

# "George, hide thy face and mourn"

Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution* (see [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Women\\_of\\_the\\_American\\_Revolution](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Women_of_the_American_Revolution)), 3d. ed. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849).

## As you read...

This story has become part of North Carolina's folklore about the American Revolution. Unlike most such stories, though, we have evidence of Nathaniel Greene's visit to Mrs. Steele's tavern: The portrait of King George III, with Greene's writing still visible on the back, is kept at Thyatira Presbyterian Church in Salisbury.

The story became so popular for several reasons. It gave people a patriotic slogan by which to remember the American victories of 1781. It also recalled women's contributions to the war effort. Even though Elizabeth Steele could not join the militia or the army, she gave "the earnings of years" to the war effort.



Figure 1. A print of a 1762 portrait of King George III.

The long, arduous, and eventful retreat of General Greene through the Carolinas, after the battle of the Cowpens, that retreat on whose issue hung the fate of the South — with the eager pursuit of Cornwallis, who well knew that the destruction of that army would secure his conquests — is a twice-told tale to every reader. The line of march lay through Salisbury, North Carolina; and while the British commander was crossing the Catawba, Greene was approaching this village. With the American army were conveyed the prisoners taken by Morgan in the late bloody and brilliant action, the intention being to convey them to Virginia. Several of these were sick and wounded, and among them were some British officers, unable, from loss of strength to proceed further on the route.

General Greene, aware of the objects of Cornwallis, knew his design, by a hurried march to the ford, to cross the Catawba before opposition could be made; and had stationed a body of militia there to dispute the passage. Most anxiously did the General await their arrival, before he pursued his route. The day gradually wore away; and still no signs appeared of the militia; and it was not till after midnight that the news reached him of their defeat and dispersion by the British troops, and the death of General Davidson, who had commanded them. His aids having been despatched to different parts of the retreating army, he rode on with a heavy heart to Salisbury. It had been raining during the day, and his soaked and soiled garments and appearance of exhaustion as he wearily dismounted

from his jaded horse at the door of the principal hotel, showed that he had suffered much from exposure to the storm, sleepless fatigue, and harassing anxiety of mind. Dr. Reed, who had charge of the sick and wounded prisoners, while he waited for the General's arrival was engaged in writing the paroles with which it was necessary to furnish such officers as could not go on. From his apartment overlooking the main street, he saw his friend, unaccompanied by his aids, ride up and alight; and hastened to receive him as he entered the house.

Seeing him without a companion, and startled by his dispirited looks — the doctor could not refrain from noticing them with anxious inquiries; to which the wearied soldier replied: “Yes — fatigued — hungry — alone, and penniless!”

The melancholy reply was heard by one determined to prove, by the generous assistance proffered in a time of need, that no reverse could dim the pure flame of disinterested patriotism. General Greene had hardly taken his seat at the well-spread table, when Mrs. Steele, the landlady of the hotel, entered the room, and carefully closed the door behind her. Approaching her distinguished guest, she reminded him of the despondent words he had uttered in her hearing, implying, as she thought, a distrust of the devotion of his friends, through every calamity, to the cause. Money, too, she declared he should have; and drew from under her apron two small bags full of specie, probably the earnings of years. “Take these,” said she, “for you will want them, and I can do without them.”

Words of kindness and encouragement accompanied this offering of a benevolent heart, which General Greene accepted with thankfulness. “Never,” says his biographer, “did relief come at a more propitious moment; nor would it be straining conjecture to suppose that he resumed his journey with his spirits cheered and lightened by this touching proof of woman's devotion to the cause of her country.”

General Greene did not remain long in Salisbury; but before his departure from the house of Mrs. Steele, he left a memorial of his visit. He took from the wall of one of the apartments a portrait of George III, which had come from England as a present from a person at court to one of Mrs. Steele's connections attached to an embassy, wrote with chalk on the back, “George, hide thy face and mourn;” and replaced it with the face to the wall. The picture, with the writing uneffaced, is still in possession of a granddaughter of Mrs. Steele, a daughter of Dr. McCorkle, and may be seen in Charlotte.

---

## On the web

### Thyatira Presbyterian Church

<http://www.ncphsociety.org/tours.html>

The portrait of King George III, with Greene's writing still visible on the back, is housed in the museum of Thyatira Presbyterian Church in Salisbury, North Carolina. Thyatira, founded about 1750, is one of the oldest Presbyterian churches in North Carolina.

### Remembering the Revolution during the Civil War

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/unc/unco9-15/unco9-15.html>

An 1864 letter tells of seeing the painting of George III with Greene's writing on the back.

### **More from LEARN NC**

Visit us on the web at [www.learnnc.org](http://www.learnnc.org) to learn more about topics related to this article, including American Revolution, Nathaniel Greene, North Carolina, Rowan County, Salisbury, history, and women.

### **Image credits**

More information about these images and higher-resolution files are linked from the original web version of this document.

#### **Figure 1 (page 1)**

Mezzotint by William Pether, after a painting by Thomas Frye. This image is believed to be in the public domain. Users are advised to make their own copyright assessment.