

The Passing of Armies

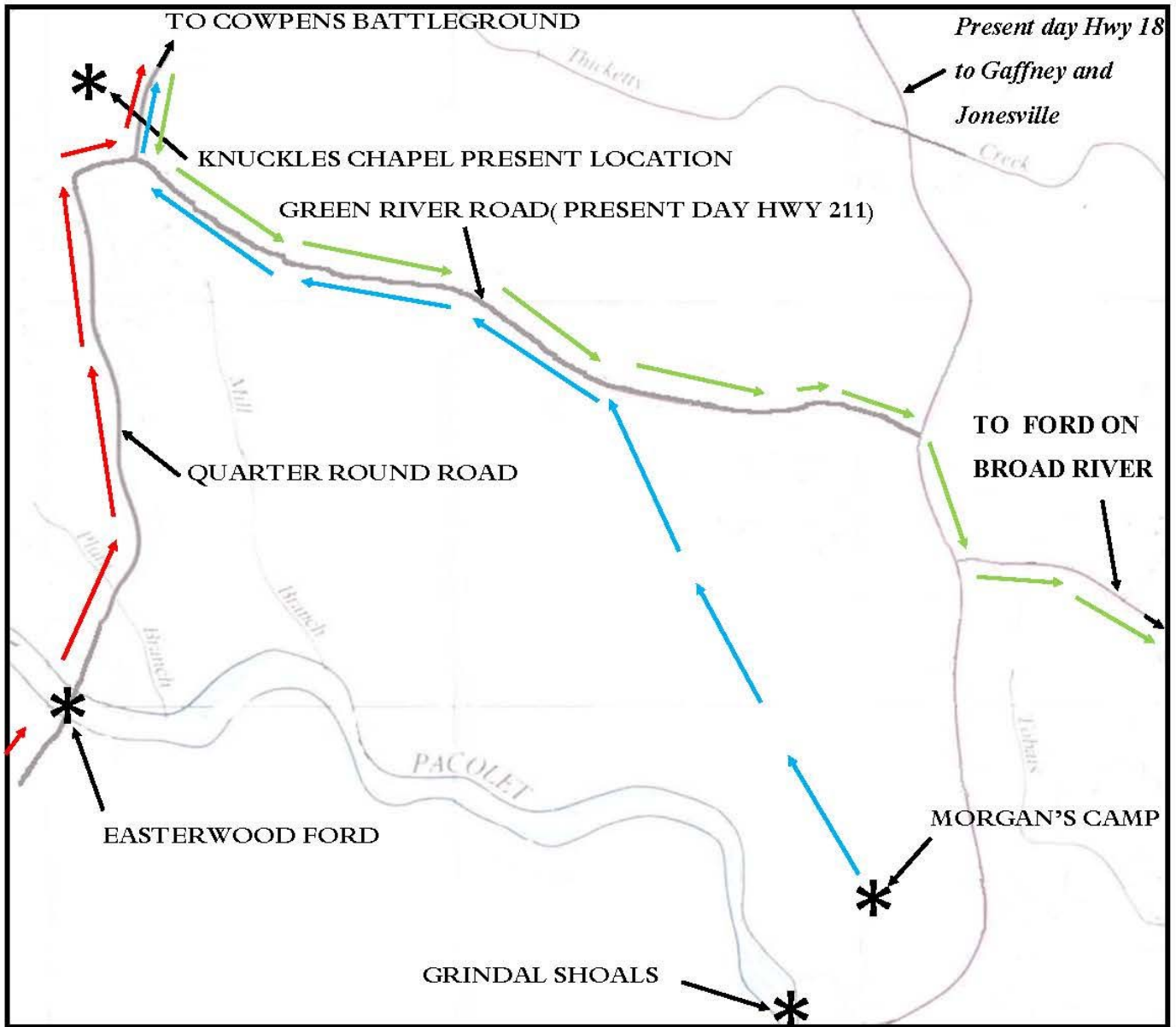
Most folks in the [Asbury](#), [Goucher](#) and Pacolet community know where the Knuckles Chapel Church is located. Many of them pass it every week without a thought about its historic location. The church itself has a long history of serving the community. In 2005, it celebrated the 100th anniversary of its founding. The church sits beside what is today known as the Goucher School Road. However, this is a fairly recent name and the name itself is no longer relevant. The school that it was named after, about four miles away, has been closed and no longer exists. For over 200 years, long before Knuckles Chapel was built, the road was known as the [Green River Road](#). It was one of the first and most historic roads in the Carolina Upcountry. The road went from [Grindal Shoals](#) on the [Pacolet River](#), up to the Green River in North Carolina. Just 100 yards, or so, from where the Knuckles Chapel Church is located today, there was an intersection where the [Quarter Round Road](#) joined the [Green River Road](#). The [Quarter Round Road](#) was also a historic road. It led from [Easterwood Ford](#) on the [Pacolet River](#) to its intersection with the [Green River Road](#).

