

The South Carolina Backcountry: Taming the Southern Frontier

This is a very fruitful Spot, thro' which the dividing Line between North and South Carolina runs—The Heads of P. D. [Pee Dee] River, Lynch's Creek, and many other Creeks take their Rise in this Quarter—so that a finer Body of Land is no where to be seen—But it is occupied by a Sett of the most lowest vilest Crew breathing—Scotch Irish Presbyterians from the North of Ireland.

REVEREND CHARLES WOODMASON, 25 JANUARY 1767

The "fruitful Spot" described by the itinerant Anglican missionary Charles Woodmason was the Waxhaws, a settlement along the border between the colonies of North and South Carolina. To Woodmason's friends in Charleston, the Waxhaws might as well have been on another planet. To the incredibly wealthy members of the South Carolina elite, the only world that mattered was their own—the fabled Carolina lowcountry—and it ended about fifty miles from the coast. In the lowcountry parish of St. George Dorchester was a crossroads called

Parish End. The name said it all, except that it might have been more appropriately called World's End. The rest of the colony was dismissively referred to as the backcountry.¹

Much of the backcountry lay in the South Carolina piedmont—a land of rolling hills and lush valleys. The topsoil was rich, but it was only about twelve inches deep in most places, and beneath it was red clay. The forests were predominantly oak and hickory with a scattering of pine and gum trees. Dogwood, red maple, and spice bush were the understory trees. In low-lying areas, were dense canebrakes. In the springtime, native azaleas, buttercups, honeysuckle, Indian pinks, trillium, iris, and violets brightened the fields and forests.²

Dozens of streams of all sizes rived the land, creating the valleys to which early settlers were drawn. Although many of these creeks and rivers began as crystal-clear mountain rivulets, they were soon clouded by soil and vegetable matter.³

In the fields and forests could be found all sorts of wild game: beavers, deer, turkeys, quail, rabbits, opossums, raccoons, bears, foxes, squirrels, wolves, geese, and ducks. In the streams were trout, bream, and catfish. Flocks of passenger pigeons darkened the sky, and the howls of panthers could still be heard. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, when European settlement eliminated them, buffalo still roamed. Ironically, it was the buffalo runs or paths, transformed into trading routes by Indians and Europeans, that became the highways that helped open up the backcountry to settlers.⁴

In 1740 there were very few Europeans in the South Carolina backcountry. By the American Revolution, nearly one-half of the colony's total population, and 80 percent of its white population, lived there.⁵

The migration of predominantly Scots-Irish settlers transformed the lower South and, in the final analysis, was key to

America's triumph over Great Britain in the Revolution. The Great Wagon Road that served as the settlers' highway began across the Schuylkill River from Philadelphia. From the Pennsylvania capital it went west to Harrisburg and then turned south, following the great Shenandoah Valley through Maryland and Virginia into the piedmont of North Carolina. The road veered slightly southeastward to the Moravian settlements at Wachovia, and then almost due south to the South Carolina town of Pine Tree Hill (Camden).⁶

The Great Wagon Road traversed the Catawba River Valley from north to south en route from Wachovia to Pine Tree Hill. The Catawba River, arising in North Carolina and continuing into South Carolina, was a slow-moving, muddy river. Its valley was broad and fertile. Because of its lushness and accessibility, it was the site of some of the first backcountry settlements in South Carolina. The Waxhaws, one of the larger backcountry settlements, was situated in the Catawba River Valley. In 1769 John Stuart, who was royal superintendent of Indian affairs for the Southern District, wrote that "near the Boundary, that Country is full of inhabitants, which in my memory was considered by the Indians as their hunting Ground, such is their rage for settling far back."⁷

What was it that caused this veritable flood of new settlers into the South Carolina backcountry? Cheap and available land was the primary attraction. South Carolina had a more generous land policy for settlers than did either Virginia or North Carolina. Each male head of household could claim one hundred acres for himself and an additional fifty acres for each member of his family and each servant. All that was required was that the settler enter a memorial at the land office in Charleston (something that many settlers neglected to do). South Carolina also had a long-standing tradition of religious toleration. And for those who thought about growing crops for export, South Carolina had a major port. So,

while some settlers from Pennsylvania stopped off in Virginia and North Carolina, other settlers from those colonies joined the migration southward.⁸

The initial group that headed south was made up almost entirely of Scots-Irish. These were ethnic lowland Scots who, because they were Protestant, had been encouraged by the English government to settle in northern Ireland. For years religious intolerance has been given as the reason for the Scots-Irish immigration. But the real reason was economics. In the early eighteenth century, absentee landlords began to raise rents and shorten leases. And in the 1770s, the linen industry was beset with difficulties. With very little hope of prospering in Ulster, the Scots-Irish immigrated to Pennsylvania. There, they ran afoul of the Quaker government, which had little concept of what was occurring on the Pennsylvania frontier. If there were problems, the Quakers in Philadelphia were sure that it was the settlers and not the Indians who were responsible.⁹

