



What's in a Name?

(of a Creek, Road, Marina and More)

X Marks the Spot • By Chuck Mobley

On July 25, 1782, a marauding British force of Royal Marines and Loyalist soldiers stormed ashore at Delegal's Point on Skidaway Island. After a sharp skirmish with the Georgia Legion, a small but seasoned force of cavalry and infantry, the British troops returned to several ships anchored in Ossabaw Sound. Now a historical footnote, this clash was the final fight of the Revolutionary War in Georgia, a raid carried out in the chaos and confusion of the evacuation of Savannah by British military forces and civilian followers.

The engagement at Delegal's Point matched two of Georgia's fiercest partisans, Lt. Col. Thomas Brown and Lt. Col. James Jackson. Brown ultimately paid a heavy price for his loyalty to the king. In 1775, a group of Patriots in Augusta scalped him, fractured his skull, burned his feet, and tarred and feathered him. He survived. Known thereafter as "Burnt Foot" Brown, he ferociously soldiered through the rest of the war, fueled by intense anger.

A native of England, Jackson sailed to Savannah in 1772 to study law. When the revolution started, he took up the patriot cause and served with Georgia forces for six years. He participated in the 1778 battle in which the British took back control of Savannah, the 1781 Battle of Cowpens and the 1781 Augusta campaign. In the lengthy 1782 Savannah campaign, he commanded the Georgia Legion and served

with such distinction that he was chosen to lead American forces into the city after the British surrender.

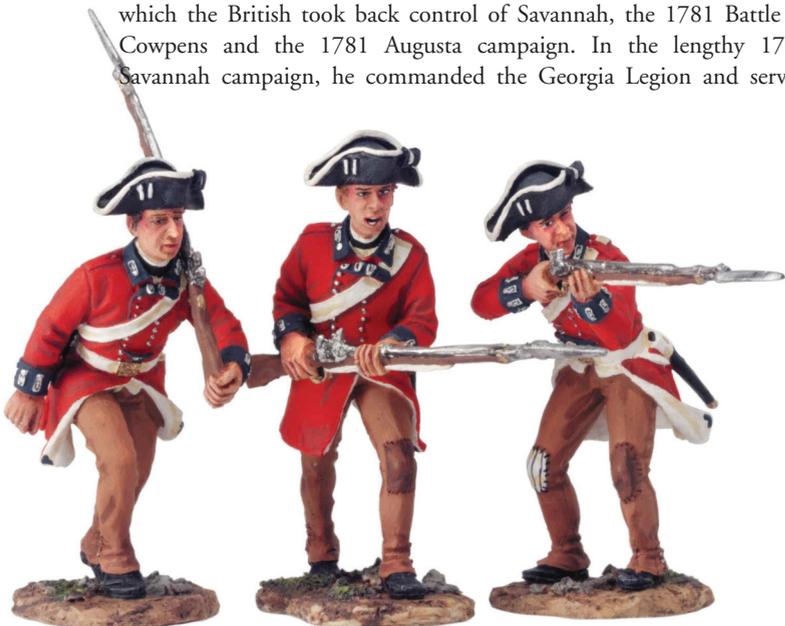
Somewhat surprisingly, since it involved such strident adversaries, the struggle on Skidaway was anticlimactic. No casualties are mentioned in accounts of the battle. Savannah historian, Gordon B. Smith, writing about the evacuation of Savannah in a National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution magazine, said Brown and the British contingent reboarded their ships after the skirmish and sailed to nearby Ossabaw Island, where they remained for some time.

One party certainly suffered damage, however. The Delegals. Their plantation was destroyed during the melee. It was a final, painful indignity for a family whose Georgia ties stretched back to the colony's earliest days.

Philip Delegal, the first, was a career British Army officer. Of French Huguenot heritage, he arrived in South Carolina in the mid-1720s. By the mid-1730s, he was campaigning in Georgia, along with his son. A list of officers in Gen. James E. Oglethorpe's Regiment of Foot includes Philip Delegal, Senior, Lieutenant, and Philip Delegal, Junior, Lieutenant. In 1742, Philip Junior was an officer in Oglethorpe's force that turned back the Spanish in the Battle of Bloody Marsh on St. Simons Island- the small but significant confrontation that ended Spain's hopes to expand its empire on the East Coast.

Philip Senior lived for a time in Georgia, but eventually moved on. His 1762 will, a copy of which is on file at the Georgia Historical Society (GHS), is a fascinating window into the nomadic life of an 18th-century British soldier. Philip Senior was then a captain, stationed at St. Peter Point on the Island of Guernsey, and posted to Lt. Gen. Parson's Regiment of Invalids, a unit made up of soldiers partly disabled from wounds and elderly veterans judged still fit for garrison duty. Philip Senior left his South Carolina plantation to his wife Eleanor, and split his money and possessions among her and their several children. To Philip Junior, who by then had put down deep roots in Georgia, the elder Delegal left 200 pounds, a gold watch, jewels and his sword.

Two of Philip Senior's children - Philip junior and his brother George - owned adjoining rice plantations on the south branch of the Little Ogeechee River. Philip Junior's family then included his first wife, Jane, and seven children.