If you could have been standing on the spot where Knuckles Chapel is located today in January, 1781, you would have been a witness to some of the most historic scenes to ever take place in South Carolina. On Monday, January 15, 1781 you would have seen the passing of General Daniel Morgan and his little American Army on their way to the [Battle of Cowpens](#). They were traveling on the [Green River Road](#) from their former camp at [Grindal Shoals](#) on the [Pacolet River](#). The next day, Tuesday, January 16, 1781, you would have seen the passing of Col. Banastre Tarleton and the British Army trying to catch Morgan and his Army. Tarleton and his Army had crossed the [Pacolet River](#) at [Easterwood Ford](#) and then traveled up the [Quarter Round Road](#) to fall into the [Green River Road](#) just behind Morgan.

Tarleton had indeed “caught” General Morgan at the [Cowpens](#), about 18 miles from the future site of Knuckles Chapel. The [Battle of Cowpens](#) was fought on both sides of the [Green River Road](#) on the morning of Wednesday, January 17, 1781. Tarleton and his Army suffered a crushing defeat and most of the Army was either killed or captured. If you had been standing at our site at Knuckles Chapel you probably could’ve heard the sounds of the cannons at [Cowpens](#). Later in the day, on the 17th, we could have seen Tarleton and many of his horsemen desperately fleeing down the [Green River Road](#) to try to join the British General Cornwallis across the Broad River.