Having little patience with governments with which they disagreed, the Scots-Irish decided to leave. They were a determined bunch, characterized by one historian as "undisciplined, emotional, courageous, aggressive, [and] pugnacious." But, he allowed, "they nevertheless produced ambitious leaders with the virtues of the warrior and politician."¹⁰

Although most of the Scots-Irish came to South Carolina after living in Pennsylvania or Virginia for a while, a large number came directly from Ulster in 1772 at the urging of the Reverend William Martin. This exodus was occasioned by an incident involving one of Martin's parishioners, a man named Beck. When Mrs. Beck was in labor with their first child, the local landlord's rent collector appeared. He gave the Becks two choices: immediate payment of all money due or immediate eviction. In a rage, Beck literally tossed the collector out of the house and, in the tussle, broke the

man's neck. Mrs. Beck and the child died, and Beck disappeared.¹¹

In a blistering sermon to his Londonderry congregation, Martin warned them that this was their future in Ulster under British rule. On 3 January 1772, he posted a notice on his church door of a "favourable opportunity" to go to South Carolina, where people could "enjoy life in abundance with the free exercise of their religious sentiments." In September 1772, some 467 families heeded the clergyman's call and left Ulster for South Carolina. They landed in Charleston and made their way by foot to the Catawba River Valley.¹²

The Scots-Irish were proud of their heritage. They were, first of all, Scots. They knew their nation's tortured history and its mistreatment by the English. They were fervent Presbyterians whose forebears had been persecuted for their beliefs. They were family men and women and tended to stick close by their kinfolks. They frequently emigrated in groups—either as families or as friends and neighbors with relationships reaching back to Ulster. Within the space of a generation, the upcountry was populated with families bearing such names as Adair, Bratton, Buchanan, Caldwell, Calhoun, Carroll, Collins, Davie, Jackson, Kuykendal, Lacey, Logan, Martin, McClure, Montgomery, Moore, Richardson, Ross, and Wardlaw.¹³

Two of what would become South Carolina's most famous families—the Jacksons and the Calhouns—were part of this eighteenth-century mass migration into South Carolina. In the 1760s, Andrew and Elizabeth Hutchinson Jackson, the parents of the seventh president, left County Antrim, Ireland, for Pennsylvania. However, they did not settle there. Almost immediately, they followed the lead of Elizabeth's sisters and hundreds of other Scots-Irish heading southward to the Carolinas, where they hoped they could make a better life for themselves. The Jacksons settled on

Twelve Mile Creek in the Waxhaws, and Andrew was born there. In the 1730s, the Calhouns left County Donegal, Ireland, for Pennsylvania. Later they moved to Augusta County, Virginia, where the family prospered. In 1756 Patrick Calhoun (the father of John C. Calhoun), his two brothers, and his widowed mother, Catherine, left Virginia for South Carolina. They established a new home first in the Waxhaws and then moved on to the Long Canes settlement along the Savannah River. Like the Waxhaws, Long Canes was a Scots-Irish stronghold.¹⁴

It is probable that the Calhouns, like most others moving down the Great Wagon Road, chose to do so after their fall crops had been harvested. If so, they would have traveled during the cold, rainy months from November to March. Sometimes in January and February snow and sleet made the trek even more uncomfortable. However, the immigrants endured the discomfort of winter travel so that they could be in their new homes in time for spring planting.¹⁵

Because travel was difficult, settlers were not able to carry much with them on their trek. Yet it was a rare family who did not take with them some special keepsake to use in their new home. When John Nuckolls left Virginia, he carried with him the cutting of a white rose, which he planted outside the door of his new cabin home. Ben Robertson's forebear, whom he called Great-great-great-great-aunt Narcissa, "packed the things she could not bear to leave—an *Arabian Nights* . . . , peach stones, hollyhock seed, seeds of melons and roses, knitting needles, a Bible." She also carefully wrapped a sugar bowl, "a piece of yellow crockery" that she had been given as a young bride in Pennsylvania and that had survived a number of moves on the frontier. Once her family reached the Valley of the Twelve Mile, she carefully planted her seeds.¹⁶

The rolling hills of the backcountry appealed to the new

arrivals. Early backcountry settlers took up whatever open lands they found so that they would not have to go to the trouble of clearing their fields. Those who settled on uncleared lands seldom took the time or expended the energy to chop down the large trees. Rather, they opted for *girdling*—cutting through the bark and cambium layer to the wood all around the trees—which caused them to die. It was a quick, easy method of getting enough land to plant new crops. Once their fields were established, they planted grain and Irish potatoes and raised livestock.¹⁷

