By David Cole, Realatorian

Walnut Grove *Plantation*

A BACKCOUNTRY HOME IN A REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Tucked along the banks of the South Tyger River in what is now Spartanburg County, Walnut Grove Plantation stands as one of the best-preserved windows into life in the South Carolina Backcountry during the Revolutionary War. Built in the 1760s by Charles and Mary Moore, the plantation was more than a farm. It was a household caught in the middle of a brutal and deeply personal civil war, one that pitted neighbor against neighbor across the Piedmont. Charles initially purchased around 1,000 acres and got deeded the rest from King George III. Totaling around 3,600 acres when all was said and done.

A FAMILY ON THE FRONTIER

Charles Moore had emigrated from Ireland, with documents stating he was a farmer, and teacher. By the time the Revolution reached the Backcountry, he and Mary were raising a large family with ten children who all lived until adulthood, on land that placed them squarely in contested territory. The Backcountry was not like the coastal Lowcountry, where the fight often meant formal battles between armies.

Here, the war was fought in yards, on roads, and in the woods, by militia units made up of farmers, and by families who had to decide, often without the luxury of distance or time, which side they would support and what that choice would cost them. America's first civil war. Neighbors fighting neighbors.

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The Moores were committed Patriots, and that commitment put a target on their home. Walnut Grove sat along a well-traveled route, which meant soldiers, messengers, and raiders alike passed through regularly. The house itself, with its steep roof and sturdy timber frame, has survived more than 250 years, and it still bears the marks of that era.

THE WOMEN WHO HELD THE LINE



One of the most remarkable parts of the Walnut Grove story is Kate Moore Barry, daughter of Charles and Mary. Kate became known as a scout and messenger for the Patriot militia, riding through the countryside to warn neighbors of approaching British and Loyalist forces. Local tradition credits her with helping muster militia ahead of the Battle of Cowpens in January 1781, one of the turning points of the war in the South. She is remembered as the "Heroine of the Battle of Cowpens" for that service.

Kate was not alone. Women across the Backcountry stepped into roles the war demanded of them, often while husbands and sons were away with the militia or held as prisoners. Jane Black Thomas, whose husband John Thomas commanded a Patriot regiment, is remembered for riding through the night to warn her son and his men of an impending Loyalist attack on their ammunition supply at the Battle of Cedar Springs, an act of courage that likely saved their lives and their gunpowder stores. Dicey Langston, a teenager during the war, is remembered for crossing dangerous ground (and a swollen Tyger River) on foot at night to warn her brother's militia unit of a planned raid, and for later standing up to Loyalist soldiers who threatened her family's home.

These were not isolated acts of bravery. They reflect how deeply the war reached into everyday domestic life in the Backcountry, where information, timing, and quick decisions made by women at home could determine whether a militia unit survived the next day.

Bloody Bill and the Brutality of Civil War



No account of the Backcountry during the Revolution is complete without reckoning with William "Bloody Bill" Cunningham, a Loyalist partisan whose late-war raids became infamous for their violence. Cunningham led brutal attacks against Patriot militia and civilians alike, and his campaigns, particularly in 1781 and 1782, (Including after the surrender of Yorktown and his 'Bloody Scout Campaign') left a lasting mark on the collective memory of the region.

His story is a stark reminder that the Revolution in the Backcountry was not simply a war between the Continental Army and the British Crown. It was, in large part, a civil war among South Carolinians, fought with a personal ferocity that battles between formal armies rarely carried. Bloody Bill also raided Walnut Grove Plantation, and this raid is reenacted during their Festi-Fall weekend every October. We know of at least 69 people that he killed, and 6 plantations that he burned.



Why Walnut Grove Still Matters

Walnut Grove Plantation survives today as a historic site precisely because it captures this dual nature of the Revolutionary War in the Backcountry: the domestic, everyday rhythms of a farming family, layered over the constant threat of violence, loyalty tests, and division that defined the era. Standing on that land, it is possible to picture Kate Barry riding out with a warning, to imagine the fear that came with hearing riders approach, and to understand why the memory of women like Kate Barry, Jane Black Thomas, and Dicey Langston endured in local tradition long before formal histories caught up to them.

The story of Walnut Grove is, in many ways, the story of the Upstate itself during the Revolution: a contested, dangerous, and deeply human chapter that shaped the region long before South Carolina became the state we know today.