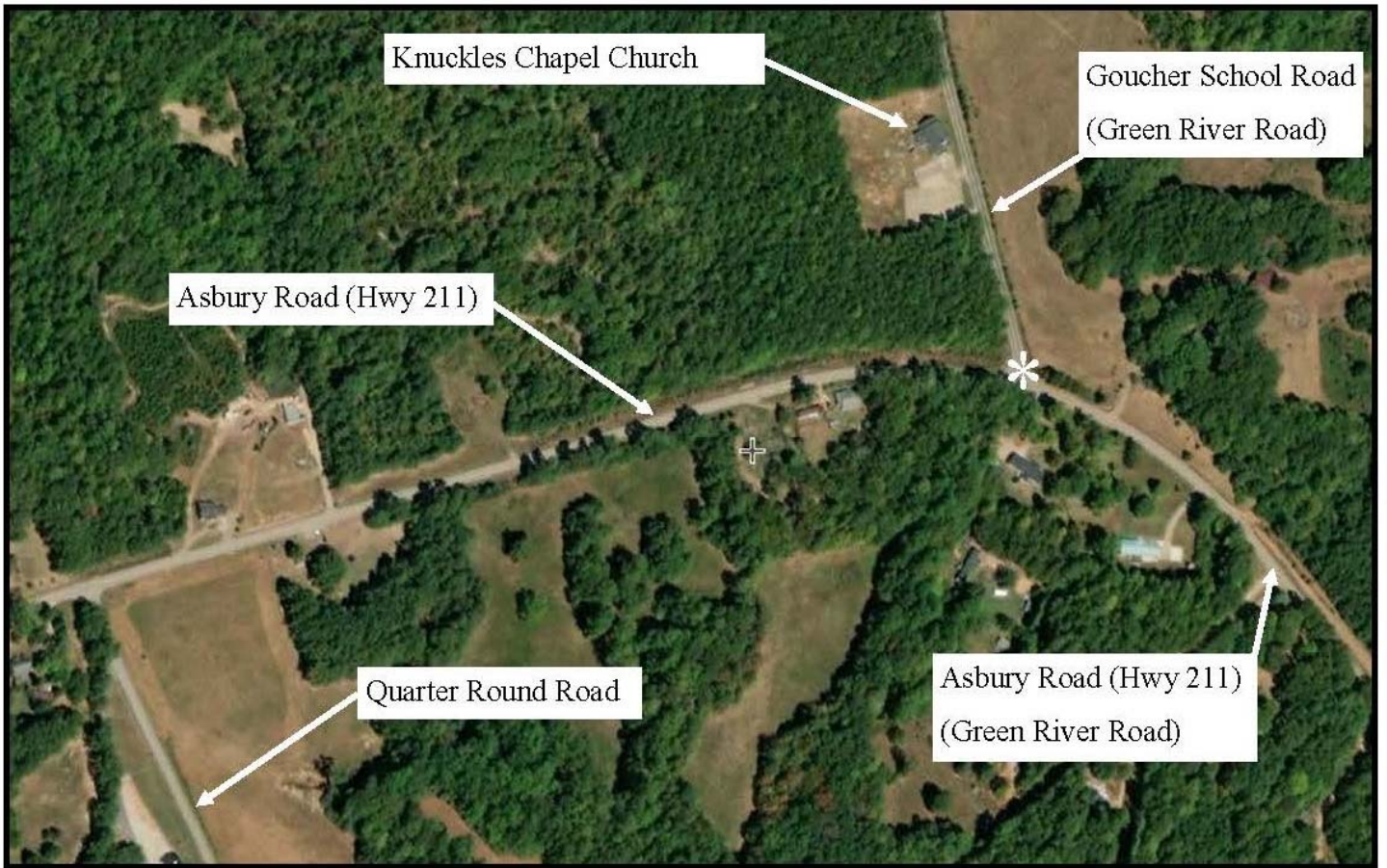


This is a present-day picture of the Knuckles Chapel Church. The church was not built until well over 100 years after the Battle of Cowpens. However, the place where it sits was a witness to some of the most historic scenes that ever happened in South Carolina.



- Tarleton and the British Army on the way to Cowpens - →
- Morgan and the American Army's Route to Cowpens- →
- Tarleton and the British Cavalry Retreating - →

British and American movements on January 15, 16 and 17, 1781 in the vicinity of the present location of Knuckles Chapel Church.



Present day aerial view of Knuckles Chapel, Intersection and Roads discussed in this story.

Let's go back in time and imagine what we could have seen at our position on the future site of Knuckles Chapel. Both imagined accounts are taken from my book "*Spirit Up the People – Four Days to the Cowpens*".

On the morning of Monday, January 15, 1781, a local man, Ransom, and his grandson, James, are sitting watching the passing of Morgan and his Army.

They had just sat down when Ransom said, "Well, here comes the army." He was pointing back down the [Green River Road](#) they had just traveled. About three hundred yards away, several horsemen rode into view going at a slow trot. Off on both sides of the road, James could make out other horsemen that were making sure no one was lying in ambush beside the road. Ransom said, "These are the scouts, the army is just behind." Sure enough, just as the scouts got about even with Ransom and James, the foot soldiers came into view. The scouts were a hard looking lot. Most of them just had on hunting clothes and were not wearing uniforms. What they all had in common was a flintlock rifle cradled in one arm or laying cross the saddle in front of them.

Ransom spoke up to James, "These boys are taking the place of Col. Washington's Dragoons. If he and his fellows wasn't over to the [Ironworks](#), they would be riding out in front of the army. They're having shoes put on their horses, you know."

James had a ringside seat to the army's passing. Right after the scouts, another group of horsemen were riding. One of these was a large man wearing a continental officer's uniform. "That's old Daniel Morgan himself," Ransom said as the group of horsemen passed. Ransom raised his hat in salute as Morgan passed and Morgan and the other officers raised theirs in return. This time, both James and Ransom were thrilled. General Morgan looked to James as if he were in pain. His Dad, Frederick, had told them earlier that General Morgan often had rheumatism very bad and that riding a horse was painful.

