

Thomas Lindley, Patriot

Thomas Lindley b. 25 Feb. 1706, d. 14 Sept. 1781

In discussing the patriotism of Thomas Lindley we should first understand the state of mind Thomas carried with him during the time leading up to the Revolutionary War. Thomas lived the first 47 years of his life in New Garden, Pennsylvania. Thomas was a Quaker and as such could have been a bystander in politics. Thomas was never a bystander as were most other Quakers at that time. Thomas moved to Cane Creek, Orange County, North Carolina in 1753 and purchased two parcels of land from the Grandville District.^[III] Thomas and his neighbor Hugh Laughlin formed a partnership and built a gristmill that will be of interest later in the sketch.^[III] Thomas became involved in the Regulator movement at least as soon as 11 May 1768. Thomas volunteered his home for a meeting of the Regulators on that date.^[III] The Regulators were an organization formed to oppose excessive tariffs and taxes imposed by the British prior to and leading up to the coming conflict. The most odious of taxes at the time was the Stamp Act. Thomas Lindley opposed the Stamp Act and is listed in the Regulators of North Carolina.^[IV] With the Johnston Riot of 1771 the Regulator movement basically came to an end. The existing Regulators that were not involved in the leadership positions of the movement were given amnesty if they would swear allegiance under oath to support the crown.^[V] Thomas was not listed as having done this for two reasons. One reason is that Quakers would only give oath to their God. The British governor Tryon made an allowance for this fact and the Quakers were given the choice of “affirming” allegiance. Thomas did not do an affirmation either, but he chose silence.^[VI]

Moving to the Revolutionary War era we will see Thomas engaged in the rearing of his family and the operation of the Mill. September 14, 1781 dawned as a very bad day in Thomas Lindley’s life. His son, James (b. 22 Sept. 1735, d. 14 Feb. 1779), had been a Tory officer hanged by the Whigs after losing the Battle of Kettle Creek in Wilkes County, Georgia in 1779, leaving a wife and children. His other son, John and nephew William, were officers riding with Colonel John Pyle MD, a noted Tory in Orange County.^[VII] His son Jonathan was supporting the Whigs. Thomas had to be wondering where he went wrong. After all, aren’t Quakers supposed to be pacifists?

Several more interesting items were going to occur on this day. The Tory forces under the command of Edmund Fanning, a brutal Tory leader, were marching toward the Lindley plantation. All the neighbors, Thomas Lindley included, knew the reputation of Fanning. The Whig forces, under the command of John Butler, were marching to meet them to rescue the prisoners Fanning held, which included the Governor of the province. For a full synopsis of the battle see “The Battle of Lindley’s Mill”.^[VIII]

How do we prove the patriotism of Thomas Lindley? We have the Revolutionary War Accounts record listing a man named Thomas Lindley as having provided 11 pounds sterling of a product to the Revolutionary Army.^[IX] We have the actual receipt for 11 pounds sterling specie (silver coin) signed by a Thomas Lindley and the date is 1784. Thomas Lindley died, however, on that bad day in September 14, 1781.^[X] What happened?

Let's take this one step at a time. Several items will be of interest in proving Thomas Lindley Sr. provided the product to the Revolutionary Army.

1. The Revolutionary Army was not in that area of North Carolina in 1784.
2. Thomas Lindley Jr. did not own a mill and was not awarded the mill in the will of Thomas Lindley Sr. Who signed the receipt?
3. The will of Thomas was probated in October 1782.
4. The payment of 11 pounds was in specie and not in North Carolina script, which was in use in 1784. This implies an earlier debt than 1784.
5. The Revolutionary War debt was paid long after the debts were incurred. Soldiers were paid as late as 1792 in some cases.
6. Several references to 39 barrels of flour are extant, for Thomas Sr. delivering on 14 Sept. 1781 that fateful day, by other researchers.
7. A discussion of the graft and corruption in the Revolutionary War Army Accounts system and conclusion.

