

South Carolina REGULATORS AT MAR'S BLUFF
ON PEE DEE RIVER
James Taylor White,
sons William, James and Ruben,
and sons-in-law
John Holloway and William Loving

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Commons House of Assembly
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New York Journal
September 15, 1768
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[South Carolina Journal of the
Commons House of Assembly]

1768- August 15 - reported an incident near Marr's Bluff, on Pedee River. An armed company of Regulators, "headed by one Gideon Gibson, on the 25th past, near Marr's Bluff, surrounded a constable and twelve men, who were sent to bring one of the villains before a Magistrate, and after a short skirmish, where two of the Constable's Party were mortally wounded, and one shot thro the shoulder, took the Rest Prisoners, whom he discharged, after ordering them 50 lashes each." [South Carolina Gazette, August 15, 1768]

"If we are to credit the depositions of George Thompson, William Loving, James White, Stephen Sebastian, Godfrey Kerfoy, John Holloway, Reuben White, and William White, misrepresented in the Paper of the 15th of August, unless by the omission of some aggravating circumstances. " [South Carolina Gazette, Oct. 24]

1770 - Aug. 15 - William White and James Taylor White submit their cases to the Commons House of Assembly for South Carolina based on the Marr's Bluff incident reported above. William had been a constable in South Carolina for years before this and took his job very seriously although he was a "cooper", barrel maker, by trade.

Wednesday the 15th day of August 1770.

A Petition, of William White, was presented to the house, and Read in the words following (viz) That on the 24th day of july 1768, your Petitioner was summoned by George Thompson, Sergeant of the Company of Militia, to which your Petitioner belongs, to assist him, who was also a Constable, in serving a warrant of Robert Weaver Esquire for relieving Joseph Holland, Lieutenant of the said Company of Militia, who was taken and forceable confined by a number of disorderly People. That he being ready and desirous to shew his affection for the Laws and Liberties of his Country, did meet at the place appointed by the said Sergeant, and did on the next day, march under his Command towards the house where Mr. Holland was confined, near which they were met by a great number of People of different Colors (viz) Whites, Blacks and Mulattoes, who formed two Lines, into which as soon as the Constable and four men had entered, the rioters immediately surrounded, and knocked them down. That when this was done, one of the chief of the Rioters, Gideon Gibson, called shoot down Billey White, for I have got Reubin, and if you kill Billey we will manage the rest easy enough. Your Petitioner finding several armed Men surrounding him, drew his Cutlass, desired them to keep off, and endeavoured to defend himself, but was soon knocked down.

That by his Fathers help (James Taylor White - EC), he got up, and tried to get his Father away, but in a very little time, the latter being again knocked down, he turned to his assistance, when several Guns were discharged at your Petitioner, a Ball from one of which passed thro the skin of his Hip, and a second entered the Bone of his right arm, about five Inches above the Elbow, and going along the said Bone, came out a little below his Elbow, totally shattered and destroyed the bone of his said arm. That your petitioner finding himself thus disabled, either to help his Father or himself, endeavoured to make his Escape, but after running a little way, fainted and fell; after some time recovering, he found several of the Rioters about him one of which said shot him thro' the Head at once; but another replied, no Damn him he can't live long, let him feel himself Die. That they carried him into the house, and threw him on the Floor, where he lay weltering in his own blood; when after having whipped his brother and others of the Party whom they had taken, they permitted your Petitioners Brother to take him away. That your Petitioner by this Melancholy accident, hath not only lost the use of his right arm, but finds his Constitution greatly weakened and impaired by the great quantity of Blood which he lost. That your Petitioner is by Trade a Cooper, and did usually earn thirty shillings per day, by working at the Trade, by which he was enabled to support his large Family, consisting of his wife and eight young Children, besides three poor Orphans, Relatives of his wife, who have not any other Person to take care of them. But that by loss of his arm, he is not only totally disabled from working at his Trade, but also in a very great measure to do anything in the Planting business. Your Petitioner therefore humbly Prays your Honors to take his Malancholy case into Consideration, and to grant him the Annuity allowed by the Militia Act, to such as are maimed and disabled in the Public Service, or to relieve him in such other Manner, as to your honors great Wisdom shall seem meet.

A Petition of James Taylor White was also presented to the house, and Read, Complaining of his being also Beat and Maimed, by the Riotous Persons mentioned in the foregoing Petition, and praying that the annuity may also be allowed to him.