Behind the horsemen, came the regular Maryland and Delaware Continental soldiers. They were dressed in their uniforms and made an impressive sight. They had dark blue coats with red trim and white pants. At least, they once were white, but they were now stained by the ever present Piedmont red mud. The Continental soldiers were also wearing blue tri- cornered hats.

The [Green River Road](#) was not very wide. It was more like a big path. It made it necessary for the army to line up in two columns as they were traveling on it. James and Ransom watched the two rows of men as they walked past. The soldiers were not marching in step, but were just walking along.

There were about 320 of the Continental Regular soldiers so it only took a few minutes for them to pass. After them came the militia. These were the men that dressed just like Ransom and didn't look at all like what James thought a soldier would look. They wore their hunting shirts and all different kinds of hats or caps. Some carried a small pack and blanket. Others didn't carry anything but their rifle. Most of them were on horseback. Just feeding their horses was a big problem for Morgan.

All of them carried their long rifle. Some had them on their shoulder, some across their necks. Some cradled them in their arms. James was horrified to see that some of the men were either barefoot or had their feet wrapped up in rags.

To James, the army looked much more like a bunch of hunters out on a stroll than soldiers on the march. They sure didn't act like they were afraid and running away from the British.

Most of them were talking as they rode or walked. Some were smoking their pipes. Lots of them were chewing tobacco and turned frequently to spit. But the men were moving quickly, and not wasting any time.

At the end of the army, there were several wagons loaded with supplies. In only a short time the army had passed. Other horsemen were at the end of the column to protect the rear.

The day was Monday, January 15, 1781. James and Ransom had just seen the American Army commanded by General Morgan pass by on its way to the [Cowpens](#). The little Army had around 800 men. In about fifteen minutes, the entire American Army had passed the spot where James and Ransom watched. Let's imagine, also, that we could be there at the future site of Knuckles Chapel the next day, on Tuesday, January 16, 1781, when Tarleton and his Army passed. This time, the boy, James, is there without his grandfather, Ransom.

He heard the running horses. His first reaction was to run over to the edge of the road so that he could wave at some more of Morgan's men as they went by. Having second thoughts, he laid down on the ground close to the road, but hidden from view, when the six horses flew by. These were great big horses but the riders were unlike anything James had ever seen. They were all big men dressed in green coats and wearing white pants and great black boots. Two or three of them had swords in their hands. But the most amazing thing about them was the polished brass hats they were wearing. The hats had feathers sticking out the top that were bent back by the wind caused by their fast ride. In just a second, they were gone. They were riding along the [Green River Road](#) chasing Morgan's army.

James lay there almost in shock. He knew that these riders were Tarleton's dragoons. He had heard them described several times by Ransom. "Tarleton's Cavalry. They were right here! Why, the British army must be coming this way". Almost in answer to his thoughts, he heard the sound of something coming from a distance. It was a strange noise.

It couldn't be the wind. It certainly couldn't be thunder this time of year. He held his breath and tried to listen harder. It was closer and louder now. It was drums! Why, it must be the British army actually marching toward him on the [Green River Road](#). They had just marched up the [Quarter Round Road](#) and turned on to the [Green River Road](#).

At first the sound paralyzed him. Then, in a minute or two, he realized that he could hear the sound of many feet marching to the rhythm of the drums. Once the initial fright was over, he was filled with an intense curiosity. What did the army look like? What was making that wonderful drumming sound?

Further down the road, closer to the intersection, was a group of trees. He ran over to one of these trees and squatted down behind it. His hiding place gave him a good view of the road.

The drums were getting much closer. He had barely gotten down behind the trees when the first of the army came into view. Leading the army were about twenty horsemen dressed just like the ones he had seen racing by. They were riding their horses at a fast walk and were stringing out along the road. These men were wearing the brass hats too. Just behind these riders rode a man on a beautiful big horse. He was dressed in a green coat like the others but didn't have on a brass hat. He wore a hat with a feather in it. Another of these soldiers with a brass hat rode beside him. They were followed by almost ten more of the riders in the brass hats.