1. The Revolutionary Army left this area of North Carolina after the Battle of Lindley's Mill. After the Battle of Guilford Courthouse March 15, 1781, General Greene, technically the loser of the battle, marched his men to Charleston, South Carolina and basically ignored Cornwallis. Cornwallis stayed in North Carolina for a time and ultimately moved his army north to the Dan River in Virginia. Cornwallis then moved on to Yorktown and his surrender occurred 19 October 1781 in the siege of Yorktown.^[XI]

The remaining Whig forces under General Butler fought the Battle of Lindley's Mill in September and, although another Whig loss, inflicted heavy losses on Fanning. The Tories and Whigs alike removed to the Wilmington area, the Tories leading and the Whigs in pursuit.^[XII] Thomas Lindley would have had to sell the product prior to 1781 or at least prior to his will being probated in 1782 as the Revolutionary Army was gone from this area of North Carolina in 1784.

2. Some concern exists about which Thomas Lindley signed the receipt for goods delivered. There were five Thomas Lindleys in the area in 1781. Thomas Lindley Sr., his son Thomas Lindley Jr., and three grandsons of Thomas Lindley Sr. The grandsons were minors at the time so they could not have signed the receipt. We must be concerned with Thomas Jr. The will of Thomas Sr. leaves the land that includes Thomas Sr.'s share of the mill to William and Jonathan.^[XIII] Why is this a problem? Thomas had to provide some sort of foodstuff to the Army. If Thomas Jr. did not own a mill, providing the large amount of 11 pounds sterling product would be difficult. When large amounts of money are involved, or for convenience sake, other concerned people will and do sign for their deceased kindred. We do not know when the product was delivered. We do know when the receipt was signed for 11 pounds and that was definitely after Thomas Sr. death. The receipt was obviously signed for him by someone else. If the product were flour from the mill as I suspect then Hugh Laughlin would be half owner of the product. In any case we must doubt Thomas Lindley Jr. provided the product to the Army. Common sense says it came from the mill of Thomas Lindley Sr. The only other Thomas Lindley to own the Lindley mill was the son of William Lindley. He purchased the mill in 1796 from the estate of Hugh Laughlin giving him full ownership in both shares of the partnership.^[XIV]

3. The will of Thomas Lindley Sr. was probated or proved in August of 1782. This was nearly a year after his death.^[XVI] The product could have been delivered during the time between the death and the will being proven. If this is the case Thomas Sr. is still the provider of the product or, rather, his estate is the provider. It may be noted that the executors of the estate were William and Jonathan Lindley. Where was Thomas Jr.?

4. The payment was in 11-pound specie.^[XVI] Specie means coin, not North Carolina script. Money was very scarce in coin during this time in North Carolina. We need to spend some time discussing the financial situation in North Carolina at this time. We know from Gresham's Law that bad money drives good money out of circulation. The State of North Carolina was totally broke in 1780. The issuance of script drove coin out of circulation and the state had to devise a method to support the troops as the war resumed in the south in 1780. The continued issuance of North Carolina script drove the inflation rate for necessities to a prohibitive level. The state devised a method to raise foodstuffs and necessities for the army. This was started in 1780 and continued through 1782. The system was to loan and tax in "kind". That is, by requesting foodstuffs and products from the populace which were stored in warehouses and distributed to the troops as needed. This system continued from 1780 through 1782. The goods requested were: Indian corn, wheat, rye, oats, rice, pork, and beef. The State of North Carolina made no attempt to repay these loans until the Federal Government helped in 1784.^[XVII] This may go along way in determining who was owed what, and when, and why was payment so late.

5. The Revolutionary War debts were paid long after the debts were incurred. Thomas Lindley's 11 pounds was recorded in Volume XI of the Revolutionary War Army Accounts. We know the payment was made in 1784. It is interesting to see the Revolutionary War Army Accounts Volume X. You will note the payment is made in 1792. This at least shows the relationship of payment to debt occurrence is irrelevant.^[XVIII]