<http://www.next1000.com/family/EC/white.jt.html>

"Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760 - 1808,"

by Rachel N. Klein, The University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

"Not until the summer of 1768, following a violent confrontation between Regulators and coastal authorities near Welsh Tract, did the assembly and council begin to see the Regulation as a threat to social order within the colony. The incident involved a prosperous Pee Dee Regulator named Gideon Gibson, who was himself both a mulatto and a slaveholder. His large plantation in a fertile area called Marrs bluff was the scene of the conflict. The struggle at Marrs Bluff not only sheds light on the coastal perceptions of the insurgents; it also speaks to the changing position of free blacks in an emerging slave society. (50)

Gideon Gibson led a group of Pee Dee Regulators who, in July 1768, took Joseph Holland, an anti-Regulator militia captain, into custody. George Thomason, a coastal militia captain and constable, led a company of men to Gibson's house in order to deliver a warrant ordering Holland's release. The meeting erupted into violence, with Regulators seriously wounding several of Thomson's party and administering fifty lashes to each of the others. William White, a member of the company, later described the Marrs Bluff Regulators as 'a great number of People of different Colours, (viz. t) Whites, Blacks, and Mulattoes.' "

Excerpt from the book:
The South Carolina Regulators
by Richard Maxwell Brown
Cambridge Mass 1963.

From the chapter "Regulators Defy Authorities":

The Marris Bluff affair grew out of an incident involving Lieutenant Joseph Holland of the Peedee militia. Holland had been taken into custody by a band of Regulators headed by Gideon Gibson. As a result, Gibson soon ran afoul of an anti-Regulator justice of the peace, Robert Weaver, a Mars Bluff merchant and magistrate. Weaver had incurred the detestation of the Regulators by declaring his disapprobation of their activities and, as magistrate, had compounded that offense by issuing a warrant for the distraint of property belonging to some of the Peedee Regulators.

Robert Weaver moved swiftly when confronted by the forced detention of Joseph Holland. He issued a warrant ordering Regulators to release Holland and entrusted its execution to a constable, George Thompson. Thompson was a militia captain as well as a constable, and he summoned a small party of militiamen to his assistance, among them William White, a cooper; his father, James Taylor White; and his brother, Reuben White. On Monday, July 25 [1768], Captain Thompson and the militiamen—fourteen in all—marched to Marris Bluff, where Holland was sequestered. Outside the house they met Gideon Gibson and his Regulators drawn up in two lines, a melee broke out.

Gideon Gibson shouted, "Shoot down Billey White, for I have got Reubin, and if you kill Billey we will manage the rest easy enough." William White drew his cutlass and prepared to fight but was quickly knocked down. His father helped him to his feet and the two tried to escape, but the Regulators wounded William, who thereupon fainted. When he regained his senses, some Regulators were standing over him. "Shoot him through the head!" cried one. The rejoinder, "No damn him! He can't live long. Let him feel himself die!" saved White. He was then carried into the house and dumped on the floor where he lay "weltering in his own blood." Outside, Regulators administered fifty lashes to each of the militiamen.

This outrage against law and order at Marrs Bluff caused a sensation in the province, but the worst was yet to come. Three weeks later the Peedee Regulators defied no less a personage than the Provost Marshal of the province. The Charleston authorities realized that they could not allow the abuse of Captain Thompson, the Whites, and the others to go unpunished, or the government's authority in the Back Country would become a nullity. The seriousness of the situation impelled Provost Marshal Roger Pinckney to go to Marrs Bluff to arrest Gideon Gibson...

The Provost Marshal was accompanied to Marrs Bluff by George Gabriel Powell, one of the leading planters and politicians of South Carolina. Powell, who lived near Georgetown, was a prominent member of the Assembly and colonel of the Peedee militia.

Powell and Pinckney with about twenty-five men arrived at Marrs Bluff on August 10 and established headquarters at Robert Weaver's house. Fifteen men from Weaver's company were waiting for them, and the next day twenty men from Captain Thompson's company swelled their number to about sixty. It was a puny band, however, for Powell and Pinckney soon learned that Gibson was guarded by a "Large Body" of Regulators and could raise three hundred more in an hour's time. It was prudent, therefore, to ask for reinforcements from the companies of Lieutenants Clary and Michael.

