Indians to the west, primarily the Cherokee. After the summer of 1778, all eight of the remaining major battles of the American Revolution were fought in the South, and the experience in guerilla warfare possessed by many of the militia units and their commanders would prove invaluable to the American Cause.<sup>6</sup>

In early October of 1777, Moses Endicott had already had a talk with his father. Life on the farm was tough and there were constant threats from the Cherokee and even from some of their neighbors who suspected that the family supported the Revolution. But on October 29<sup>th</sup>, Moses would be eighteen and he was anxious to sign up with the Surry County militia to take on the Tories. His father was reluctant to let him go. His younger brother Joseph, now 16, had only recently become proficient with the long rifle and the rest of the family needed protection. Besides Thomas, Sarah, and the two older boys, there were now 13-year-old Aaron, 11-year-old Brasilia, and the two little boys, 6-year-old Thomas and 2-year-old Samuel. Moses was surprised then when Thomas agreed that it was time for him to do his part. He was outfitted with a horse, a rifle, some dry food, and the clothes on his back and sent off to war.

In late October of 1777, Moses signed up for three months of service in Captain William Hardens' Company in Colonel Joseph Williams' Regiment of North Carolina militia. The time was spent learning the basic skills of a soldier although there is no indication that he saw any significant action. In January of 1778, he was honorably discharged from service and returned to his home.<sup>7</sup>



Moses had not been home for long, however, when the family received news that Colonel Benjamin Cleveland and his mounted regiment--known as "Cleveland's Bulldogs" by admirers and as "Cleveland's Devils" by the British and the Tories for their brutal but effective actions--was looking for recruits.<sup>8</sup> Once again, in early March of 1778, Moses volunteered. He served for thirteen months in Captain William Underwood's Company in Colonel Benjamin Cleveland's Regiment of North Carolina Troops. He had become a "Bulldog" or, to the British, a "Devil."

**Colonel Benjamin Cleveland**

It was not easy to distinguish state troops from militia as the two acted together so regularly. For the most part, Moses was involved in some "—expeditions against the Tories in some unimportant skirmishes."<sup>9</sup> Given the nature of the war, this might have been an understatement since they engaged in lynching and in efforts to force settlers on the British side to leave the counties where the "Bulldogs" were operating. Late in the year, the war took a decidedly different turn when the British captured Savannah, Georgia on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December. The war had shifted to the Southern Theater.

At the end of March 1779, Moses Endicott once more was honorably discharged, but agreed to continue his service as a "minuteman" in Captain Underwood's company and in Colonel Cleveland's regiment. He was often away from home when he would rejoin his

unit and “--- scour the upper part of North Carolina for the purpose of checking the outrages of the Tories.”<sup>10</sup>

The next stage of Moses’ participation in the war is not well documented. From March of 1778 until March of 1779, he had been in full-time service to Colonel Cleveland and the regiment. When he became a “minuteman” he was at home but immediately available to the regiment whenever a threat appeared. The regiment never exceeded about 350 men and I speculate that probably 50-100 were on full time duty with the remainder serving as “minutemen” who could quickly be mobilized to counter Tories, and Moses was one of these men. The operations they carried out were often quite brutal. During 1779, Cleveland’s troops caught two known hoodlums (or Tories), James Coyle and John Brown, who had been terrorizing the countryside on a spree of rape, murder, robbery, and plundering. Colonel Cleveland summarily hanged both men from the nearest tree and severely beat James Harwell who had harbored the fugitives. Colonel Cleveland was indicted for murder in the Superior Court of the District of Salisbury but was pardoned on November 6, 1779 by the governor.<sup>11</sup>

Ammunition was always in short supply, and in March of 1780, Moses was detached from his unit and participated with others in the transport of lead from Chislers Mine on New River in Virginia to forces under General Rutherford and General Gates. When he began this service, the Siege of Charleston in South Carolina was underway and on May 12, the British were successful in its capture.<sup>12</sup> The Tory militias in the South were encouraged by the success and by the defeat of General Gates on August 16<sup>th</sup> of 1780 at Camden.<sup>13</sup> Moses, after five months of packing lead, was allowed to rejoin his regiment and prepare for the battles yet to come.

The period August 1780 to April 1781 was the most intense and decisive eight months of the Revolutionary War and Moses Endicott with Colonel Cleveland’s “Bulldogs” played a major part. In his pension papers, Moses talks about being engaged, soon after his return to the regiment, in “several severe skirmishes” with the Tories in Henry County, Virginia and west to Big Glades. (The latter was then part of Virginia, but is in present day Pocahontas County, West Virginia about 80 miles north of the Virginia-North Carolina line). These attacks on the Tories were a continuation of a series of militia victories that began on June 20<sup>th</sup> of 1780 with the engagement near Ramseur’s Mill, and concluded with the Battle of Shallow Ford on October 14<sup>th</sup> of 1780. Meanwhile, during August and early September, Cleveland’s “Bulldogs” including Moses, were in pursuit of the Tory “North Carolina Volunteers” under British Colonel Samuel Bryan. That pursuit came to an end after the Loyalists were pushed out of the state of North Carolina.

