# The American Revolution in North Carolina

## The Proclamation of 1763 and the "Overmountain Men"

### Learning Outcome:

Students can:

- *Explain how the Proclamation of 1763 affected support for the American Revolution in western North Carolina.*
- *Explain how the Patriot victory at the Battle of Kings Mountain "turned the tide" of the American Revolutionary War.*

The 13 colonies that became the 13 original U.S. states were all located between the Atlantic Ocean and the Appalachian Mountains. Each time a new colony was created, its original settlers built the colony's first towns along the Atlantic coast. Then, as North Carolina and other colonies grew, settlers moved west toward the Appalachian Mountains. At this time, most colonists were farmers. They usually had big families. It was normal for a married couple to have between eight and 10 children. When those children grew up and started families of their own, they often moved west of where their parents were living. So, with every generation, the population of North Carolina and other American colonies moved west toward the Appalachian Mountains.

Before 1763, the vast region between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River was claimed by both Great Britain and France, as well as by the Native American nations that sparsely populated the region. However, between 1754 and 1763, Great Britain and France fought a large war. Americans call it the French and Indian War, although Europeans refer to it as the Seven Years' War. At the end of the French and Indian War, France gave up its claim to the land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. People living in western North Carolina and the western regions of other colonies were very happy that their children and grandchildren could continue moving west onto land that was mostly unoccupied without fear of being stopped (or attacked) by the French.




However, soon after the end of the French and Indian War, the government of Great Britain made a law that became known as the Proclamation of 1763. This law made it illegal for American colonists to move west of the top of the Appalachian Mountains. A British government official in London drew a line on a map of North America that became known as the "Proclamation Line." American colonists were not allowed to move west of the line.

However, before 1763, some Americans, including several groups of pioneers from North Carolina, had already moved west of the "Proclamation Line." At least three settlements existed west of the line in what is today eastern Tennessee: the Watauga Settlement, Carter's Valley,

and Nolichucky Settlement. The settlers living in these communities had bought land from the Cherokee Native American nation. However, the Proclamation of 1763 made their purchase of the land and their homes illegal.

The British government did not send soldiers to stop settlers from moving west of the Proclamation Line. However, it refused to accept that people who lived west of the line legally owned the land on which they lived — even when settlers could show that they had lived on the land for a long time or had documents proving that they had purchased the land. Some settlers feared that at some point in the future, the government of Great Britain would try to sell the land west of the line to other settlers or to companies that would sell the land to settlers for a very high price. The settlers who had moved west before 1763 might lose their farms and be forced out of their homes.

When historians write about the causes of the American Revolutionary War, they often explain how American colonists were outraged about the taxes that Great Britain imposed on the colonies in the 1760s and 1770s. Great Britain tried to tax paper, glass, sugar, and — of course — tea. It is true that Americans in many of the colonies believed that these taxes violated their natural rights, since they had not voted for the leaders who were deciding that American colonists would have to pay these taxes. This is why the slogan "no taxation without representation" became so popular before and during the American Revolution.

However, people living in western North Carolina and along the frontier in other colonies did not buy much glass, sugar, or tea. Although many colonists living in western North Carolina (including those living west of the Proclamation Line) probably would have agreed that British taxes were unfair, those taxes didn't have a big effect on the day-to-day lives of people living on the American frontier in the years just before the American Revolutionary War. On the other hand, the Proclamation of 1763 directly interfered with the lives and freedom of settlers living in western North Carolina. As a result, the people of western North Carolina did not hesitate to support the Patriots when the British army marched through the Carolinas during the American Revolution.

The Patriots' stand against the British at the Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780 shows just how much the people of western North Carolina supported the Patriot cause. The events leading up to the battle began when the British army captured the city of Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1780. Then, the British began marching northwest through South Carolina. They won every battle they fought until they reached the hills near the North Carolina border.

As the Redcoats were moving through South Carolina, a British army officer named Patrick Ferguson recruited a group of American Loyalists to fight alongside the British. Ferguson and the pro-British Americans he recruited were given the task of protecting the left **flank** (side) of the British army so that the Patriots couldn't sneak up on the British army from the side. However, a group of Patriots who lived near or beyond the Proclamation Line in western North Carolina in the present-day states of Tennessee and Kentucky decided to attack Major Ferguson's Loyalist troops. The Patriots met at a place called Sycamore Shoals in present-day Tennessee and then marched toward the Loyalists who were camped on a hill along the border between North Carolina and South Carolina called Kings Mountain.



***Frontier cabin***

The Battle of Kings Mountain took place on October 7, 1780. Many of the Patriots who fought in this battle had marched over 100 miles from their homes west of the Proclamation Line to reach the hill



*The Battle of Kings Mountain*

where Ferguson and his army of Loyalist soldiers were camped. Other Patriots began calling the soldiers who came from west of the Proclamation Line the "Overmountain Men." The Overmountain Men were willing to make this sacrifice and risk their lives at least in part because of their outrage about the Proclamation of 1763.

After a long string of British victories in South Carolina, the outcome of the Battle of Kings Mountain was a shock to British. Around 90 Patriots defeated an army of more than 1,000 Loyalists. Major Ferguson was killed in the battle. A few months later, at the Battle of Cowpens (which took place about 30 miles west of Kings Mountain), the Patriots won a decisive battle against the Redcoat army that Ferguson's Loyalists had been trying to protect.

Following the Battle of Cowpens, the British Redcoats moved into North Carolina. The Patriots continued to attack them by surprise as they moved through the state. Eventually, the British Redcoats in North Carolina had lost so many soldiers and were so short on supplies that their leader, General Charles Cornwallis, decided to march the army to the town of Yorktown, Virginia, to wait for the British army to send more soldiers and supplies.



*General Cornwallis at Yorktown*

Instead of receiving supplies and reinforcement, General Cornwallis received an unpleasant surprise when he and his soldiers reached Yorktown. General George Washington's Continental Army attacked and defeated General Cornwallis's army at the Battle of Yorktown. As a result of this Patriot victory, the British government gave up the war and agreed to accept the United States as an independent country. Years later, Thomas Jefferson called the Battle of Kings Mountain "the turn of the tide of success" in the American Revolutionary War. In other words, before Kings Mountain, the Patriots were losing the war in the South and were not winning the war in the rest of the country. Then, the success of the Overmountain Men at Kings Mountain began a string of Patriot successes in the Carolinas which ultimately led to the United States' victory in the war and the successful conclusion of the American Revolution.

## READING REVIEW QUESTIONS:

Write a paragraph explaining how the Proclamation of 1763 affected settlers living in western North Carolina.

Explain why the Proclamation of 1763 had more of a direct effect on settlers in western North Carolina than British taxes did.

Explain why the Battle of Kings Mountain is considered a turning point in the American Revolutionary War.