In the meantime, Pinckney got word that Gideon Gibson was willing to surrender. Powell and Pinckney were still apprehensive since they were deep in Regulator territory. They agreed that Powell should invite Gibson to a private interview in the woods where the two might calmly discuss the situation. Gibson accepted the invitation and talked with Powell for an hour and a half on Sunday, August 14. The parley went well, and Powell was impressed with the sincerity of Gibson, who promised to give himself up at eight o'clock the next morning. But Powell was "Egregiously mistaken" in his opinion of Gibson, who did not appear at the appointed time. Instead, Gibson sent a letter saying that he had changed his mind and would not surrender. An hour or so later, about ten o'clock, Claudius Pegues came to Marrs Bluff and assured Powell that he "would render all the services in his power."

Powell and Pinckney were cheered by this offer of help. Claudius came from the Cheraws, thirty five miles north of Marrs Bluff; he was a magistrate and a man of high standing through all the Peedee region. Powell, Pinckney, and Pegues went to confer with the five militia commanders, ... who had drawn their men up in formation about half a mile from Weaver's house. To their

surprise, Powell and Pinckney were confronted by three hundred militiamen rather than the expected one hundred.

It soon became clear that the militiamen were themselves ardent Regulators!... The men refused to aid Pinckney, "as Gibson they said was one of them (Regulators) and had applied to them for protection." The militiamen seized the opportunity to launch into a tirade about their grievances– the lack of Back Country courts and the "Exorbitant expence" of the law...

At this stage the good offices of Charles Pegues proved useless. Pegues turned out to be an "active man" among the Regulators, in fact, their candidate to represent St. David's Parish (two new Back Country parishes– Saint David on the Peedee, and Saint Matthew, west of the Santee– were created in 1768) in the next session of the Assembly. So Powell and Pinckney labored alone, taking "great Pains" to point out to the militiamen "the mistakes they were running into," but all in vain. The meeting broke up, and the mortified, half-frightened Powell and Pinckney were forced to trail back to Georgetown without Gideon Gibson, their expedition a total failure.

Historic Background and further reports of the South Carolina Regulators and Gideon Gibson

Gideon Gibson, Patriot, helped To Bring courts to Backcountry

Did you ever hear the story of Gideon Gibson of Mars Bluff and how the first circuit courts were established in South Carolina? It's an old story which dates back before the war of the Revolution when this was a part of the South Carolina backcountry and when all the colonies were subjects of the British crown.

The year was 1750 and the only court of civil and criminal jurisdiction was in Charleston, except the courts of justices of the peace which had jurisdiction only in civil cases as high as 20 pounds current money. The result was a great handicap upon the people who lived some distance from Charleston, as did the people of this or any other section of the Pee Dee. Roads and ferries were few, and even short distances were therefore extremely great. According to Bishop Gregg in his HISTORY OF THE OLD CHERAWS the people were "worn out by the law's delays, insulted by the insolence of office and ruined by costs and expenses most unreasonably incurred and cruelly exacted."

But that wasn't the greatest evil. Because the Court of Justice was too far away to carry small offenders to it, petty disorder became common place and a scourge to decent, law-abiding citizens.

Under these conditions the South Carolina Regulators, similar to the Red Shirts [See Wade [Hampton's Red Shirts](#) - *See Hampton's Legion below] of a later day, came into being and Gideon Gibson of Bluff was one of the foremost of them.

In the year 1752, the inhabitants of the Pee Dee about the mouth of Lynches Creek filed a petition, stating that they had to travel about 200 miles to the seat of government, that trade and commerce among them were greatly obstructed for want of a county court to hear and determine all causes, civil as well as criminal; 'that the frontier is same back country, had become a dwelling place of many evil disposed persons, such as horse thieves and other felons who had escaped from North Carolina and other parts, others co-habiting with their neighbors wives and living in a most lascivious manner, while they had no means to suppress them. They requested that an act be passed dividing Craven County which included

all this section of South Carolina, and that their section, which by their own description would have included what is now Iowee County, be established as a distinct county with 12 or more justices authorized to hear and determine all cases without fee or reward.

But they didn't get their county. The committee named by the council to consider the matter ruled that since there were no fit towns for the establishment of a seat of county government in the territory indicated, no such county should be established but that instead a court should be established at Georgetown for the greater convenience of the people. The court at Georgetown was, however, not established and the inconveniences to the people of the back country continued. For nearly half a century this condition prevailed. The Regulators organization was composed of a high type of citizen. Their aim was to suppress the disturbers of the peace by promising speedy punishment to them. They had asked for the establishment of a court and had been refused. They now sought the regulation of their difficulties by this armed organization called the Regulators. The government, of course, sought to suppress them.