Housing was also a concern for the new arrivals. Lean-tos made of pine branches were one quick fix. So was something called a "potato house," which was similar to a lean-to except that the frame was covered with sod rather than pine branches. These earthen-covered huts offered little protection from the elements, particularly during a hard rain. When time permitted, settlers cut down the massive pines for log cabins.¹⁸

Many of the settlers were poor, and their homes reflected their lack of worldly goods. "The People," wrote the Reverend Woodmason, "all new Settlers, extremely poor—Live in Logg Cabbins like Hogs—and their Living and Behavior as rude or more so than the savages."¹⁹

Typically these early cabins had but a single room and a dirt floor. Some had only three walls, but most had four. Roofs were made of bark or split logs. Sometimes clay was used for chinking in between the logs. The cabins seldom had windows. Any opening other than a door was small, with solid wooden shutters. Chimneys were made of local fieldstone or sticks and clay.²⁰

Food and clothing were just as basic as housing. Corn was the first crop planted. Hogs were allowed to roam free in the forest until autumn, when they were rounded up for butchering. Generally there were just two meals a day, and the principal foods were cornbread and fresh pork in the winter and cornbread and bacon

in the summer. There was some variety to this monotonous (and not very nutritious) diet. Vegetable gardens supplied turnips, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes. Native greens, such as poke, and berries and nuts could be found in the wild. Cows and chickens provided milk, eggs, and meat. In the Waxhaws, the Reverend Woodmason complained, all there was to eat was cornmeal, bacon, and eggs. "These people," he wrote, "are all from Ireland, and live wholly on Butter, Milk, Clabber and what in England is given to the Hogs and Dogs." In another location, he complained that he had had to subsist for weeks on "Musk Mellons, Cucumbers, Green Apples and Peaches and such Trash." For a delicate Englishman such as Woodmason—who missed his tea, roast beef, and pudding—backcountry cooking was "exceeding filthy, and most execrable." Perhaps if the good reverend had consumed a liquid other than water he might have had an easier time digesting backcountry fare. However, nowhere in his journal does he mention drinking corn whiskey, which was plentiful.²¹

Whatever was set on the table was eaten out of wooden trenchers or bowls. Gourds and wooden noggins were used for drinking and eating utensils; plates, glasses, and cups were scarce. If available, pewter spoons and hunting knives made eating easier, but there were no forks.²²

Clothing, like everything else in the backcountry, was limited to not much more than the bare necessities. Women wore a simple shift, a short petticoat, and little else. Those who had good figures pinned their shifts "to shew the roundness of their Breasts, and slender Waists (for they are generally finely shaped)." Others pulled "their Petticoat close to their Hips to shew the fineness of their Limbs." Much of what we know about backcountry dress comes from Woodmason. Apparently the missionary spent some time ogling the women—before he wrote in disgust that they "might as well be in Puri Naturalibus—Indeed Nakedness is not

censurable or indecent here, and they expose themselves quite Naked, without ceremony—Rubbing themselves and their Hair with Bears Oil." Men wore shirts and breeches, and children ran around "half naked." Everyone's clothing was roughly made, usually from linsey-woolsey or deerskins. Few settlers could afford shoes, and most went barefoot all year.²³

It would not be unfair to say that the backcountry was close to being a state of nature. There were settlements, but the only social organization was the church. Woodmason was an Anglican missionary to the backcountry settlements, but there were only two Anglican congregations beyond Parish End. There were several Quaker meetings, but of those backcountry folk who belonged to a church (and fewer than 10 percent did), most were either Baptist or Presbyterian.²⁴

Sectarian animosities were fierce. Scots-Irish Presbyterians were fervently devoted to their churches and just as fervently antagonistic to those who did not share their particular beliefs. They were the bane of Woodmason's existence and harassed him and any who attended his services. In one location, "[a] Presbyterian fellow carried off the Key to the Meeting House" so that services could not be held indoors. At Hanging Rock Creek, Woodmason was roughed up by "lawless Ruffians" who had been hired by "debauch'd licentious fellows, and Scots Presbyterians." When the missionary persisted in holding a service, "a Gang of Presbyterians" interrupted it by "hallooing and whooping . . . like Indians." In the High Hills of the Santee, some Presbyterians "hir'd a Band of Rude fellows to come to Service who brought with them 57 Dogs (for I counted them) which in Time of Service they set to fighting, and I was obliged to stop." A little later, Woodmason took a dog to the home of one of the area's leaders and informed him that "57 Presbyterians came that Day to Service, and that I had converted one of them, and brought Him

home." He was fortunate to have been able to live to tell such a story.²⁵

Frontier denominationalists took their religion seriously. The Baptists disliked Woodmason and his Anglican Church and did their best to discredit his missionary efforts. However, they liked the Presbyterians even less—and the Presbyterians returned the animosity. So deeply held were these feelings that "a Presbyterian would sooner marry ten of his Children to Members of the Church of England than one to a Baptist." There were more Baptists than Presbyterians in the backcountry, and although there were members of all churches in the various settlements, certain areas were the strongholds of one denomination or the other. The settlers in the Catawba and Savannah River Valleys were predominantly Presbyterian, while those living between the Broad and Saluda Rivers were mainly Baptists.²⁶

