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Applied Research

A Thank You Note to the Archaeological Research Trust on Francis Marion Research

By Steven D. Smith

My first “book” on Francis Marion was written in either 4th or 5th grade, and I was clear (as only a 10-year old can be), concise (two pages), and well-researched (from a newspaper article I now hold). Since then, time, age, beer, and the educational system have ingrained in me the habits of obfuscation and verbosity, yet I think I still do pretty good research. My latest “book” on Francis Marion, a 425-page dissertation completed this fall, certainly illustrates the former two, and hopefully the latter.

Archaeological Perspectives on Partisan Communities: Francis Marion at Snow’s Island in History, Landscape, and Memory, looks at a colonial community situated along the Pee Dee River and its transformation into a highly successful, even legendary, partisan force led by Francis Marion through the thick and thin of the last four years of the American Revolution. At the geographical center of this community was Snow’s Island. From August 1780 until March 1781, this swamp highland, surrounded by Lynches River, Clark’s Creek, and the Pee Dee, was Marion’s supply depot, campground, rendezvous, and military rear base. From Snow’s Island, Marion and his partisan force, consisting of the Williamsburg Militia, the Britton’s Neck Militia, and a host of random volunteers, harassed the British as opportunities presented. Through skill and luck (lots of luck), Marion alluded the British, cajoled his partisans to remain steadfast, and protected the residents surrounding Snow’s Island through the fall and winter of 1780-1781. The British captured and destroyed the base in the spring of 1781, but by that time its strategic usefulness was near an end. General Nathaniel Greene, commander of the American Continental Forces, entered South Carolina shortly afterward and America turned to



Sean Taylor, Steve Smith, and Audrey Dawson at Francis Marion’s redoubt across from Snow’s Island. (SCIAA photo)

the offensive. Marion’s role grew into the district commander of all of northeastern South Carolina, and the community surrounding Snow’s Island continued its support, not only providing Marion manpower, but also large numbers of cattle, hogs, and forage.

This story is told in my dissertation, but with a unique perspective, viewing the Snow’s Island community through the eyes of not only a historian, but also through those of an archaeologist and anthropologist. The study focuses on *community* and its operation as a social unit within the context of war—partisan war especially. It is doubtful anyone else has used this kind of multi-disciplinary approach to the study of partisan war before me. Readers will have to judge for themselves if “anyone” had better sense to attempt it.

From age ten to, well, much later, I have written 12 reports, book chapters,

encyclopedia entries related to Francis Marion, and now a dissertation. Much of the research for these works, and especially the writing of the dissertation, was funded by the SCIAA’s Archaeological Research Trust Fund, both collectively through grants and through individual member contributions. I write this *Legacy* article to sincerely and humbly thank all of you for your funding, interest, and support, throughout the last five years as I completed the requirements for the Ph.D. I especially want to thank Ed and Dorothy Kendall, George Bell, Chip Helms, Russell Burns, and John Frierson for their many contributions. I can only ask that you continue to support others at SCIAA in the completion of their education also. Meanwhile, I’m planning my next book on Francis Marion—the one I had in mind in the 5th grade—clear, concise, and well researched.