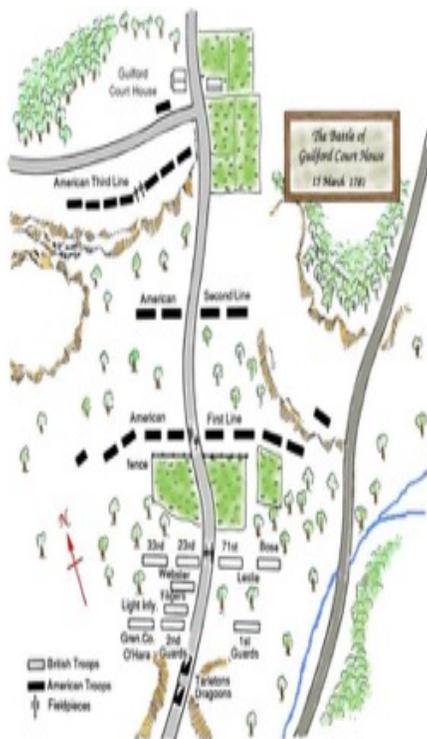
Next, in late September, Colonel Cleveland led the entire regiment of 350 men to Quaker Meadows. There, forces from North and South Carolina and present day Eastern Tennessee gathered and their leaders planned for action against Major Patrick Ferguson and his 1000 man Tory “Loyal American Volunteers.” Major Ferguson--who actually

was a Lieutenant Colonel in the British 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot, but preferred to use the lesser title when commanding loyal militia--had begun a campaign shortly after the Battle of Camden in August to hunt down and punish the rebels who were continuing to resist royal authority. This had enflamed many of the “Over Mountain Men” from western North and South Carolina. His most recent move was to bring his “Volunteers” into North Carolina to screen the west flank of an expected invasion by the British under Lieutenant General Charles Lord Cornwallis. When the assembly found out that Major Ferguson and his men were encamped on King’s Mountain, there was a rapid movement of patriots to find and destroy the force.

Unfortunately, someone had stolen Moses Endicott’s horse, and when his regiment rode to the east, he found himself with an infantry formation moving toward King’s Mountain in an attempt to intercept any British or Tories trying to escape. They were still marching when, on October 7<sup>th</sup> of 1780, the Battle of King’s Mountain occurred. Major Ferguson was killed as were 150 of his “Volunteers” and the remainder were captured.<sup>14</sup>

After Kings Mountain, some of the forces proceeded into South Carolina and fought at the Battle of Cowpens on January 17<sup>th</sup> of 1781. However, most of the North Carolina militia was released to return home to protect against Tory bands. We do know that Moses was with the dismounts for about six weeks after Kings Mountain and then returned home in mid-November.

While the rebellion had accomplished a turnaround of the war at Kings Mountain and Cowpens, it failed to stop the British who soon invaded North Carolina. Pushing across the state, the British were on a collision course with the Americans at a place called Guilford Court House and again Moses was there. Moses described “several very severe skirmishes on the Reedy Fork of the Haw River.”<sup>15</sup> While the main action did not occur until March 15<sup>th</sup> of 1781, it is likely that Moses was referring to a fight that began on the March 6<sup>th</sup>. In a letter written after the battle by Lord Cornwallis to Lord George



**Guilford's Courthouse Battle Map**  
Courtesy of US Parks Service



**Illustration by Dan Troiani, National Park Service, 1976, of American Militia firing at the battle of Guilford Courthouse**

Germaine, the Secretary of State for America, he states that “General Greene fell back to Thomson’s House near Boyd’s Ford on the Reedy Fork, but his light troops and militia still remained near us. I marched on the 6<sup>th</sup> to drive them in, and to attack General Greene if an opportunity offered. I succeeded completely in the first, and at Wetzels Mill on the Reedy Fork where they made a stand. The Back Mountain men and some militia suffered considerably with little loss on our side.”<sup>16</sup>

This is the only documented reference to fights along the Reedy Fork in the Guilford Court House campaign, and Moses undoubtedly referred to this fight in his pension papers. In another letter of roughly the same time, Major General Sir Henry Clinton, commander of the British 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment remarked that “Cornwallis re-crossed the Reedy Fork and marched in a southwest direction for twenty-five miles toward Deep River where he halted for one day. This, unfortunately, afforded General Greene an opportunity of re-crossing the Haw to meet supplies and new levies which were coming to him from Virginia and Hillsborough which, being completely affected by the 11<sup>th</sup>, he was now in a condition to face his Lordship and even bring him to action.”<sup>17</sup>

The stand made by Moses and the militia at Reedy Fork helped buy the time for the Continentals and the militia to complete their plans. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Moses Endicott and the North Carolina militia stood in the first line facing west toward the British attack at Guilford Court House, and the world would soon turn upside down.