Throughout the entire backcountry, there were twenty-one Presbyterian churches, but only two clergy. Several of these churches were very large—such as the Long Canes Church, which had five hundred families and was arguably the largest congregation in the colony. Baptist congregations did not require seminary-educated clergymen and allowed anyone to preach who had been called by the Holy Spirit. Before the Revolution, there were twenty-four organized Baptist churches and forty-nine Baptist meetinghouses in the backcountry. As important as organized religion was to individual communities such as the Waxhaws and Long Canes, 90 percent of the backcountry population was unchurched.²⁷

The oldest and most important Baptist church was located on Dining Creek in the Fairforest community. The Reverend Philip Mulkey moved there in 1762, and the faithful erected a log meetinghouse. A decade later, the congregation of three hundred families was prosperous enough to afford a house of worship. They

built a brick church that was forty by twenty-six feet and included galleries. The Fairforest Church established at least nine branch congregations in other frontier communities before the Revolution.²⁸

The relative unimportance of organized religion to the overwhelming majority of backcountry residents added to the social instability of the region. Non-churchgoers openly profaned the Lord's Day by hunting, fishing, drinking, playing cards, and frolicking. Because of sectarian feelings, little respect was paid by church members to any beliefs but their own.²⁹

This lack of community respect carried over to magistrates' courts. Justices of the peace had very little authority to begin with, but what little they had was eroded by the way many conducted their proceedings. Frequently taverns were the only sizable structure in an area, so the magistrates opted to hold their courts in them. Court Days were occasions more for entertainment than for the dispensing of justice, and local drunks took great delight in hurling insults at the justices and the court proceedings.³⁰

By the 1750s, backcountry society was still not very community-minded. Sectarian and ethnic animosities, individualism, and a general lack of respect for social and civic institutions resulted in a society that was disorganized and unstable. The Cherokee War (1760–61) would be the match that ignited this volatile mix. The result was a society that could best be described as dysfunctional.³¹

The sudden influx of thousands of settlers through the colony's back door, not through Charleston, disrupted the orderly plan of frontier settlement that the colony's government had initiated in 1730. Instead of settling into organized townships that were designed to ring Charleston with a series of fortified settlements, the new upcountry residents settled down wherever they

chose. They were usually careful to apply for official land grants, but they sometimes selected lands that were claimed by the two major Indian nations of the interior, the Cherokee and the Catawba. The proximity of the new settlements to the Cherokee and the Catawba would eventually cause difficulties.³²

In 1760 the Cherokee, angry at broken English promises and urged on by the French on the Gulf Coast, decided to attack South Carolina's frontier settlements. There had been rumors all along the frontier, and in late January some 250 settlers from Long Canes decided it would be best to move closer to the coast. Unfortunately, their wagons got mired in a bog, and while they were trying to get them out, a Cherokee raiding party attacked. The result was the death or capture of nearly forty women and children (including Catherine Calhoun). The dead were mutilated beyond recognition—a fate that befell another group of settlers several days later. Most of the adults were killed, but nine children survived, despite having been scalped.³³

The Cherokee roamed at will almost to the lowcountry. The Long Canes settlements and those along the Tyger and Enoree Rivers were closer to Cherokee territory and were therefore in the greatest danger. The Waxhaws, because of its proximity to the Catawba (who remained firm allies of the English), came through the Cherokee War relatively unscathed. However, there was no safety in the upcountry. One settler said that "if I was to give one hundred Guineas to a person to Cross the Country . . . I could not get any person to Undertake it."³⁴

Cruelty and brutality were the order of the day on both sides. A group of Cherokee voluntarily held hostage at Fort Prince George were murdered by their captors. When the English garrison at Fort Loudon surrendered under a flag of truce, they were mowed down by a hail of arrows and shot as soon as they left the safety of the fort. Responding to this crisis, the colonial Com-

mons House of Assembly in Charleston appealed to the government in London for assistance and raised the bounty on Cherokee scalps from 25 to 35 colonial pounds (\$473 to \$662 in 1996 dollars).³⁵

Everywhere there was chaos. Desperate settlers abandoned their homesteads and crowded into makeshift forts, where disease and corruption took their toll. Those who remained outside the forts helped themselves to everything that had been left behind. Even members of the militia had sticky fingers. This taking of others' property would continue long after the Cherokee were subdued in 1761. The war unleashed numerous horrors on the residents of the frontier, but the complete breakdown of law and order was the most demoralizing.³⁶

The Treaty of Augusta in 1763 established a reservation for the Catawba and pushed the Cherokee farther westward. Residents of the Waxhaws would no longer have to worry much about the danger of an Indian attack. However, they would have to worry about attacks by outlaw bands.