Again in 1767 a petition went from the upper and interior parts of Craven County to the government for a redress of grievances. And still again in 1768, another petition went citing the grievances of the people and urgently requisition that the government give to them the consideration and conform to the wishes of the people for a court nearer than the distant Charleston. The request was summarily disposed of by the Council, to use their own words, "after mature deliberation, by determining that it would not be necessary to take any notice of the same"

It was here that Gideon Gibson stepped into the picture. In less than a month after the final rejection of the petition by the Council, Gibson had advanced a type of argument the government could not ignore. He was a man of property and influence whose home was near Mars Bluff. He was a man also of fierce determination, an acknowledged leader of the people who was "as he was intent upon vindicating the rights of the people." A magistrate by the name of Weaver; issued a warrant of distress to execute on the chattels of some of the Regulators, and a constable, George Thompson, called in 13 other men to assist him. Gideon Gibson arose to meet the challenge. He was the leader of the Regulators, and he and his band met the constable's party near Mars Bluff in a pitched battle. One of the constable's men was killed and Gibson's brother was wounded.

The government was alarmed. Gideon Gibson had made more impression upon the hard-headed government heads in Charleston than had the

petitions signed by many of the people. He had attacked the problem direct, with the supporting power of gunpowder. The government did not understand, and didn't try to understand that the Regulators were men of fierce patriotism, law abiding, fair minded citizens who had taken arms only after they had exhausted all means of getting much needed relief by peaceful methods. An order was issued that they disperse and return to their homes, promising "His Majesty's gracious pardon for the misdemeanors committed, excepting those person concerned in the outrages and daring violence committed by Gideon Gibson and other upon George Thompson, a lawful constable."

In the meantime, Governor William Bull sent a Colonel Powell, who belonged to the Pee Dee Regiment of His Majesty's militia. Mars Bluff, they found 15 men of Captain Weaver's company, and the day following they were reinforced by 20 others. But they heard disturbing things from the people around Mars Bluff. Gibson, they were told, was guarded by a large company of men, and if he'd just speak the word, he could easily get 300 more within an hour's time. As Colonel Powell listened to these reports from the people of Mars Bluff, he saw the need for more reinforcements, and so he sent orders to five company captains to join him at Mars Bluff with 20 men from each of their companies to assist in taking Gideon Gibson.

In the meantime, Colonel Powell had been told that Gibson would surrender himself, so Powell sent a letter to Gibson inviting him to meet with him in the woods where they might be alone and talk the matter over. The meeting day was Sunday and for an hour and a half the two men talked and reasoned together. Powell knew he had the power of the government behind him, while Gibson knew that behind him was the power of right and the people. The outcome of the conference was a promise from Gibson that on the next day at 8 o'clock; he would surrender himself at an appointed place to Mr. Pinckney, the provost marshal. When the time for his surrender came, Gibson was not there. Instead, he had sent a letter which explained that since the agreement made on the previous day, he had altered his decision and would not surrender.

The 100 reinforcements Powell had ordered from the five companies had not arrived and Powell was becoming anxious. But by noon they did arrive and drew themselves up about a half mile from the home of Captain Weaver. Colonel Powell and Provost Marshal Pinckney went immediately to meet them, but upon their arrival they found instead of 100 men as requested, about 300 or more.

Colonel Powell stood before them and immediately began declaring what was expected of them, Gibson was to be taken, dead or

alive. His followers, the Pee Dee Regulators who had defied the government, were to be destroyed. Resistance to the government must come to an end. His Majesty had proclaimed it, and he read the proclamation in their hearing.

Powell was their commanding officer and had a right to expect obedience of them, but the men had their own speech to make. Gideon Gibson, they said, was one of them and had sought their protection, and protect him they would. They began a recitation of the evils to which the absence of county courts had subjected them. Here were a people who understood the meaning of justice defying a government which refused that justice. In the subsequent fight for independence, many a brave act was to take place within the deep shadows of Pee Dee swamps, but there in the woods in the Mars Bluff community during the days prior to the revolution, were sons of the Pee Dee committing a act comparable in courage to anything that Marion and his men did during the days of the Revolution itself.

