



Tracking a South Carolina Patriot

*In order to obtain the benefit of the
Act of Congress of the 7th Jan 1832. -
of South Carolina, Nicholas Prince
On this 8th day of November
1776 hundred and thirty*

**NICHOLAS PRINCE AND THE
REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

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PATRICIA MARKER HINTON

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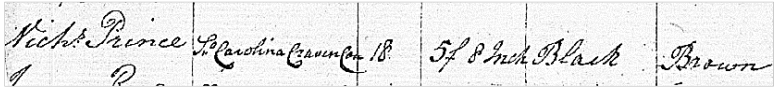
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INTRODUCTION

Nicholas Prince was average in almost every respect.



1. Size roll of the 4th South Carolina Regiment (Artillery), circa 1779. Grimké Family Papers 1761-1866, Special Collections of the South Carolina Historical Society.

When he first volunteered to fight the British in 1776, he was eighteen years old. An obscure military report written about 240 years ago described him as 5’8,” with black hair and brown complexion. His home was in colonial Craven County and he was probably tanned from farm work in the blistering South Carolina sun.¹

There was little remarkable about Nicholas, except that his experiences mirrored those of the vast majority of Patriots— young, illiterate, passionate, poor. He lived during a seminal time in American history. As a Revolutionary soldier, he travelled nearly 1,500 miles, on foot, by boat or on horseback, from the backwoods of northeast South Carolina to Georgia and back to his home in today’s Horry County. He was a raw recruit when he fought in the land and sea assault on Sullivan’s Island and a hardened soldier at Savannah and Charleston. Made a prisoner of war, he escaped to fight with General Marion’s men in rural South Carolina.²

After the war, he founded two families, fathered eight or more children, took part in village affairs, maintained ties with Revolutionary compatriots, and established a comfortable farm.

He died in the “sixty-third year of American Independence.” A life well lived.³

His story is not just about war. It is also a narrative of how the American Revolution defined his relationships throughout life. The more exciting aspects revolve around a soldier’s exploits. No wonder, they are riveting. However, back stories placing his military service in context are intriguing in their own right. Take, for instance, the ties between Nicholas and his boyhood friend and fellow soldier, Edward Conner. The relationship may have originated with the liaison between Nicholas’ grandfather, Joseph Prince, and the mysterious Sarah Connor. Nicholas’ story is incomplete without including tales of some of the men who fought alongside him in the 4th South Carolina Regiment. The experiences shared by Revolutionary veterans forged lasting bonds. And, there are complex family threads, including that of a much younger, second wife who may have urged, even nagged, Nicholas to apply for a Revolutionary War pension.

SOLDIER

Of the three million people in the thirteen American colonies, an estimated 184,000 served over the course of the Revolutionary War. One-fifth were killed in action, died from disease or were wounded. A fraction of war veterans, or their survivors, applied for pensions based on Revolutionary War service. The account of Nicholas Prince is one of 82,603 declarations recorded decades after battles had been won and lost.²¹

IN HIS OWN WORDS

Nicholas Prince described his war experiences in a sworn statement for a Revolutionary War pension on November 8, 1833 in Horry District, South Carolina. He began with an account of his birth.

***That he was born in Robinson [Robeson] County
in the state of North Carolina
near on the South Carolina line.***

Nicholas was born Thursday, March 16, 1758, the firstborn child of Nicholas Prince and Sarah Lewis. He was named for his father, who was about twenty years old.²²

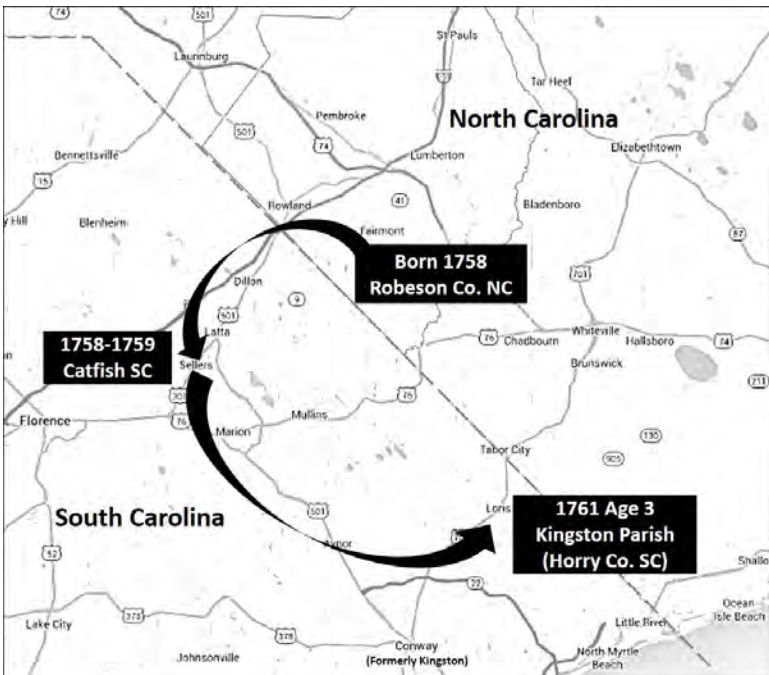
He declared he was born “near on” the state line in Robinson County. Rather, the county was Robeson, carved from the southern part of colonial Bladen County, which bordered South Carolina.

