

W. BRENT BURGIN LUNCH AND LEARN LECTURE SERIES

“Unearthing Fort Rutledge”

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Tucked away on the edge of Clemson University's campus are the remains of the Cherokee town of Esseneca and Fort Rutledge. Most people passing by the old monument near the site are unaware of the history. On August 1, 1776, a small battle occurred at Esseneca between the South Carolina militia and a British/Cherokee force. Following the skirmish, the militia destroyed the town and built Fort Rutledge. The fort played an important role in the American Revolution serving as a staging area for patriot expeditions. It also served as a mechanism of settler colonialism, further displacing the Cherokee from their home. The British "destroyed" the fort in 1780, and nature buried what was left over the centuries. This history is little remembered. In 2021, Clemson faculty and students partnered with the National Park Service and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to unearth what was left of the fort. This research led to new and unexpected discoveries that are changing our understanding of the region's history.

