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# A HISTORY OF THE GILCHRISTS

by

ROBERT W. GILCHRIST - 1997

Posted here by Kind Permission of Bob and Peggy's daughters, Erin Silvaroli and Lynley Barry,  
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Continued.....

## THE IMPACT OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION ON ROBESON COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA

Although no major decisive battles took place in Robeson County during the American Revolution, there were many skirmishes and sharp encounters between the opposing sides; and, though there was not great loss of life on either side, both groups pursued the conflict with such determination as to keep the whole region in a state of complete disorder. The peace-loving settlers, who were themselves divided in their loyalties, lived in constant fear of imminent seizure.

The Tories, never great in numbers nor well organized, were primarily on the defensive, with their offensive engagements being all together the sudden surprise attack. The area's woods and thick swamps provided them with ample refuge. Tory headquarters for the region became McPhaul's Mill, owned by Neil McPhaul, a captain in the British army and an ardent Tory. The rendezvous site was located about one and a half miles west of Antioch Church and about five miles east of Mill Prong. Here Loyalists were recruited, troops were drilled, and Whig Patriots were often placed in confinement. Another point of rendezvous, but with less significance than McPhaul's Mill was Floral College. The attitude of the settlers living in this section, however, was considerably more apathetic, plus the location did not afford the Tories the protection provided at McPhaul's Mill.

As the activities of the Tories became increasingly more flagrant, outside aid had to be summoned. With the arrival of Colonel Thomas Wade in the fall of 1781 in command of an effective force of Patriots, the two most significant engagements to take place in the area were fought: The Battle of Drowning Creek and The Battle of Raft Swamp.

The Battle of Drowning Creek took place where Beattie's Bridge crossed the Lumber River - known as Drowning Creek from this point to its source. (The site of the bridge is only a short distance from Gilchrist Bridge.) Wade and his men encamped on the east side of the creek on the present site of the Montpelier Presbyterian Church. His arrival, however, had not gone unnoticed. At 11:00 on the morning of September 1, 1781, the Patriots were attacked by the combined force of British Colonel David Fanning's 225 cavalymen and Tory Colonel Hector McNeill with seventy enlisted men and numerous recruits. Wade's men mounted a furious counter assault on the numerically superior and better positioned enemy. The battle lasted for approximately two hours and evolved into stiff hand-to-hand combat. Then, with the timely attack by Colonel McNeill's force, which had failed in carrying out an earlier planned attack, victory was snatched from the Patriots and they were forced to withdraw. Colonel Wade later reported a loss of only four men wounded, while Colonel Fanning reported the Patriots' loss as nineteen dead and fifty-four prisoners. His own casualties he claimed were five wounded and five dead horses. It was later determined that Colonel McNeill's failure to initiate the planned attack on Wade's force was due to the fact that his brother, Alexander McNeill, was a captain under Colonel Wade.

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Arriving at the camp on October 15th, the Patriots discovered the near four hundred Tories had fled about an hour earlier and were in rapid flight down Raft Swamp. Setting out in hot pursuit, the Patriots quickly caught up with and subdued the Tories' rear guard, then made a dash to the bridge crossing the swamp in an effort to stop the main Tory body. Hand-to-hand fighting, using sabres, erupted with many, including horses, being thrown into the water. A number of the embattled Tories were able to break away, reassembling across the swamp in a field. But being in no position to withstand the charging dragoons, they fled into the nearby swamp, thus bringing to an end the Battle of Raft Swamp. The Tory loss was given as sixteen killed and about fifty wounded; the Patriot loss was one killed, and about thirty wounded. The battle site was on the west side of Big Raft Swamp at the point where Lowery Road crosses the swamp. Soon after this encounter the Tories in the area began to disband leaving the Whig Patriots in control. (1)

Yet, with significant clashes between Patriots and Tories occurring within minutes of his home, and with close acquaintances lining up on either side desirous of his support, what position did John Gilchrist take? The answer is found in part in a 1797 case involving, a sharply contested election that was brought before the North Carolina Senate by General John Willis, who, in turn, had lost the Senatorial election to Mr. John Gilchrist of Robeson County. Willis accused John Gilchrist of being a Tory during the war with Great Britain, and insisted on his removal from the Senate. The following are several character depositions concerning John Gilchrist made before Justices of the Peace: Mr. Daniel McLauchlin of nearby Richmond County and Mr. David Torry. The testimonies provide a still further glimpse into the character and nature of John Gilchrist, as well as his position on the American Revolution. (2)



(1) McLean, Angus W. THE HIGHLAND SCOTS IN NORTH CAROLINA, Vol. II (unpublished), pages 370-395. Many thanks to Mr. Vic Clark of Dallas, Texas for making this material available.

