

## **The Life of Fort Dobbs**

*Second in a series of articles intended to provide historical information about Fort Dobbs, its role in the French and Indian War, its significance in teaching the history of North Carolina's contribution to the eventual British Victory and as a window into a world wide conflict that shaped the future of the United States.*

The place of Fort Dobbs in the history of the French and Indian War is unique and important despite the fact that it was never the site of a major battle, siege, or massacre. Fort Dobbs combined the functions of a military barracks, fortification, refuge, provisioning depot and center for negotiations with Indians. Fort Dobbs needed to assume these roles as it was the only government military installation between Southern Virginia and South Carolina.

Fears that the French were, "daily instigating their Allies to scalp massacre and destroy our settlers" drove Governor Arthur Dobbs to powerfully urge that, "In this critical situation let us his Majesty's faithful subjects of the Colony of No Carolina show that we are true sons of Britain whose ancestors have been ever famous for defending their valuable religion and liberties." To this end North Carolina raised companies of Provincial soldiers, to fight against the French and Indians.

In the summer of 1755 a company of 50 men, under the 21 year old Captain Hugh Waddell, marched to the Western portion of the colony, into the newly created county of Rowan. That summer he met with Governor Dobbs and together they, "set out to fix upon a proper and most central place for them to winter at, and erect a Barrack, and afterwards, if found proper there to build a Fort;" By the end of July Dobbs could report to his superiors that, "We are also erecting a small Fort upon our western or Indian Frontier, where we have a company of 50 men,"

The site of Fort Dobbs was chosen because of its defensibility and centrality. Dobbs described how it was, "the most central to assist the back settlers." The location was on the frontier but not past it, the reasoning was that, "if I [Dobbs] had placed them [Waddell's company] beyond the Settlements without a fortification they might be exposed, and be no retreat for the Settlers, and the Indians might pass them and murder the Inhabitants, and retire before they durst go to give them notice." The Fort thus acted as the nerve center for the defense of Western North Carolina. Dobbs had ordered, "a piquet to be chosen out of the most active men of the Militia of each County with a chosen officer at their head of fifty men each and a central place of rendezvous to be fixed for each to the northward and Southward of our Frontier Company, to be under Captain Waddell's command, to join him when necessary or for him to march to assist them in case of any incursion,"

For the next 3 years the assembly voted to keep troops at the fort and it provided protection from brigands, Indians and the ever present fear of the French. The utility of the post and its defensive capabilities was so great that in 1758 when the company stationed there was ordered North to fight the French the assembly heard, "a Petition of several of the Inhabitants of Rowan County, setting forth, That the murders lately committed on the Dan River hath occasioned the Inhabitants of the Forks of the Yadkin to leave their Settlements, &c., Praying the Continuance of Captain Bayley and his Company, or some other in his Room." The company's slow march to Pennsylvania may have been occasioned by his waiting longer at Fort Dobbs to allay the fears of the locals. But by the fall the company from Fort Dobbs and 2 other companies were actively fighting the French in Pennsylvania.

*For more information on Fort Dobbs or North Carolina's role in the French and Indian War, please visit <http://www.fortdobbs.org>, call 704-873-5992 or visit the Fort Dobbs State Historic Site for an interpretative tour.*