



NINETY SIX: A BRIEF HISTORY

Eric Williams, Park Historian, Ninety Six National Historic Site

Ninety Six South Carolina has the distinction of being the site of two battles of the American Revolution. The first, which occurred in 1775, marks the beginning of the American Revolution, a bloody civil war, in the colony of South Carolina. The second battle, a siege of the fort at Ninety Six, marks one of the longest sieges conducted by American Forces during the war. Today, the site is protected, preserved, and interpreted by the National Park Service.

In 1772 the town of Ninety Six was established as the judicial center for the South Carolina backcountry, and by 1775 the town was a bustling commerce and government center in the wilderness. A courthouse and brick jail as well as a dozen residences made up the frontier town which grew up beside the Cherokee path. The path was a major trade route connecting the Cherokee towns of the backcountry with the then capitol of South Carolina - the bustling port city of Charleston.

In November of 1775, the commander of the Patriot Militia in the Ninety Six district, Colonel Andrew Williamson, learned that a loyalist force of nearly 1,800 men were en route to the town of Ninety Six. He quickly moved his small Patriot force, numbering less than 600, to the town and built a crude fortification of fence rails. Before the fortification could be completed, the loyalist force appeared. Fighting broke out with Patriot and Loyalist forces reportedly firing "rifles and muskets, from behind houses, trees, logs, stumps, and fences". The battle would rage on from the 18th of November until the 21st. With Col. Williamson dangerously short on gunpowder, and with Loyalist forces fearful that Patriot reinforcements may arrive at any moment, the warring commanders agreed to cease hostilities and disband. Although the battle was inconclusive, it was the start of a long struggle in South Carolina that would last until 1783.

When Charleston fell to the British in 1780, British commanding general

Cornwallis fortified a string of forts throughout the state to support his army's operations. One of the more important forts in this chain was the one constructed at Ninety-Six to guard vital trade and communication routes between Charleston and the Cherokee Nation, and between Augusta and Charlotte. In the spring of 1781, Patriot forces under the command of General Nathanael Greene waged war on the string of British outposts and by late May of that year all of the outposts had been captured except for Ninety Six and Augusta.

Greene sent troops under the command of Francis Marion and Henry Lee to attack the outpost in Augusta, while he and nearly 1,000 Patriot soldiers laid siege to the fort at Ninety Six. The siege would be one of the longest of the war, lasting from the 22nd of May until the 19th of June, 1781. Greene would pull out of Ninety Six on that day without taking the Fort from the British, but Marion and Lee had been successful. With the fall of Augusta, a once-strong string of British forts stretching from Augusta to Georgetown was now reduced to one fort at Ninety Six. The British defenders at Ninety Six were left 200 miles from the nearest British outpost, and it was later abandoned by British forces as they pulled out of the Carolina backcountry. The earthen Star Fort remains as a well-preserved example of an original 18th-century fortification.

The park is located on S.C. 248 two miles south of the town of Ninety Six. Because of its importance to the founding of our nation, Ninety Six National Historic Site became part of the National Park Service in 1976.

CELEBRATING FREEDOM SIXTH IN A SERIES

By: Frank Stovall, Musgrove Mill State Historic Site Manager

Two hundred and twenty-five years ago soldiers marched across every corner of the Palmetto State fighting in a brutal conflict forever remembered as the American Revolution. Between 1775 and 1782, more than 200 skirmishes and battles would be fought in South Carolina. As part of the national commemoration of the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution, Parkview will feature articles on properties protected by the South Carolina State Park Service and partnering organizations that have historical ties to the American Revolution.

This issue's featured site is Ninety Six National Historic Site, managed by the National Park Service. Ninety Six is more than the site of the American Revolution's longest siege, it was also the site of a bustling frontier town and a major British installation during the war for independence.