Although South Carolina was officially separated from its northern neighbor, boundaries between the two provinces were fluid and early colonists moved freely from one region to the other. While the exact location of Nicholas’ North Carolina birth is unknown, a reasonable estimate is it was near the juncture of Robeson and Columbus counties, perhaps near current Marietta or south to Fair Bluff on the Lumber River. Of course, at that time, neither village existed.

It is unclear why or how Nicholas Prince the Elder came to be in North Carolina. He had no apparent ties to the state and his father, Joseph Prince, did not own properties in the state. Family dynamics could have played a role. He may have felt

slighted because of his father's land gift to Joseph Connor and sought his fortune in North Carolina.²³

Evidence suggests Nicholas Prince the Elder once lived in Robeson County. The notation "Nicholas Prince improvement" is in a land grant for Joseph Oates. The property was on Cowpen Prong Swamp, Robeson County. Nicholas the Elder may have settled on the land, cleared it, built structures, even drained a swamp. For some unknown reason, he left for South Carolina before securing a land grant for himself. The elder Nicholas Prince left no trace of his life, other than a brief mention in another man's land grant and his son's pension application.²⁴



3. The route Nicholas and his parents traveled from North Carolina to Catfish to Kingston Parish, South Carolina.

***That when he was an infant
his parents moved to Catfish in Marion District
(then called Georgetown District).***

Nicholas' parents moved to Catfish in present-day Marion County, about thirty miles distance, when he was less than a year old. They may have travelled through thick virgin forests on narrow trails, a day or so by wagon. Or, made the journey by canoe or flatboat on the Lumber River, going south to the Little Pee Dee, connecting with Catfish Creek, then north to Catfish. Like many settlers from northern colonies they were seeking fertile, free land. Nicholas the Elder may have been familiar with the area and knew other Catfish settlers. Possibly, the couple wanted to be close to Sarah Lewis' family, which had settled in Marion County years before.²⁵

They settled in Catfish, either the now extinct Catfish community, north of the town of Marion, or somewhere in the Catfish Swamp and Catfish Creek areas. They were not the first settlers. Others, mostly English, Scots and Irish, had moved into the area in the 1730s and 1740s. When Nicholas and his parents arrived, there were a few hundred families scattered throughout the district. Farms were generally modest and situated along waterways, usually at some distance from each other.

The region's desirable land attracted farmers: "Catfish waters a large portion of the country, and has some very fine lands (mostly sandy) watered by it and its tributaries."²⁶ Native Americans were no longer a threat: they had left or been driven out years before. Settlers built rough log cabins and cleared land for farming and livestock grazing. Wildlife was abundant, so hunting and trapping were a way of life. Later, during the Revolutionary War, Catfish Creek became notorious for its pro-British attitudes and Tory activity.²⁷

Within a few years, Nicholas' parents left Catfish.

***And then when he was about 3 years old his parents
moved to Horry District (then called Kingstown Parish)
where he has resided ever since.
That he was born 16th March 1758.***

When Nicholas was a toddler, the young family moved on to Kingstown (Kingston) Parish. The parish was located in Georgetown District from which Horry County, in the northeastern corner, would be formed. The Waccamaw River dominated then, as now, the southern part of the region. Kingston, later Conway, was the only interior village of the remote district. Farms were along waterways, which served as an early planters' highway. Loblolly and longleaf pines covered the coastal plain; swamps and creeks were in low-lying areas.

The family's move was shortly after the death of Joseph Prince. Perhaps, it was a coincidence. Nicholas Prince the Elder may have wanted to rekindle family ties. If the move was related to an inheritance from Joseph's estate, there is no evidence of it. The family did not settle on Prince lands along the Waccamaw River or the seacoast, but near Cooper Branch, northwest of present-day Conway.²⁸

Within a few years, the family expanded. Young Nicholas had four siblings: James, Elizabeth Mary, Joseph, and a younger sister. Horry records chronicle their lives.²⁹

Aside from his pension declaration, there is no record of Nicholas' birth. He lived in today's Horry County until his death in 1839. Numerous land grants and civil transactions tell of his life. However, before grants of land, marriages, and community petitions, Nicholas went to war.