After the Battle of Guilford Court House, Moses and much of the militia were allowed to go home. Their war was over. The British headed to Virginia and eventually Yorktown where General George Washington and the French fleet trapped them and effectively brought an end to the Revolutionary War on October 19<sup>th</sup> of 1781.<sup>18</sup>

In all, Moses Endicott had served a total of 40 months during the Revolutionary War, and certainly did his part to gain and secure American freedom. It is noteworthy that his mother and father, Thomas and Sarah Welsh Endicott, along with his brothers, supported the cause throughout the war and survived the brutal guerilla warfare that ravaged many homesteads in North Carolina. The United States and the State of North Carolina paid Thomas for “sundries furnished the Militia of North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina.”<sup>19</sup> For Moses, there was a land grant waiting for him in the wilds of Kentucky and the family would soon be on the move again. But that is another story.

Author’s Note: A special thanks to Endicott Cousins LTC (Ret) Gordon S. Harmon and Ed Tracy for their invaluable contributions to this work.

*In Memory of Moses Endicott  
Endicott Meeting House Cemetery- Harrison County, Kentucky*



*Photo Credits: Ed Tracy*



***Moses Endecott Memorial Service and Dedication – June 6, 2004  
Sponsored by the Endecott-Endicott Family Association, Inc.***

***[www.endecott-endicott.com](http://www.endecott-endicott.com)***

***Moses Endicott is additionally honored, with other Revolutionary War soldiers, on a  
plaque at the Bourbon County, Kentucky Courthouse***

<sup>1</sup> McCloskey, Mabel McFatridge. *Some Descendants of John Endecott, Governor, Mass Bay Colony*. Reprinted (Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company, 2002). 30.

<sup>2</sup> Moses Endicott Revolutionary War Pension Application R3348 National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC. Wellment Endicott Widows Application. September 20, 1855 in Posey County Indiana Wellment Endecott, 82, filed an application for her bounty land entitlement stating that she is the widow of Moses Endecott, a revolutionary pensioner who received his pension for his services in Lexington, Kentucky up to the time of his death on April 24, 1834; that she married him in Harrison County, Kentucky April 8, 1834; that they were married by Charles Webb, a minister of the gospel, that she was the widow of Joseph Endicott at the time she married Moses; that Moses was a resident of Nicholas County, Kentucky.

<sup>3</sup> Harmon, Gordon S. and Sanford, Teddy H. Jr. *Thomas Endicott, The Pioneer Patriarch*. (Springfield, MO: GSH Visions, 2008). 7, 11. Moses Endicott donated one acre of his land for the construction in 1791 of the Endicott Meeting House, the oldest continuous place of worship west of the Alleghenies.

<sup>4</sup> McCloskey, Mabel M. *Some Descendants of John Endecott, Governor, Massachusetts Bay Colony*, (Salem: Higginson Book Co., 1999). 30-34.

- <sup>5</sup> Cleveland, Vicki L. J. Cleveland Family Chronicles. *Deeds of Glory: A Biography of Colonel Benjamin Cleveland*. <http://www.angelfire.com/il/ClevelandFamilyChron/ColBen.html>. downloaded 24 February 2014.
- <sup>6</sup> Sherman, William T. *Calendar and Record of the Revolutionary War in the South: 1780-1781*. (Seattle: William T. Sherman, 2003).
- <sup>7</sup> Moses Endicott. Revolutionary War Pension Application R3348
- <sup>8</sup> Cleveland. op. cit.
- <sup>9</sup> Moses Endicott: op. cit.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Cleveland. op. cit.
- <sup>12</sup> Middlekauff, Robert. *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*. (Oxford University Press, 1982). 454.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid. 463.
- <sup>14</sup> Allen, Thomas B. *The Over Mountain Men*. Military History Magazine for November 2010. 38-39.
- <sup>15</sup> Moses Endicott: op. cit.
- <sup>16</sup> Sherman. *Calendar and Record of the Revolutionary War in the South: 1780-1781*. 416.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. 417.
- <sup>18</sup> Middleauff. *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*. 590.
- <sup>19</sup> North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History Revolutionary Army Accounts, Volume A, 249. This documentation is sufficient evidence with the National Society Sons of the American Revolution (NSSAR) and the National Daughters of the American Revolution (NDAR) to submit membership applications to each respective society as a proven direct descendant of Thomas Endicott (1737-1831).