The war completely disrupted whatever organized society had existed on the frontier. The continued influx of new settlers, especially those bent on making trouble, did little to stabilize the situation. Law-abiding folks called these less-than-desirable newcomers "low people," "riff-raff," or "Virginia crackers." They were "hunters and squatters, absconded debtors, idlers, gamblers, and unsavory refugees from the northern colonies, settlers who had never recovered from the trauma of the Cherokee War, deserters from the military forces, and, often, mulattoes, Negroes, or people of mixed white, Indian, and Negro blood."³⁷

By 1766 these undesirables had formed organized outlaw gangs in South Carolina and were cooperating with other criminal bands as far north as Pennsylvania. The Great Wagon Road became their highway for crime. In the summer of 1766, a wave

of lawlessness engulfed the frontier settlements. No one was safe.³⁸

John "Ready Money" Scott, a merchant in the Savannah River Valley, was attacked in his home. The gang members tied up Scott and applied a red-hot poker to parts of his body until he revealed where he had hidden his money. The militiamen in Camden were so fearful of retribution from the organized criminals in the area that they refused to muster and search for robbers known to be lurking nearby. In the Waxhaws, John Huggins saw four suspicious men approach his house. When he challenged them, two of them fled, but the other two assaulted him. In the ensuing scuffle, Huggins was shot through the neck.³⁹

A few brave individuals managed to capture six outlaws. They were taken to Charleston for trial because there were no courts outside the colonial capital; nor were there any law enforcement officers. The lowcountry elite was oblivious to what was happening in the colony beyond Parish End.

It took a journey of two weeks from Long Canes to get to Charleston. Five of the six outlaws were convicted, but Lord Charles Greville Montagu, the newly arrived British governor, pardoned them. He wanted to begin his term by showing the people of South Carolina how merciful he and British justice were. The governor's pardon convinced backcountry leaders that if they wanted law and order, they would have to take matters into their own hands.⁴⁰

During 1767, criminals operated with little fear of law enforcement. Law-abiding citizens were cowed into submission or coerced into cooperation. Outlaws expected storekeepers and tavern owners to become fences for their stolen goods and burned the businesses of those who refused. Some were killed. It took a while for the decent, law-abiding settlers to come up with a plan to restore law and order. Initially sectarian rivalries, personal

feuds, and the natural personal independence of the Scots-Irish settlers hindered any attempt at concerted action.⁴¹

Then the tide turned. It was as if, collectively, the settlers realized that they had to act or their families and homes would be destroyed. They turned on the outlaws with a vengeance. Armed frontiersmen hunted down bandits and burned their hideouts. Those who were caught were whipped to within an inch of their lives. The outlaws gave measure for measure, however, and soon the backcountry was involved in open warfare between those who wanted to build communities and those who wanted to destroy them. Colonial officials were slow to react to the situation. When they did, they decided that the law-abiding-citizens-turned-vigilantes were the bad guys and the outlaws were the victims! In an action that underscored a complete lack of understanding of the problem, Governor Montagu ordered the vigilantes to disperse. His proclamation was ignored.

By the fall of 1767, the various vigilante groups scattered throughout the backcountry had begun to cooperate with one another. Soon they were calling themselves Regulators. The royal governor might have thought of the Regulators as "licentious spirits," but in fact they were the backcountry's leading citizens. Many of them were small planters who owned several hundred acres that they farmed with their families and perhaps a slave or two. Others were entrepreneurs who owned grist- and sawmills or operated country stores. They were men who had a stake in society and wanted not only to preserve it but to improve their holdings. In short, these were individuals who aspired to what we have long called "the American Dream."⁴²

The Regulators were men who had worked hard for what they had and resented those who were lazy. They had carved their farms out of the wilderness, they had built mills, and they had established stores. They knew that if they failed to curb the law-

lessness in the backcountry, they stood a good chance of losing everything for which they had labored so hard. Nowhere was this desire for law, order, and stability more evident than in the remonstrance (petition) that the Regulators sent to the colonial Commons House of Assembly.⁴³

The lengthy preamble to the document (more than five thousand words) detailed the troubles facing backcountry residents.