The green coated riders rode on by as James lay there in wide eyed wonder at the spectacle he was seeing. Just behind the first group of riders, a few horsemen passed who were wearing red coats and a different kind of hat. They were followed closely by the drummers. The [Green River Road](#) was narrow and the British army was marching in two long lines of soldiers. At the head of each line, James could see and hear the drummers as they passed right by him. The sound of the drums scared and excited James all at the same time. It was the most thrilling sound he had ever heard. They sounded like they were alive and commanding the soldiers to march. The sound of the soldiers marching feet blended in with the drums and James was so close to the line of march that it felt like he could feel the marching through the ground. The drummers were now past James and the

soldiers were in view. They wore very red coats and white pants and tall hats. They were wearing wide leather belts that had little boxes fastened to them. Each of them also was carrying a long heavy rifle over his shoulder. Ransom had told James these smoothbore guns were called “Brown Bess” by the British soldiers. The gun looked a lot bigger to James than Ransom’s flintlock rifle.

The soldiers kept marching past. James was struck by the difference between this army and Morgan’s army he and Ransom had just seen the day before. The British had drummers and were marching in step and weren’t talking as they marched. They had beautiful uniforms and all kinds of equipment. Also, they seemed to be in a hurry and seemed to be marching awfully fast.

Compared to the British army, Morgan’s men had looked like a bunch of hunters out on a stroll. They had made no pretense of keeping in step. They had talked as they walked or rode along. Most of them had nothing like a uniform. Indeed, many of them had not even had shoes.

The soldiers kept passing. After a while, another group of drummers passed followed by more red coated men on horseback and a lot of red coated foot soldiers.

James was soon surprised to see a large group of soldiers starting to march by that were dressed in green coats very much like the horsemen that had been leading the army. Except these men were on foot and carrying rifles like the red coated soldiers. James had heard Ransom talk about Tarleton’s Legion and how it had horsemen and foot soldiers. The legion was made up of Tories and were not regular British soldiers. James decided that these green coated soldiers must be part of the Legion.

After the green coats, came some more red coated drummers and more red coated soldiers. This time, though, right in the middle of the soldiers, horses were carrying two small cannons that had been taken apart. James had never seen a cannon before and they did not seem small to him. The horses carrying the cannons were being led by a rider wearing a blue coat instead of red or green. James had never seen such a variety of colored clothing in his whole life. Almost all of the clothes he had ever seen had been the drab homespun material that had been dyed with the few natural dyes like walnut hulls. He had never seen the likes of all these fine uniforms.

But just as he was marveling at all he had seen, another unusual part of army started by. James did not know it, but it was the 71st Highland Regiment from Scotland. They were wearing their distinctive hats with its colored tartan. James also noticed that in addition to the drummers the Scotland regiment was led by several men that were carrying a very strange looking object. To James, it looked

like each man was holding a pillow under one of his arms and the pillow had a small stick sticking out of it. These were pipers with their bagpipes, and they were not playing them as the army marched at a fast pace past where James lay hidden.

The last of the strangely dressed foot soldiers passed James. They were followed by more and more of the green coated horsemen of Tarleton's Legion. James thought they would never stop coming by. He thought they must be at least two or three hundred of them following the foot soldiers. Finally, the horses were by and James heard the creaking and rocking noise of wagons.

The first wagon passed and James decided to count them - nineteen, twenty, twenty one - still they kept coming. He finished counting the wagons. There were 35 of them. Each was piled high with boxes and barrels and shovels and all kinds of things. James had not known there were 35 wagons in all of South Carolina much less with just one part of the British army.

James saw all of the wagons piled high with supplies and then thought of the few wagons with their meager loads that had followed Morgan's army.

After the wagons passed, they were followed by still more of the green coated horsemen. Then, finally, the road was empty, and the sound of the creaking wagons and distant drums and marching feet faded off in the distance.

James lay there for a minute letting what he had seen sink in. Tarleton's army had just passed right by him. It was beautiful and very frightening all at the same time. The more he thought about it, the more it filled him with dread and worry. He just did not see how Morgan and his men, could stand up and fight such a magnificent army as he had just seen. Why, the British had everything - uniforms, guns, cannons and more supplies than could be imagined.