6. Several researchers have quoted 39 barrels of flour being delivered from the Thomas Lindley mill^[XIX]. This is a large amount of flour. Some researchers state the mill was "drawn on" for 6 loads of flour on the specific date of 14 September 1781^[XX]. Drawn on implies to me a non-voluntary delivery and it may have been just that based on the paragraph number 4 above. Would this much flour have caused a hardship in the Lindley/Laughlin mill business? We know there are 220 shillings in 11 pounds. A bushel of grain costs around 2 shillings a bushel, prior to the runaway inflation of 1780. The price varied depending on the type of grain. A barrel contains slightly more than 3 bushels. Doing the math, it can be seen that 11 pounds will roughly buy 39 barrels of flour at 2 shillings per bushel. An acre of good grain land produced about 20 to 25 bushels of grain. Thomas Lindley owned 1000 acres. Not all was under cultivation, but based on the above yield I doubt if much hardship would have been caused by 39 barrels of flour. We can see that 11 pounds went a long way in 1780. We can believe the sale happened, however, since the Whigs were in the area and Quakers would never deny foodstuffs to any needy person or army.

7. The Revolutionary Army Accounts system was full of graft and corruption. The receipts were issued at the time of payment of the debts. The debts were not incurred on the date shown on the receipt for payment. The debts or IOU's were frequently traded as money since there was nearly no hard currency in North Carolina during and after the War. When the debts were to be paid, they were surrendered to the state in Hillsborough and whoever owned the debt signed the payees name on the back of the receipt. Thomas Lindley's signature may have been signed by anyone owning the debt, not necessarily a family member. ^[XXI] This can be seen in the Revolutionary War Army Accounts Record. You will note the receipts are listed at the time of payment and the numbers are not sequential. ^[XXII]

In conclusion, I have no trouble placing Thomas Lindley in the patriots' column. Thomas Lindley's history and actions speak loudly of his feelings. The Greensboro Daily News article, published in 1928, was written after a reunion of Lindley family members from all over the country. Some of those family members probably knew the story of Thomas Lindley's patriotic acts, as they were nearly 100 years closer to the actual acts that I am today. Neither they nor I saw Thomas put the flour in the wagon, but the flour was discussed in 1928 or it would not have appeared in the article. Thomas was also stated to have remained neutral in the referenced article. Thomas may have thought himself as being neutral, but providing the flour to the Whigs tells a different story.

James Lindley 2002, Bellevue, Washington

^[II] Vol. 3, of Land Grants of Granville District Pt. Rowan Co. NC #4695 and #4057

^[III] City of Hillsboro records and The Battle of Lindley's Mill by Algie I. Newlin

^[IV] History of Orange County edited by Hugh Lefler and Paul Wager, Chapel Hill, 1953

^[V] Baptists, Regulators and Captain Merrill, Henry Sheets 1907

^[VI] The Colonial Records of North Carolina, Vol. 8, 1769-1771, by William L. Saunders, Raleigh, 1890

^[VII] Ibid. IV

^[VIII] The Loyalists of North Carolina during the Revolution, Robert O. Demond, PHD, Duke Univ. Press

^[IX] The Battle of Lindley's Mill, by Algie I. Newlin, 1975, LIC# 74-33579

^[X] Treasurers and comptrollers Papers, Revolutionary Army Accounts Vol. XI, Page 40 Folio 2

^[XI] Treasurers and Comptrollers Papers, Revolutionary War Pay Vouchers No. 6146

^[XII] The History of a Southern State, North Carolina, by Lefler and Newsome, Chapel Hill pp 235-38

^[XIII] Ibid. II, Algie Newlin, pp23

^[XIV] Abstract of Wills, Orange County, N.C.I. Shields, Ruth, Book A. 252

^[XV] History of Snow Camp, North Carolina by Juanita Owens Euliss, 1971

^[XVI] Ibid. XIII

^[XVII] Ibid. X

[\[XVIII\]](#) North Carolina, The Rebuilding of an Ancient Commonwealth, by R.D.W.Conner, Vol. 1, 1929
pp.334-35

[\[XVIII\]](#) Roster of Soldiers From North Carolina in the Am. Rev. DAR. 1932 pp.223

[\[XIX\]](#) History of Hillsboro, Orange County, North Carolina, The Hadley Society quote

[\[XX\]](#) Greensboro Daily News, 9 September, 1928

[\[XXI\]](#) Telephone conversation with Archivist at North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh NC, April 2002

[\[XXII\]](#) Ibid. IX