While a commanding officer has a command which will not take orders from him, he must either exercise severe discipline or remove himself from the command. The former Colonel Powell was in no position to do the first, so he chose the latter. "I cannot with any propriety," he wrote the governor, "continue to be colonel of a regiment of militia amongst whom I have the mortification to find myself of so little weight as not to have been able to persuade them to do the d they owe to their King and Country."

And so, Gideon Gibson, patriot of the Pee Dee, came forth from his hiding into the hands of his friends, and Colonel Powell, the commanding officer of the militia, was powerless to get the militia to lay hands upon him.

Less than one year later, the bill for the establishment of the circuit courts became law, and the people of the Pee Dee no longer had to go to Charleston to get their grievances settled in a court of justice.

And that's the story of Gideon Gibson, a Pee Dee patriot, of colonial days, and how the circuit courts came to the south Carolina backcountry.

Note; Material for this story was found in Gregg's HISTORY OF THE OLD CHERAWS and in a paper prepared by Miss Nellie Bristow of Florence and appearing in the Florence Morning News under date of June 19, 1938.

Charlestown, (S. Carolina) August 16
(News Article)

Date: 1768-10-13;

Paper: New-York Journal

Charlestown (S Carolina) August 16th

" The outrageous opposition lately offered to the Civil authority near Mars Bluff, on Pedee River, being at present a general subject of conversation, and by many attributed to the People called Regulators, it may not be amiss to lay before the public the following information, viz. : That there are two parties so called, and the proceedings of the one frequently confounded with those of the other. That the first (called the Honest. party) consists in general of people of good principals and that the other (called the Rogues' party) are a gang of banditti, a numerous collection of outcast Mulattoes, Mustees, Free Negroes, &c., all horse thieves from the borders of Virginia and other Northern Colonies (the very people whom the Regulators would have expelled the Province, or brought to Justice), and have taken up arms to carry on their villainy with impunity. The last accounts we have received of both are, That the former, on the 16 th past, took up one Charles Sparks, of infamous character, on Pedee, and ordered him to receive 500 lashes and quit the Province : and of the latter, that an armed company of them, headed by one Gideon Gibson, on the 25th past, near Mars-bluff, surrounded a Constable and 12 men, who were sent to bring one of the villains before a magistrate, and after a smart skirmish, wherein two of the Constable's party were mortally wounded, and one shot through the shoulder, took the rest prisoners, whom he discharged, after ordering them 50 lashes each. In the skirmish, Gibson had one of his sons killed, and another wounded in the neck. Proper measures are taken to bring the principals of this desperate Gang to Justice.

New York Journal

September 15, 1768

Charlestown, (S Carolina) August 19th

On Saturday the 6th Inst. his Honour the Leiut. Governor, by and with the advice of his Majesty's hounourabl council, issued a Proclamation, wherein, after reciting that of the 3d inst. and setting forth, that it had been represented and appeared to his Houour, that very many Person concerned in the acts of Violence, committed in the Northern Parts of this Province, had been unwarily drawn in and provoked thereto, by the great and repeated Losses they had sustained from

Gangs of Robbers and Banditti, confederated in numerous Bodies; all Persons, unlawful assembled, are strictly commanded to disperse and repair peaceably to their respective Houses and Occupations; the, and all others, are also forbidden thereafter to assemble again, at their utmost Peril. The Proclamation concludes with a promise, for all such as shall forthwith pay a due obedience thereto of his Majesty's most gracious Pardon, for all Misdemeanors by them committed, previous to the 6th Day of August Inst in unlawful assembling, Whipping or confining an Person or Persons, as set forth in the Proclamation of the 3d, excepting to Gideon Gibson and others who attacked a Constable and hi Party in the actual Execution of a legal Warrant, near Marr's Bluff the 25th Ult.-- It is with Pleasure we lear, that this lenient and human Measure is likely to produce the desired effect.

Date: October 13, 1768

Location: New York

Paper: New-York Journal

On the 22nd August, the Gazette said : " We are sorry that we cannot have the pleasure of informing the public, that either of the Proclamations issued by his Honor the Lieu* Gov r on the 3rd and 6th insta, are likely to produce the desired effects; Gideon Gibson declining to surrender on any terms; having put himself under the protection of people that do not at present seem disposed to give him up. This man's character, we are told, always stood fair, till he lately became the tool of a Party, who committed the outrages near Mars-bluff, mentioned in our last. "