(2) North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh: General Assembly Session Records, Nov.-Dec. 1797 - Box #1 (in folder). "Senate Committee Reports (Privileges and Elections - Miscellaneous)." The discovery and research of this material was by Mr. Ransom McBride of Cary, North Carolina --- with grateful appreciation.

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*That Mr. Gilchrist a member of this house  
as being ineligible to a seat as such in  
consequence of his taking up arms against  
the British States during the last war with  
Great Britain. Your committee after a  
due consideration of vouchers and documents  
addressed by both parties, and a full  
investigation of the allegations in said  
memorial, are of opinion that Mr. John  
Gilchrist the Senator from Robeson  
County is entitled to a seat in this  
house and ought to be continued as  
such.*

*B. Gaither chmn.*

The above text transcribes as follows:

"The committee of privileges and elections to whom was referred the memorial of General Willis reports:

That the said memorial impeached Mr. John Gilchrist a member of this house as being ineligible to a seat as such in consequence of his taking up Arms against the United States during the last war with Great Britain. Your committee after a due consideration of vouchers and documents addressed by both parties, and a full investigation of the allegations in said memorial, are of opinion that Mr. John Gilchrist the Senator from Robeson County is entitled to a seat in this house and right to be continued as such.

B. Gaither, chmn

*North Carolina*  
*In Senate 25<sup>th</sup> Novem: 1797.*  
*The foregoing Report being read,*  
*Resolved that this House do concur*  
*therewith. ---*

The above text transcribes as follows:

North Carolina

In Senate 25th Novem: 1797. The foregoing Report being read. Resolved that this House do concur therewith. ---

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*holy Evangelist of Almighty God. Deposeth as follows in  
a case of contested election between John Willis esq. and John  
Gilchrist both of the County of Robeson. To wit -*  
*James Allen Deposeth & saith, that he never knew  
nor never heard of Mr. Gilchrist to bear arms, or in any  
measure whatever to aid or assist the Enemies of the United  
States during the late war. He farther saith that he was in com-  
pany with a party of the Torys at Mr. Gilchrist's house in  
the time that Major Craigs army lay at Willmington, &  
that said Party insisted much on Mr. Gilchrist's going with  
them to the Camp - which he refused. They then threatened to  
press him to go with them. He replied that he was determined  
to not take up any arms, as long as he could avoid doing it.  
They then took away a gun that said Gilchrist had without any  
long delay. Test. Daniel Mc Lauchlin J.P.*

The above text transcribes as follows:

State of No, Carolina )  
November 15th 1797  
Richmond County )

On the day above written the following persons came before me, Daniel McLauchlin, a Justice of the Peace for said County, and after being duly sworn on the holy Evangelist of Almighty God deposeth as follows in a case of contested election between John Willis esq. and John Gilchrist both of the County of Robeson.

James Allen deposeth and saith: that he never knew nor never heard of Mr. Gilchrist to bear Arms, or in any measure whatever to aid or assist the Enemies of the United States during the late [war]; he farther saith that he was in company with a party of Tory's at Mr. Gilchrist's house in the time that Major Craigs army lay at Willmington and that said Party insisted much on Mr. Gilchrist's going with them to the Camp --- which he refused them. They then threatened to press him to go with them. He replied that he was determined to not take up any arms as long as he could avoid doing it. They then took away a gun that said Gilchrist had without any ??? whatever ---  
Test.

Daniel McLauchlin J.P.

James Allan

*John Watson Deposeth & saith: that during the late war  
between America & Great Britain he was frequently in the  
Tory camps, & often in the settlement wherein Mr. John Gilchrist  
lived, but never heard nor never knew him to aid, assist, or  
comfort the British Troops, or others the Enemies of the United  
States. But often heard the parties called Torys murmur & com-  
plain against said Gilchrist for not joining them -  
On being asked if he heard of Mr. Gilchrist getting votes  
at last Election on account of his being suspected to be  
attached to the British cause - he replied that he was at  
the Election: but never heard any such threats or promises  
by any person as a reason to vote for him.  
Test. Daniel Mc Lauchlin J.P.*

The above text transcribes as follows:

John Watson deposeth and saith: that during the late war between America and Great Britain he was frequently in the Tory camps, and often in the settlement wherein Mr. John Gilchrist lived, but never heard nor never knew him to aid, assist, or comfort the British Troops, or others [of] the Enemies of the United States, but often heard the parties called Torys murmur and complain against said Gilchrist for not joining them.

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any such reported or assigned by any person as a reason to vote for him.

Test. Daniel McLauchlin J.P.

