

Little Bermuda - Daufuskie Island in the Revolutionary War

July 1, 2026

In recognition of the upcoming 250th birthday of our nation, this month's post by the Daufuskie Island Historical Foundation presents one of the stories of Daufuskie Island during the Revolutionary War.

The War divided the colonies into partisan factions as individuals took sides with either the colonial rebels or supporters of the monarchy. The colonies were not, as some might think, a uniform picture of support for independence. It has been estimated that approximately 20% of the white population in the colonies was Loyalist at the outset of the war. South Carolina leaned even more heavily towards England, with upwards of 25% of the population identifying as Tory. In Georgia, the numbers were significant enough to almost prevent the colony from participating in the rebellion.

Recognizing the more favorable numbers in the South, and the greater economic value of the Southern colonies, suppliers of tobacco, indigo, cotton and rice, England embarked on a "Southern Strategy" in 1778, concentrating more of its military action there. British forces took Savannah in late 1778 and Charleston in 1780.

Locally, Daufuskie Island came to be identified as "Little Bermuda" due to the predominance of Tories or loyalists, while Hilton Head was more aligned with the Whigs or colonials. The Daufuskie economy was heavily dependent on indigo, with England the primary market. In our May post, we presented a "census" on the eve of the Revolutionary War (mid 1770's) that was constructed by various historical efforts. To that table we're going to add a third column identifying the landowners on Daufuskie as Royalist or Patriot (Colonialist).

Name/Occupation	Land (Acres)	
Mary Martinangele (widow) Capt. Philip Martinangele (farmer) Isaac Martinangele (farmer) Simeon Martinangele (farmer) Francis Martinangele (farmer) Abraham Martinangele (farmer) Mary Martinangele Hopkins (wife of British seaman) Margaret Martinangele William Green (farmer)	500	Loyalist
Robert Watts (shipbuilder)	422 (Bloody Point)	Loyalist
John Ash (planter)	983	Loyalist
Richard Russell Ash (planter)	983	Loyalist

Dr. James Fraser (planter/physician)	350	Loyalist
James Black (ships carpenter)	500	Patriot-absentee
Edward Davies (merchant)	1794	Patriot-absentee
George Haig II (planter/merchant)	852	Patriot-absentee

Maybe we can look at this as one of the earliest political polls.

The Martinangele family obviously played a large part in establishing the island's identity. They were resident landowners, as were the Ash's and Frasers. Phillip Martinangele served as a Captain in the Royal Militia. His brothers Francis, Isaac and Simeon, and kinsman William Green served with him. Phillip Martinangele initially started out serving the colonials. It may have been the influence of his brother-in-law Richard Pendarvis (more on him later), and the fall of Savannah to the British that convinced him to side with the royalists.

Dr. James Fraser appears to have been a committed Royalist, while Richard Ash seems to have followed a more opportunistic approach, being something of a covert loyalist flushed out by the British occupation of Savannah. He seems to have initially served in the company of James Dougherty, a colonialist who you will read more about below, but was driven to side with the British after a surprise confrontation at Johns Island.

Edward Davies was a large-scale landowner, and identified as a patriot, but he was a Savannah/Beaufort merchant who acquired his holdings as a trust for his infant son. James Black may have been influenced by being commissioned to construct a ship for the South Carolina Navy Board. Black was killed during the War while on sentry duty on Johns Island.

Late in the War, Daufuskie became a haven for loyalists with the security of knowing that British forces were nearby at Tybee and Savannah, and that locals tended to be friendly. Hilton Head remained more of a colonialist stronghold, probably due to, at least in part, the plundering of local plantations by British forces on at least two occasions.

While Daufuskie did play a role in conflicts earlier in the War, especially with Bloody Point being used as a sentry and assembly point for forces protecting or preparing to attack Savannah, it was not the site of any major land battles. In the summer of 1775, the seas near Daufuskie were the site of the "Battle of Bloody Point". John Habersham captured the London packet ship Little Carpenter carrying 16,000 pounds of gunpowder, which was divided between colonial forces in South Carolina and Georgia.

The alignment of Daufuskie with the Tories, Hilton Head with the Whigs, combined with the proximity of the islands, did result in confrontation and violence, with raiding parties,

ambushes, retribution and murder included in the events of the time. Order was maintained by force, with each side operating as its own vigilante group.

Consider the following series of attacks, retaliations and counterretaliations that occurred between the locals.

The story begins with Richard "Tory Dick" Pendarvis, who lived on property overlooking the May River (Bluffton) and had married Margaret Martinangele, a member of the prominent loyalist family from Daufuskie Island. Her brother, Phillip, was captain in the Royal militia on Daufuskie, as we mentioned above. Brothers Simeon, Isaac and Francis were also listed on the Royal Militia roles.