It just did not seem fair to James with Morgan and his men having to fight such an army. He was reminded of the story that Ransom had told him of the wolves that hunted in the nearby woods. The wolves hunted in packs. When a pack got on a deer trail, the deer was usually doomed. The pack pressed on so hard that it would run the deer until it could go no more and was finally killed.

James realized that Tarleton and his army were just like the pack of wolves, and Morgan and his little army were like the deer. Morgan and his men were trying to run away as best they could and get across the Broad River and away from the wolf pack of Tarleton and his army but Tarleton was coming on strong. He had everything on his side - his horses, his cannon and his supplies.

James lay there in the late afternoon light and felt a terrible feeling of desperation and sorrow for Morgan and his little army. The wolf was on his way.

Let us have one more imaginary sighting at our location on the future site of Knuckles Chapel. This one still involves James, by himself, in the early afternoon of the next day, Wednesday, January 17, 1781.

Around noon, James had walked back to the place on the [Green River Road](#) where he had seen the British Army pass yesterday. Early that morning, he and his family, had heard a few distant sounds to the north. It was unlike anything they had ever heard. James was afraid it was the sound of battle when the British had overtaken Morgan's fleeing Army.

James was right. The sounds were from the few shots fired by the British cannons at the [Battle of Cowpens](#). The battle has started just after dawn and lasted less than an hour. The battle was a disaster for the British. In that short period of time, most of the British Army had been killed wounded or captured. The exception was the British horsemen of Tarleton's Legion. When they saw the battle was going badly for the British they refused to get involved. They numbered about 200. When Tarleton saw that the battle was lost he led these horsemen in a frantic rush from the battlefield. In the beginning of the retreat, Tarleton and the American cavalry commander, Col. Washington had a short face-to-face encounter. Washington's sword broke and Tarleton shot and wounded Washington's horse.

Tarleton and the group of horsemen made a desperate attempt to flee from the battlefield and get to the safety of General Cornwallis' army. They traveled back down the [Green River Road](#) as fast as their horses could travel.

James was standing beside the [Green River Road](#) close to where the Knuckles Chapel Church is located today. He heard a strange sound in the distance that seemed to be getting closer. At first, it was almost like distant thunder, but as it got closer he realized it was the sound of many horses running. He got out of sight behind some bushes to watch the horses go past. When they got in sight, he realized it was some of the same green coated horsemen that he had seen pass with the British Army the day before. However, they sure looked different now. The horses were all bunched up as close as the narrow road would allow and all were in a dead run. The horses were all sweating and lathered up from the exertion of running several miles. In the cold January air, they actually seemed to be a veil of smoke surrounding them as the hot vapor of their sweat condensed. It was a strange sight. They all rushed right past him in their great haste to get away from the pursuing American cavalry led by Col. Washington. They all went on down the [Green River Road](#).

In a short period of time, another group of riders approached him. They too, were traveling as fast as they could go. This group was not nearly as large. Some of them were wearing regular colonial cavalry uniforms but lots were wearing their regular militia clothes. Some of the militia horsemen had been attached to Col. Washington's cavalry unit just before the battle. Now, all of them were in a furious chase to catch up and destroy what was left of Tarleton and his Army. In their pursuit they followed the British down the [Green River Road](#).

James was still stunned by what he had seen. He sat down on the ground to ponder about it. In just the last three days, he had seen the passing of the American Army, the British Army and the remnants of Tarleton's Legion go by him on the [Green River Road](#). The memory of those three days in January would stay with him his whole life.

Washington's riders never caught up with Tarleton's horsemen. Tarleton and his men fled across the Broad River at Hamilton Ford and went on to join Cornwallis who was camped at Turkey Creek.

The events that could be seen from the future Knuckles Chapel Church location in January, 1781, were remarkable and historic. They were integral to the American victory at the [Battle of Cowpens](#). They took place in our local community and should be remembered by the people of Pacolet, [Goucher](#) and [Asbury](#). The American Revolutionary War is not something that just happened in New England, much of it happened right here in our front yard.

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