

Margaret O'Neal McDowell, one of the earlier pioneers of Old Burke, was a woman of courage during the American Revolution.

On September 30, 1780, the Irish lass who had become the Widow McDowell was approaching her 60th year. On this day that she was never to forget, the Great Meadow was the place of rendezvous for more than a thousand Over Mountain Men—among them her two sons, Charles and Joseph, Jr., whom, after tomorrow, she might never see again this side of Heaven. The men of this gathering army were coming together with one intent—to challenge the British under the command of Major Patrick Ferguson.

This small army bivouacked at Quaker Meadows was on its way to fight the battle that would be the turning point of the Revolution in the South—the Battle of Kings Mountain.

Because of her heroic actions in support of the Kings Mountain Campaign, Margaret O'Neal McDowell, Mistress of the Quaker Meadows Estate, is listed as a Patriot of the American Revolution.

She died sometime after 1780. No stone marks the grave of Margaret O'Neal McDowell, American Patriot.

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Grace Greenlee was declared a Patriot for her many acts of heroism in the War for American Independence.

The Battle of Ramseur's Mill near Lincolnton began at daybreak on June 20, 1780. It was a desperate struggle and at times a hand-to-hand battle, as neighbor fought neighbor in the thick fog. The combatants wore no uniforms. The only way to distinguish the troops was by the white paper pinned to the hats of the Whigs and the green twigs pinned to the hats of the Tories.

In less than two hours, the battle was over. Four hundred North Carolina Whig patriots had defeated a superior force of 1,300 Tories loyal to the British Crown.

This was the day that Grace Greenlee had feared, for word was brought her that her husband Captain John Bowman had been grievously wounded and was likely to die.

Grace rode on horseback, carrying her little daughter, Polly, and following dim trails through the South Mountains in a race with death. She reached her wounded husband a short time before he died. Grace Greenlee buried Capt. John Bowman near where he fell, in a mass grave for the seven Whig Captains killed in the Battle of Ramseur's Mill.

Grace Greenlee came home to her role as a new widow, a mother to Polly, and a woman with lands to till, plant and harvest. From the fruits of her fields, she became an unofficial quartermaster for the rebel Whigs.

Once while riding alone, she met a band of Tories—who insolently halted her and asked her the news. She told them there was nothing of interest to relate, except that the McDowell Brothers were out with a large force hunting for Tories, and that they were approaching over the same road she had traveled. The Tories fled—and she returned home in safety.

In the fall of 1782, Grace Greenlee was 32 years old when she married her cousin, General Charles McDowell, and went to live at McDowell Station. She was to bear five McDowell children and is buried beside her husband under the forest floor.

SACRED

*To The Memory of Grace McDowell  
Consort of General Charles McDowell  
Who died the 18th of May 1823  
In the 73rd year of her age.*

*“Once engaged in scenes of life  
A tender mother and loving wife  
But now she's gone and left us here—  
The lesson bids us all prepare”*

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In those times that tried men's souls, Sarah Anne Erwin was another Burke County woman of remarkable courage.

In 1780, Colonel Alexander Erwin was away from his wife, Sarah, and their six children fighting with the Burke Militia during the Kings Mountain Campaign.

Samuel Alexander, a neighbor and friend who had been severely wounded in the service of his new country, sought shelter at Cherryfields, Erwin's 338-acre estate named for its many wild cherry trees.

Sarah put the wounded man in an outbuilding, hoping to conceal him from marauding bands of Tories, or British sympathizers, until his wounds healed.

Soon a party of Tories in pursuit of Samuel Alexander rode to Cherryfields and searched the residence over Sarah's active opposition. After the house had been plundered and swords had been run into every bed and corner, the Tories approached the outbuilding where the helpless man lay.

Sarah placed herself at the door, refusing to admit them. Forcibly thrusting her aside, they

entered the building and discovered the wounded Whig. As one of the Tories was in the act of striking Alexander with his sword— Sarah threw herself between the descending blade and the wounded man.

With her own body, she shielded Samuel Alexander from the blow that was intended to kill him. She received a dreadful gash across her neck, shoulder, and breast. Amazingly, she survived, and with blood gushing from her right arm, Sarah Erwin stood her ground against the Tories and thus saved the life of a neighbor who had sought her shelter.

Sarah Erwin never fully recovered from the Tory saber stroke. The wound maimed her for life and contributed to her early death in 1785 at the age of 35. For her heroism, Sarah Erwin is remembered as an American Patriot.

*Memento Mori*

*In Memory of Sarah Erwin*

*An affectionate wife and tender mother*

*“When I lie buried deep in dust*

*My flesh shall be Thy care*

*These withering limbs with Thee, I trust*

*To raise them strong and fair”*

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Adapted by Dr. Cheryl Oxford from

Under the Forest Floor,

by Eunice Ervin

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### **Historic Burke Foundation, Inc.**

Historic Burke Foundation promotes knowledge of local culture and history through educational programming and historic site preservation. The foundation operates the Historic Burke County Courthouse, and owns and operates the Charles McDowell, Jr. House at Quaker Meadows Plantation, Quaker Meadows Cemetery, and Belvedere Cemetery. These properties are available for tours, plays, lectures, meetings, weddings, and concerts for a reasonable fee. Support Historic Burke Foundation by joining or donating to us today!



*The Historic Burke County Courthouse (1833-1837) on the Historic Courthouse Square in downtown Morganton, N.C.*

(828) 437-4104

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# WOMEN OF COURAGE

Quaker Meadows Cemetery dates from 1767 and is the final resting place of pioneer-patriots of Historic Burke County. Three women buried in Quaker Meadows Cemetery are included in the List of Patriots of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution—

**Margaret O’Neal McDowell**

**Grace Greenlee McDowell**

**Sarah Anne Erwin**



*Quaker Meadows Cemetery, Morganton, NC*

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