Our large Stocks of Cattel are either stolen or detroy'd. Our Cow Pens are broke up. . . . Houses have been burned. . . . Stores have been broken open and rifled. . . . Private Houses have been plunder'd; and the Inhabitants wantonly tortured. . . . Property is of no Value, except it be secure: How Ours is secured, appears from the foremen-tion'd Circumstances, and from now being obliged to defend our Families, by *our own Strength: as Legal Methods* are beyond our Reach—or not as yet *extended* to Us.⁴⁴

The preamble did more than catalog the sufferings of the law-abiding citizens of the backcountry. In insulting and sarcastic language, it condemned the negligence of the colonial government for permitting such a state of affairs to exist. Then followed a series of twenty-three requests, twelve of which dealt with courts and legal matters. The Regulators wanted law and order. They also wanted public schools, representation in the Commons House, churches (and clergy to staff them), and Bibles and prayerbooks for the poor. That was all well and good, but the remonstrance was an "in your face" document that offended the members of the Commons House of Assembly. Among the Regulators' requests was a law to set the fees of attorneys because those charged by Charleston lawyers were outrageous. According to item 16, South Carolina was "harder rode at present by Lawyers, than Spain and

Italy by Priests." The eighteenth request was to limit the number of lawyers in the assembly.⁴⁵

The legislators (many of whom were lawyers) *were* offended and tabled the petition. Only after several Regulators apologized to the Commons House for the offensive language were the needs of the backcountry addressed. The legislators passed a circuit court act and created several new parishes in the backcountry. Of more immediate need, they authorized the creation of two ranger companies to bring the outlaws to heel. In effect, the colonial government deputized the Regulators.

Colonial rangers were mounted units that could move swiftly and effectively from one location to another. They had a mission, and they did what they were told to do—eliminate the bandits. They ignored colonial boundaries. From the Savannah River to Virginia, they tracked down outlaws. In North Carolina, they hanged sixteen. Numerous criminals and their associates were flogged. Captured gang members were sent to Charleston, where they were tried and convicted. The worst offenders were hanged, and the others branded. Within six months, the outlaw bands had been broken up, their leaders either dead or decamped to other colonies. The criminals who had terrorized the citizens of the Waxhaws, Long Canes, Camden, and other backcountry settlements were no longer a threat.⁴⁶

The Regulators, however, were not content. There still were "Rogues, and other Idle, worthless, vagrant People" who might be threats to individual property and the community. They needed to be disciplined. Who better to do this than the Regulators?⁴⁷

In June 1768, Regulators from various settlements gathered in congress at the Congarees. This was a familiar backcountry area—the site of a former Indian village and later a trading post at the mouth of Congaree Creek in Saxe Gotha District—almost in the center of the colony. There they passed the Plan of Regu-

lation by which they intended to control the lives of "the baser sort of people." South Carolina had no vagrancy law, so there was no legal way to handle "idle persons." Given the temper of the backcountry, the Regulators once again decided to take matters into their own hands. For three years, it was not the royal government in Charleston but the Regulators who were in control of South Carolina from fifty miles inland to Cherokee territory. The Plan of Regulation was the only law that they recognized.⁴⁸

The Plan of Regulation went far beyond simply imposing law and order. It included provisions for regulating almost every aspect of individuals' lives. If a man did not support his family, he was disciplined. So were immoral women, debtors, drunks, loafers, vagrants, or anyone thought to have had an association with the outlaws. Whipping was the favored form of punishment: "39 lashes well laid on." One thing could be said for the Regulators—they were effective. "The Country was purged of all Villans," wrote an observer. "The Whores were whipped and drove off. The Magistrates & Constables associated with the Rogues, Silenc'd & inhibited. Tranquility reigned. Industry was restor'd."⁴⁹

With no one to oppose them, some Regulators used their movement as a cover to settle old scores. Enforcement of the Plan of Regulation became capricious and, increasingly, vindictive. Punishments were used not just to bring offenders into line but to humiliate and intimidate. Jacob Sumneral, a justice of the peace in New Windsor Township, fell into disfavor and was dragged from his house and whipped. He refused to give up his commission and was kidnapped and tied to a post for seven days. He was freed only because his wife managed to elude the Regulators and get help from royal authorities and sympathetic militia.⁵⁰

Another, more brutal, incident also occurred in New Windsor Township. John Harvey, a farmer, was accused of having a horse that belonged to someone else. A group of fifty or so Regulators

seized him and carried him off to be disciplined. He was chained to a tree, and each man whipped him ten times with bundles of switches. Throughout the administration of more than five hundred lashes some Regulators provided background music with drums and fiddles. Harvey survived, but this and other sadistic actions led to a backlash against the Regulator Movement.⁵¹

Law and order had been one of the Regulators' main demands. However, when victims of their lynch-style justice went to Charleston to swear out warrants for assault, armed bands of Regulators prevented the colony's provost marshal from arresting the offenders. They ignored royal proclamations to disband and disperse. Thus, the proponents of law and order became lawbreakers.⁵²

Victims, justices of the peace, and respectable landowners decided that enough was enough. The organization that had been created to bring about law and order had become a threat to the stability and harmony of the backcountry. A new organization, composed of men calling themselves the Moderators, took up arms themselves and began to arrest Regulators. After several years of undisputed sway over South Carolina's interior, the Regulators were not about to give up easily. It made little difference that many of the Moderators were ex-Regulators and their neighbors. The Regulators were determined to maintain control of the backcountry, and the only way to do so, they reasoned, was to eliminate the Moderators.