John Watson

Archibald McBride deposeth & saith that he lived in about five miles of Mr. John Gilchrist's house nearly during the whole time of the Tory Army, & the party called Torys often passed by where he the deponent resided & they often complained that he was always at home when they had to be out on dangerous expeditions, telling him further that he was ruled by his Uncle John McBride & that McBride was ruled & governed by John Gilchrist which they could never get to their camps —  
J.M.B. 1811/12  
Test Daniel McLauchlin

The above text transcribes as follows:

Archibald McBride deposeth and saith: that he lived in about five miles of Mr. John Gilchrist's house nearly during the whole time of the Tory Army, and the party called Torys often passed by where he the deponent resided and they often complained that he was always at home when they had to be out on dangerous expeditions, telling him further that he was ruled by his Uncle John McBride and that McBride was ruled and governed by John Gilchrist which they could never get to their camps.

Test. Daniel McLauchlin J.P.

Arch'd McBride

Allen McGill deposeth & saith that he lived in the family of Mr. John Gilchrist during mostly the whole of the late war: & that he never knew nor ever heard Mr. Gilchrist joining, aiding, assisting, or comforting any of the British Troops or others: the Enemies of the State or of the United States during the late war: & that he the deponent often heard

The above text transcribes as follows:

Allen McGill deposeth and saith: that he lived in the family of Mr. John Gilchrist during mostly the whole of the late war, and that he never knew nor ever heard Mr. Gilchrist joining, aiding, assisting, or comforting any of the British Troops or others [of] the Enemies of the State or of the United States during the War and that he the deponent often heard .....

[Could this man be the school teacher mentioned in the book: The Lumber River Scots, as being brought from Scotland by John Gilchrist to educate his children?]

Angus McBride deposeth & saith that he understood that it should be known by Angus McBride, nephew that he the deponent told some persons that Mr. John Gilchrist was known to have in teaching him some part with the Torys during the late war: then at the end of the Torys: that deponent declared that he never uttered an word thought of saying such expressions with any person whatever: the further which that Angus Gilchrist had heard him not to have said or given the Torys —  
Test Angus McBride

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Angus McBride maketh oath that he understood that it should be said by Neil Brown Esquire that he the Deponent told some person that Mr. John Gilchrist was worse to him in making him turn out with the Torys during the late War than all the rest of the Torys. (T)his deponant declares that he never uttered, nor never thought of using such expression with any person whatever. He further saith that said Gilchrist had advised him not to turn out or join the Torys.

Test.

David Torry J.P.

Angus McBride

Duncan MacBride maketh oath that during the late Tory Army he lived in about one & a half mile from John Gilchrist's house & that he never knew of said Gilchrist's joining or attaching himself to any of the British Troops & that said Gilchrist was known among the Torys by the name of Rebel. The Deponent farther saith that he truly believes said Gilchrist to be in principles an Enemy to the proceedings of said Torys.

David Torry J.P.

The above text transcribes as follows:

Duncan MacBride maketh oath that during the late Tory Army he lived in about one and a half mile of Mr. John Gilchrist's house and that he never knew of said Gilchrist's joining or attaching himself to any of the British Troops - and that said Gilchrist was known among the Torys by the name of Rebel. The Deponent farther saith that he truly believes said Gilchrist to be in principles an Enemy to the proceedings of said Torys.

Test.

David Torry J.P. Duncan McBride

Archibald MacMillan deposeseth & saith that during the whole of the late war between America & Great Britain he lived in about half a mile of Mr. John Gilchrist's house & was frequently in the Tory camps but never knew nor never heard of Mr. Gilchrist joining aiding or assisting any of the British Troops & this deponent farther says that from the conduct & behavior of Mr. Gilchrist that he believes he was an enemy to the Tory cause & a friend to the cause of the Country. He further saith that Mr. Gilchrist advised him not to join the Torys.

The above text transcribes as follows:

Archibald MacMillan deposeseth & saith that during the whole of the late war between America & Great Britain he lived in about half a mile of Mr. John Gilchrist's house & was frequently in the Tory camps but never knew nor never heard of Mr. Gilchrist joining aiding or assisting any of the British troops & this deponent farther says that from the conduct & behavior of Mr. Gilchrist that he believes he was an enemy to the Tory cause & a friend to the cause of the Country. He further saith that Mr. Gilchrist advised him not to join the Torys

Archibald McMillan

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The Late Bob and Peg Gilchrist

Robert W. Gilchrist (1939 - 1998 ) of Titusville, Florida and his wife Peggy, were killed in a tragic automobile accident on April 8, 1998. Both were dedicated teachers and active members of the Park Avenue Baptist Church for over 30 years. Bob specialised in history. Shortly before the accident, he was a guest speaker at the dedication of the restored Mill Prong House near Raeford, North Carolina which was built by his 4th Great Grandfather, John Gilchrist, in 1802. Bob loved his family history, and had planned his third trip to Scotland to renew friendships and continue his research. He made many significant contributions to his heritage, and was honored by the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh with a request for a copy of his 1997 book. In his memory, portions of this 1997 book have also been placed on the internet at <http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~steve/robertwg/> in the hope that it will kindle the interests of others to follow his footprints and continue his quest for knowledge of the Gilchrist family.

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