

Revenge was rather icy for the Archibald Steele family

By Louise Pettus

In 1900, Newton Chambers Steele of Chattanooga, Tenn., published a book about his York County ancestors titled *Archibald Steele and His Descendants*. Steele was a great-grandson of Archibald and Agnes Steele, who lived on York County's Fishing Creek during the Revolutionary War.

Archibald and four of his sons - John, Joseph, William and James- were all partisan soldiers.

Partisan soldiers were not a part of any regular army but furnished their own arms, clothing and horses. They elected officers from their own ranks. Joseph Steele, only 20, was the captain of his company.

William, the youngest, was only 15. The father was not a regular soldier but fought only when the British were in the vicinity of the home.

For some unknown reason, Joseph's company joined Gen. Francis Marion rather than Gen. Thomas Sumter, who was in this area and won the allegiance of most of the York and Lancaster troops.

Once, when the father and four sons were away from their home, leaving behind Agnes and the youngest brother, 13-year-old Robert, the British burned the house.

A British sympathizer and neighbor, Jonah Byrd, guided the Tories to the Steele house.

The first thing the British did was take Agnes Steele's feather beds into the yard and rip them open with their swords. The soldiers were knee-deep in feathers, a very precious item in those days. Then they placed a rope around Agnes' neck and threatened death unless she told the location of her husband and four sons. She refused to talk.

The men took out the kitchen utensils, probably meaning to use them in their camp and set fire to the cabin. Archibald Steele was not far away with a small band of partisans. When he got word of this, the men gave chase.

The British, aware that they were being pursued, threw the heavy ironware into a deep hole in the waters of Fishing Creek and thereby lightened their load enough to escape.

Dr. Steele said that, for generations, the Steeles had pointed out the deep hole in the creek to the children of the family and from that hole he had, in his personal possession, one of the iron pot-racks.

A pot-rack, he explained, was a short chain of round links with a large hook at each end. The hook at one end of the chain was suspended from an iron rod or wood pile set high in the chimney. The other hook swung just above the fire. On the bottom hook was hung an iron pot or kettle. If the fireplace was large enough, two or three pots might be boiling at once.

When the war was over, Dr. Steele said, Jonah Byrd "had the hardihood, the cheek, the brass, to dare to come to live in that community where he had led his fellow Tories and the British dragoons in their plundering and burning raids."

The Steele boys found this intolerable. The sight of the ashes of their old home so rankled Joseph Steele that one day he took his sword to Byrd's head and each time turned the blade so that it fell on the flat side rather than the edge.

From Byrd were wrung two promises. One was that he would leave within 20 days and never return. The other was that he would locate and recover Agnes Steele's cooking utensils that had been thrown in the creek.

According to the story handed down to Dr. Steele, it was a cold day in the winter of 1781-1782. Byrd broke the ice, dived in and got out many of the pots and racks, along with pottery and shallow pewter milk pans.

After that, the spot became known as the "deep hole in Fishing Creek."