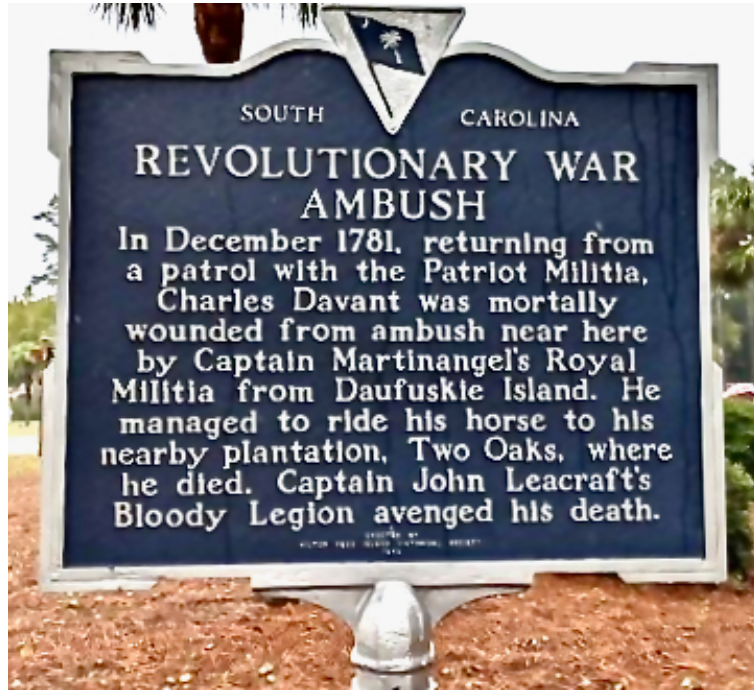
In January of 1781, Pendarvis led a contingent of the Royal Militia to Bear Island to apprehend one James Dougherty (Doherty or Doharty), described as an "energetic leader of the Revolutionists". The encounter between Pendarvis and Dougherty ended with the death of the latter, and the escape of the men who accompanied him. Among the escapees was a young (age 17) John Leacraft, Dougherty's nephew, and this incident possibly contributed to his subsequent formation of the "Bloody Legion", whose members included David John Mongin, Sr., and John David Mongin, Jr., among others. (Yes, the very same Mongin family who later came to own most of Daufuskie Island in the antebellum period.

In April of 1781, Leacraft and his accomplices carried out their vengeance for the Dougherty skirmish and shot Pendarvis in front of his residence, "Stephenville", on the banks of the South May River, where he and his wife, Margaret Martinangele, were on their honeymoon. He died in his wife's arms. The Georgia Gazette reported that "The villains afterward went to the house and insulted Mrs. Pendarvis with opprobrious language, and upon leaving took with them three horses and Captain Pendarvis' gun".



Of course, the death of Phillip Martinangele's brother-in-law demanded retribution, so in December of 1781, Phillip and five of his men rowed to Hilton Head Island from Daufuskie and ambushed a dawn patrol consisting of Charles Davant and John Andrews. Charles Davant, mortally wounded, managed to ride back to his home, where he died in his son's

arms. His last words were reportedly, "Martinangele, get Martinangele". Charles Davant was the only known casualty on Hilton Head during the Revolutionary War.





Retaliation was swift, with the "Bloody Legion", led by John Leacraft, crossing to Daufuskie Island and raiding the home of Phillip Martinangele, and, finding him sick in bed, shot him while two of the raiders held his wife as she watched. Afterwards, according to reports in a Charleston newspaper, they "plundered Mrs. Martinangele and her children of almost everything they had."

(If you have not visited the Mary Dunn cemetery on Daufuskie, make an effort to go and see the Martinangele crypt, where several family members, and possibly Phillip, were buried.)



To put all this in the proper timeline, it is important to note that British General Lord Charles Cornwallis surrendered to General George Washington on October 17, 1781, following the siege of Yorktown, so this last act of vengeance occurred after that event, highlighting the personal nature of the back and forth that came to occur.

The Treaty of Paris was signed in September of 1783, ending the War between the Colonies and Great Britain. The surviving Martinangeles returned to reclaim their Daufuskie plantation, and, in a particularly surprising development, in 1783 the widow Margaret Martinangele Pendarvis married Captain William Edwards Mongin, who was not only a Whig (patriot) but was a half-brother to David John and John David Mongin, members of the Bloody Legion, the very same band who had murdered her husband.

The newly married couple divided their time between the Mongin mansion, Walnut Grove, on the South May River, and living with Margaret's mother, Mary, at their Plantation on Daufuskie. And, as any student of Daufuskie Island history will know, the Mongin family came to significantly shape the Daufuskie Island's character during the antebellum era.

In another turn of events, maybe unsurprisingly, John Leacraft, the original leader of the "Bloody Legion", was elected as the sheriff of Beaufort County after the War, from 1783-1784 and again from 1789-1790. Following the War, there was a breakdown in civil order, particularly on the "frontiers" of Beaufort County. The chief law enforcement officer in the judicial districts of South Carolina was the sheriff, elected by the General Assembly. The Assembly's selection in 1783 of the first postwar sheriff in the Beaufort District was a man who had proven himself to be a ruthless leader capable of using any force necessary, John Leacraft, leader of the Bloody Legion, known for his swift retribution after the murder of Charles Davant. The brutality of the period is a story for another day.

Locally, there were still some vigilante type actions occurring. According to oral tradition and Martinangele family papers, in 1785 a remaining band of Tories on Daufuskie was gathering their belongings to flee to the Bahamas. A group of former Hilton Head militiamen got word of their plans, and as a small fleet attempted to sail from Bloody Point near the Martinangele plantation, they were met by a group of boats loaded with the militiamen and possibly remnants of the Bloody Legion, who fired shots at them. They returned fire, but apparently there were no casualties resulting from what may well have been the last skirmish of the Revolutionary War, and the Tories sailed off towards British held territories.

Thus ends our story of murder and mayhem involving Daufuskie during the Revolutionary period. There were few major engagements or military campaigns, but very personal hostilities were a significant part of local history.

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