Looking across the Delegal gravesite, toward the quiet setting of the golf course

In the 1760s, Philip Junior began to acquire property on Skidaway Island. His holdings on the island eventually ran to some 4,000 acres and included Green Island. A collection of Delegal colonial records on file at the GHS indicates that during that time, Philip petitioned for possession of the “25 acres of land known as Racoon (sic) Hammock near Green Island” and “the land at the mouth of the Vernon River near Green Island which he has purchased.” There is no record whether the petitions were granted, but, considering the eventual size of his holdings, it seems likely that they were.

Other prominent property owners on the island included John Milledge, Inigo Jones, Noble Jones, Edward Telfair and James Habersham. Unlike those men, however, Philip Junior built a residence on Skidaway. Elizabeth Lichtenstein Johnson, the daughter of Catherine Delegal and the granddaughter of Philip Junior, offers a glance, through her writings, at life on the island at the time. She described Skidaway as a “very pleasant place upon the water, abounding in fruits of various kinds, figs, peaches, pomegranates, quinces, plums, mulberries, nectarines and oranges.”

Philip Junior’s life changed dramatically in 1774 when his first wife died. A year or so later, he married Margaret Curtis, who owned property on Skidaway herself, along with additional acreage on Little Wassaw Island. This union produced two children, a son and a daughter. But



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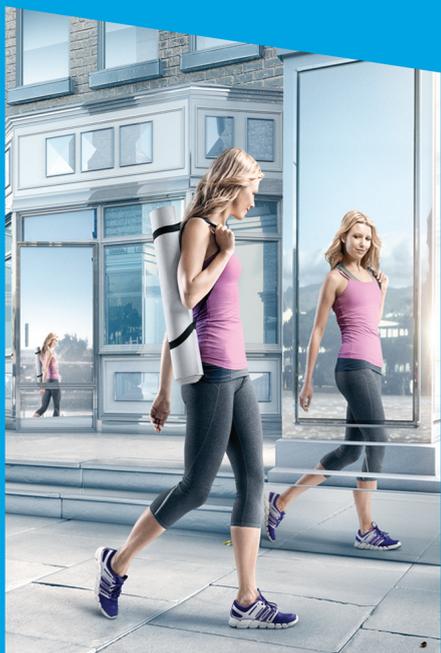


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This stone marks the grave of Philip Delegal Jr., though his remains appear to have been moved elsewhere.

there would be no opportunity for them to enjoy the idyllic scenes described by Delegal's granddaughter, as the family was swept up in the turmoil of the American Revolution.

Georgia remained in British control until early in 1776, when revolutionary forces took control of Savannah. A complete turnaround occurred in December of 1778, when a British army marched into the city and restored royal rule. Outside of Savannah, however, British control was tenuous, and something very much like civil war ravaged the countryside until July of 1782, when fighting finally ended.

Johnson, in a letter written long after the war had ended, described Skidaway during those dramatic and dangerous years. The island was "exposed to the depredations of all the Privateers, English or American" as they plundered from friend or foe alike. Her grandfather's plantation was raided repeatedly, and slaves and barrels of valuable indigo were carried off.

As the son of a British officer and an officer himself, Philip Junior likely never wavered in his loyalty to Britain. His granddaughter, whose husband was a loyalist officer, was another staunch defender of the crown. Recollections of a Georgia Loyalist, Johnson's 1836 account of her wartime experiences was an often caustic and always unrepentant defense of the British cause. But the price of that public stance was high. Thousands of loyalists – including Johnson and her family – were forced to leave Georgia in 1782.

Philip Junior, though, stayed on Skidaway. He died on October 19, 1781, when the

British flag still flew over Savannah. He was buried in a small enclosure bordered by tabby walls. Once, that was Delegal property. Now, it's part of the Palmetto Golf Course, where the worn and weathered walls border the 13th green.

Laura Seifert, an Armstrong State professor, led an archaeological survey conducted by ASU students and Skidaway residents of the gravesite on Palmetto. The work was carried out during October and November of 2014. "While Philip Delegal, Jr., may have been buried here at one point in time, he appears to have since been removed," Seifert wrote in her report. "The soils and artifacts give little indication as to whether the grave was looted or Delegal was removed to be reburied in another cemetery. Since no human bones were found, reburial seems the more likely option."

Just off one of the walls, a small, modern marker has been set into the ground. It offers a succinct yet suitable epitaph: "Philip Delegal Jr. Georgia Settler Died Oct. 19, 1781."

Sources: Georgia Historical Society papers and publications; New Georgia Encyclopedia; Website of the Sons of Liberty Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution; Website of the 41st Regiment of Foot; "An Archaeological Investigation of the Waters and Delegal Cemeteries on Skidaway Island, Georgia," by Laura Seifert, Digging Savannah, Armstrong State University; "A Short History of Skidaway Island," by V.E. Kelly; "Once Upon an Island: The Barrier Marsh Islands of Chatham County, Georgia," by Elizabeth Piechocinski.