In March 1769, some six or seven hundred Regulators marched on a Moderator camp on the banks of the Saluda River. The two sides were about equal in numbers, and both were spoiling for a fight. Bloodshed was avoided because two of the backcountry's recognized leaders, Richard Richardson and William Thomson, arrived on the scene. They argued that there was no real need for the Regulators since the riff-raff had long since either been

brought to heel or fled to more hospitable colonies. The colonial assembly had passed an act creating circuit courts for the backcountry. And if there was no need for the Regulators, then there was no need for the Moderators either. Through force of personality, Richardson and Thomson convinced both sides to disperse and allow the law to "take its course without opposition."⁵³

The military truce in the backcountry coincided with actions by the Commons House of Assembly in Charleston. The assembly passed a new circuit court act that created seven district courts—four of which were designed to serve the frontier portions of the colony. Within three years, courthouses and jails would be built in the backcountry villages of Ninety Six, Orangeburg, Cheraw, and Camden. Law and order, one of the principal demands of the Regulators, would soon be a reality.

In 1763 the Indian nations of the Southeast had all signed the Treaty of Augusta with Great Britain. With the ensuing imperial control of Indian relations and the careful delineation of Indian territory, there was little conflict between Native Americans and settlers in South Carolina. Moreover, the outlaws were subdued and the rival vigilante groups dispersed, leaving law-abiding settlers free to improve their economic condition. In the remaining years before the American Revolution, this is what they did. They paid little attention to the growing revolutionary movement in Charleston and, instead, concentrated on their farms, orchards, herds, mills, and stores.

Although the majority of backcountry residents were subsistence farmers, by the late 1760s a number were becoming substantial planters. Indigo, wheat, hemp, and tobacco were grown for export as well as domestic consumption. With nine to twelve hands growing indigo, a backcountry planter could earn an income of between \$22,000 and \$44,000 (in today's dollars). More successful planters, such as Patrick Calhoun, became slave owners.

According to a contemporary account by Henry Laurens, many settlers lived "comfortably in respect to every article necessary for the support of life."⁵⁴

Even subsistence farmers were accumulating property and possessions. William Purse lived in the area between the Broad and Saluda Rivers. When he died in 1772, he owned two horses, three head of cattle, several hogs, two plows, and carpenter's tools. Among his household effects were a spinning wheel, deerskins, pewter utensils, kitchen items, and a "homemade jacket."⁵⁵

In addition to working the land, some backcountry settlers became entrepreneurs. Country stores appeared along roadsides, and water-powered mills at falls in creeks and rivers. It was not unusual for a miller to charge one-tenth of whatever he ground for his customers. Thus, if a farmer's corn produced ten bushels of cornmeal, the miller kept one of them. Cattle driving was another way for an enterprising man to make a living. In the fall of the year, cattlemen herded cattle from the surrounding area into "cow-pens" before driving them to market in Charleston or Philadelphia. Hogs were also rounded up and, in the fall, driven to Charleston. Individuals with wagons pulled by horses or oxen transported the produce of the backcountry to Charleston. By the 1770s, roads threaded the forests and linked frontier communities with the provincial capital.⁵⁶

In 1762 William Hill, a native of northern Ireland, immigrated to South Carolina from York County, Pennsylvania. He settled in the section of the Catawba River Valley that was called New Acquisition District. There was iron ore on his property. The mineral deposits were near the surface, and in the 1770s Hill began operating an open-pit mine.⁵⁷

Joseph Kershaw of Camden had trading connections with the largest Charleston mercantile firms. Within a few years, he had established a thriving trade and branched out into planting. By the

Revolution, he owned more than one thousand acres of land and one hundred slaves. His home, on a prominent rise outside town, was as elegant as any Charleston mansion. It made the social statement that its owner had arrived. Moses Kirkland settled on the Wateree River, where he operated a sawmill, a gristmill, and a ferry. In 1775 he sold his mills and moved further inland to Ninety Six District, where he established himself as a successful indigo planter.⁵⁸

Not only were those who had been in South Carolina for a while beginning to prosper, but so were newcomers. John Thomas Sr. and his wife Jane Black Thomas emigrated from Pennsylvania to the Catawba River Valley. They cleared a farm along Fishing Creek and were members of the Fishing Creek Presbyterian Church. In the mid-1770s, the Thomases moved to the Fairforest community in Spartan District. They were founders of the Fairforest Presbyterian Church, and Jane was "one of its most active and zealous members." John Thomas, unlike the overwhelming majority of backcountry residents, had the means to acquire several slaves.⁵⁹

