

## **Francis Marion ~**

Brigadier General Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox of the American Revolution, left an indelible mark on the American imagination. He is an American Robin Hood who, from time to time, captures the popular imagination. One of the greatest heroes of the American Revolution, Marion is more myth than man to the general public. However, he continues to be remembered with reverence in the oral history of South Carolina. Those who can, will proudly identify their fifth or sixth great-grandfather who rode with the Swamp Fox.

Francis Marion was a real person. He was subject to all the frustrations, pressures, obligations, desires, and personal ups and downs that people are subject to. He remained a bachelor until the age of 54, when, on April 20, 1786, he married Miss Mary Esther Videau, a 49-year-old spinster.

Although we think of Marion as a partisan fighter, he held elected office as a state senator. He was one of a dozen or so men who shaped the new republic of South Carolina and then supported the adoption of our present federal constitution. He ended his public life during the turbulent political times that marked the early republic. Differences between the Federalist party and the Democratic-Republican party caused heated debates and even violence. Marion was a Federalist. He believed, as did many of the former Continental Army officers, in a central government. Much of South Carolina, however, followed the Democratic-Republican party, which was a states rights party.

One thing is clear from the writings of those who actually knew Marion. He was an exceptional person. He undoubtedly had a brilliant mind, capable of both flexible and original thoughts. Those who fought against him acknowledged his integrity. Many who were his political enemies during his life, later acknowledged that Marion had been correct, and they had been wrong. Those who followed him, looked on him in awe. Capable of making life and death decisions, he was known as a humane man who was devoted to his siblings and their families.

Although most people today think of Marion as a soldier, his greatest accomplishment was stopping the civil war in South Carolina at the end of the American Revolution. When many people were calling for vengeance, he advocated forgiveness towards the former supporters of England.

Marion never surrendered, no matter how hopeless things appeared to be. Although not an orator by the standards of the day, he was able to convince men to

follow him in what must have seemed to be a hopeless cause. Like a true revolutionary, he urged upon his followers the justice of the American cause. Known as a strict disciplinarian, he was a just man who appealed to integrity before force. When he personally commanded, he was never beaten. He never wasted the lives of his followers for some hope of personal glory. Although it is said that he never physically engaged in the fighting, no one ever doubted his personal bravery. In the thick of numerous firefights, targeted by British marksmen, he was never wounded.

He thought out and waged a very modern, logistical war against the British. His strategy was sound and successful. Because he did not risk his soldiers' lives to get "big victories," and because it is hard to point to some large battle that he won, those who do not understand the art of war discount his actions as being romantic but not significant. Just the opposite is true. His was a dirty, hard fought war of attrition. He had a strangle hold on the British supply lines. Not only was that a major factor in the defeat of the British in South Carolina, but it also set the stage for the eventual defeat of General Cornwallis in Virginia. One of the reasons Cornwallis went to Yorktown, where he was trapped by George Washington and the French, was that Cornwallis could not get supplies overland. (He went to the coast to be re-supplied by the British navy.

Francis Marion's days reached their bound. As he approached it, "he spoke thoughtfully of the great concerns of life, death, and the future; declared himself a Christian, a humble believer in all the vital truths of religion." "Death may be to others," said he, "a leap in the dark, but I rather consider it a resting place, where old age may throw off its burdens." On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 1795, he passed away, painlessly, peacefully, with his last words revealing the fact that he was victor in this, as in every struggle elsewhere.

Never, since the winter of 1795, when they laid Francis Marion to rest, has Belle Isle, the once beautiful plantation and home of his brother Gabriel, had so large an assemblage as met on May 22, 1893, to celebrate the unveiling of the granite monument erected by the state of South Carolina over the grave of the Revolutionary hero. Over 1,000 people, all classes and conditions of men, including several hundred negroes, attending, from all parts of Berkeley and Charleston, by dirt road, in all sorts of vehicles, horses and wagons, buggies, gig or dog cart, and upon arrival of the Northeastern train from Charleston. The day was warm and clear, and the long trip was uneventful.

The visitors found the lawn fronting the old Marion house (where the turn-around is today) filled with people, the piazzas and windows filled with eager and expectant faces, waiting for the unveiling, which could be easily seen therefrom.

The granite monument to Marion had been covered with the Palmetto flag, which was attached to a rope and upright pole. General Huguenin, the acting chairman of arrangements, requested the following young ladies from St. Stephen's, St. John's Berkeley, Georgetown, and Charleston to unveil the monument: Misses Ella and Mattie Gourdin, Henrietta, Mary, Lizzie, and Hattie Palmer Inman, Mrs. Panzerbeiter, Misses Anna Sinkler, Laura Kirk, May Waring, Maggie Holbeck, and Leila Murphy. They stood in front of the monument to Marion and the tomb of Mrs. Marion, and many members of the DeVeau family, and gracefully performed their patriotic duty.

At 12:15, Gen. Huguenin announced that on behalf of the State of South Carolina, he then ordered unveiling the monument in honor of the distinguished soldier and patriot, Francis Marion; he dropped his handkerchief; the fair women pulled the cord, and the flag of Marion's State unveiled his tomb; the brass Napoleon of the German Artillerists belched its thunders on the astonished ears of men, children, and horses, with a salute of eleven guns.

Edited by Keith Gourdin

Resources: Collections from library of Keith Gourdin, including *The General and Cousin Mary Esther*; *Reflections on Gen. and Mrs. Francis Marion*, by Karen L. MacNutt