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## Sign, sign, everywhere a sign

Markers show where history happened

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Bernie Petit

About three years before the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, Patriot Whigs defeated Loyalist Tories in a battle that took place where US 321 now runs through Lincolnton.

Or so the sign says.

Some believe the battle, which took place June 20, 1780, propelled the Patriot contingent to victory at the Battle of Kings Mountain nearly four months later.



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(John Clark/The Gazette) The historic William Chronicle marker in front of the Belmont Historical Society house at 40 Catawba St.

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What took place there was a decisive defeat for the British – at least that’s what motorists passing through Grover read.

Theses aren’t exactly destination locales for non-history buffs to say the least: a school sits near where the Battle of Ramsour’s Mill took place; and US 29 at NC 216 cuts through an area likely traveled by soldiers en route to the Kings Mountain battlefield (now a National Military Park in South Carolina).

What they are, however, are small reminders of historically significant places and events in our region.

“When the Belmont Historical Society was started (in 2005), there was a marker for (Revolutionary War) Major (William) Chronicle down the road covered up by the woods. No one had ever seen it,” said Allen Millican, a BHS supporter who started a pictorial history museum across the street.

“We’ve got that one in the front yard now. It tells a lot of good information.”

To date, more than 1,400 historical markers have been erected throughout the state by the North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program, established in 1935, with at least one historic marker in every county.

Today, there are more than 50 of the distinctive silver and black historical markers throughout Cleveland, Gaston and Lincoln counties, including:

>>Oak Grove, built 1782 and the home of Revolutionary War officer and Provincial Congress member James Johnston (1742-1805). The two-story brick building stood until the 1950s, when it was demolished as part of an urban development project. A marker commemorating the site is found on NC 16 at Lucia in Gaston County.

>>James Pickney Henderson (1808-1858), the first governor of Texas, was born Mar. 31, 1809, in Lincolnton, the son of Law-son and Elizabeth Carruth Henderson. Henderson, an officer during the Mexican War, received his early education at the Lincoln Academy before studying law at the Univeristy of North Carolina. A marker commemorating Henderson is on NC 182 west of Lincolnton.

>>Graham’s Fort, home of Col. William Graham and site of a Tory raid in September, 1780. During the Revolutionary War, Col. Grham lived in a fortified home that was among the safest places for locals to retreat from enemies. It was typical of the type of fort scattered about the frontier, offering protection to pioneers. A marker commemorating the site is on NC 226 at Buffalo Creek bridge northwest of Grover.

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>>Peter Forney (1756-1834), a Revolutionary War officer, the son of French and Swiss immigrants who moved to what is now Lincoln County. As an officer, Forney fought against Cherokee and British troops throughout the frontier and used his men to harass and delay British troops. After the war, he returned home, began building an ironworks near Lincolnton and helped establish other furnaces and forges in Lincoln that produced iron products, including cannonballs used in the War of 1812. A marker commemorating Forney is on Old NC 273 at SR 1412 west of Lowesville in Lincoln County.

Such places, usually ignored by those in a hurry to get to where they're going, said Martin Mongiello of The Inn of the Patriots in Grover.

They shouldn't be.

"They're worth slowing down and checking out," said Mongiello, pointing out there are as many historical markers in Grover (six) as there are in the Cleveland County seat of Shelby. "There's a lot of history here."

Mongiello has been commended by state officials for his work in helping get two Cleveland County markers refurbished – one honoring Col. Patrick Ferguson and the other a dual-sided marker at the state border marking the formation of North and South Carolina.

He's also part of a group fighting to get a historical marker for Col. Frederick Hambright in the county. Hambright's home was near the Kings Mountain battlefield and he's already been recognized by South Carolina as a historical hero, Mongiello said.

Several significant structures in our region have been lost to disrepair or progress over the years, which is a shame, he said.

Still, he added, our towns and cities would benefit from always remembering to protect their histories whenever possible.

"You try to do as much as you can without losing your heritage," Mongiello said. "Preserving history helps a city retain its charm and what it's all about."

**Mark It Down**

The North Carolina Highway Historical Marker program was established in 1935 and has erected more than 1,400 historical markers throughout the state, including at least one in all 100 counties.

Prior to that time, the North Carolina Historical Commission, started in 1903, and private organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution sponsored a small number of historical markers and plaques.

For more information, or to see a list of all the historical markers in Cleveland, Gaston and Lincoln counties, visit [www.ncmarkers.com](http://www.ncmarkers.com).

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