In 1773, Anthony Hampton moved from Rowan County, North Carolina, to South Carolina. Hampton, then fifty-eight, was descended from an English family who had settled in Virginia in 1620. Seeking greater economic opportunity, Anthony had moved first to the settlement of Town Fork in the Dan River Valley of North Carolina. In addition to his farming activities, he processed flax and soon developed a steady trade with Charleston. In the late 1760s, his three oldest sons ventured southward and became successful deerskin traders. Like their father, they established commercial ties with Charleston merchants. Their wagons hauled deerskins to the coast and returned to the frontier with Indian trade goods.⁶⁰

At the urging of his sons, Anthony Hampton and his wife,

Elizabeth Preston Hampton, agreed to move to Spartan District near the boundary with the Cherokee nation. The Hampton's new home on Hampton Branch between Middle and South Tyger Rivers was their fourth in thirty years. Anthony Hampton was not just another footloose frontiersman who skipped from place to place—usually one step ahead of the sheriff. He had been an active member of the several communities in which he had lived. In Virginia he had been a tax official and in North Carolina a captain of rangers, road commissioner, and member of the General Assembly. The Hamptons' decision to move once again could not have come easily. Their children were all adults, and they were established members of their community. Yet, in 1773, Anthony Hampton sold his plantation in North Carolina, packed up all his worldly possessions, and, with three generations of his kin, moved to the South Carolina backcountry.⁶¹

Two years later, in 1775, William Bratton and his family arrived in South Carolina. The Brattons, like so many others in the backcountry, traced their roots to Ireland. In the early 1740s, Andrew Bratton of County Antrim had immigrated to Pennsylvania. Two of his sons, William and James, moved on south to Augusta County, Virginia.⁶²

William's son, William, left Virginia and settled in Rowan County, North Carolina. Like many Scots-Irish, he was restless until he had settled where he wanted to put down deep roots. The land in Rowan County was fine, but along the Great Wagon Road there were stories of the rich lands farther south. In 1765, while still living in North Carolina, he purchased two hundred acres of land near Fishing Creek in the Catawba River Valley in what was then the southern portion of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Three years later, he took out a land grant adjacent to his new holdings. In 1772 the colonies of North and South Carolina adjusted their common boundary, and Bratton's property ended

up in New Acquisition District of South Carolina. The colonial boundary meant little, however, to the residents of the Catawba River Valley. The valley, not some artificial surveyor's line, was of more importance to them.⁶³

In 1774 Bratton had his South Carolina land surveyed, and the next year he and his wife, Martha Robinson Bratton, moved. They were newcomers in an area that had been settled for a generation. Farmsteads dotted the countryside. White's Mill on Fishing Creek ground grain for the farms in the vicinity. Nearby was William Hill's iron mine. Roads linked the town of Yorkville with trading centers in North and South Carolina. Fishing Creek Presbyterian Church, the spiritual heart of this Scots-Irish community, was already twenty-two years old.⁶⁴

In the 1770s, backcountry residents were preoccupied with improving the economic well-being of their families. The political squabbles between the elite-dominated Commons House of Assembly and royal officials had little relevance for them. After all, many of the same members of the assembly who were complaining of British tyranny had dismissed the petitions of the backcountry populace as unworthy of notice. The revolutionaries Christopher Gadsden and John Rutledge had been particularly obnoxious. In letters to the editor of the *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, Gadsden made light of backcountry complaints as "artful Insinuations and mischievous Catches," and Rutledge sneeringly referred to the backcountry population as a "Pack of Beggars." Thus, while members of the lowcountry elite became more and more concerned about their "rights as Englishmen," their political concerns were not shared by those in the backcountry. Beyond Parish End, the issue in 1775 and 1776 was the economy, period.⁶⁵

While former Regulators and former Moderators were equally concerned with improving farms, expanding trade, and develop-

ing industry, the backcountry population was united on little else. Sectarian and ethnic animosities still simmered. Victims of the Regulator Movement still harbored grudges. And old Regulators were concerned, not that the movement had gotten out of hand, but that it had not gone far enough.

In many ways the troubles of the 1760s were but a prelude to those that would occur during the Revolution. Despite its progress since 1770, backcountry society was still relatively fragile. The American Revolution, like the Cherokee War, would set in motion a chain of events that rent the social fabric of the backcountry. In the 1760s, the area had divided into armed camps, with neighbor pitted against neighbor in the struggle for control of the frontier settlements. During the Revolution, the divisions were sharper and the stakes much higher—the future not just of the backcountry but of South Carolina and the United States of America depended on the outcome.