

Grindal Shoals on the Pacolet River

by

Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

In 1980, I took a course called *South Carolina Literature* at Wofford, my alma mater and hometown college in Spartanburg. While researching for class, I discovered a book by the Reverend J. D. Bailey, *History of Grindal Shoals and Some Early Adjacent Families*, published in 1927. This book resides in the Kennedy Room of the Spartanburg County Library, a collection of rare books, maps, and other historical information about our state. With the impatience of youth, I found no appeal in Bailey's book. I didn't need material about obscure Revolutionary War events, people long dead, or family legends of a defunct community once called Grindal Shoals to pass the class. I shelved the book.



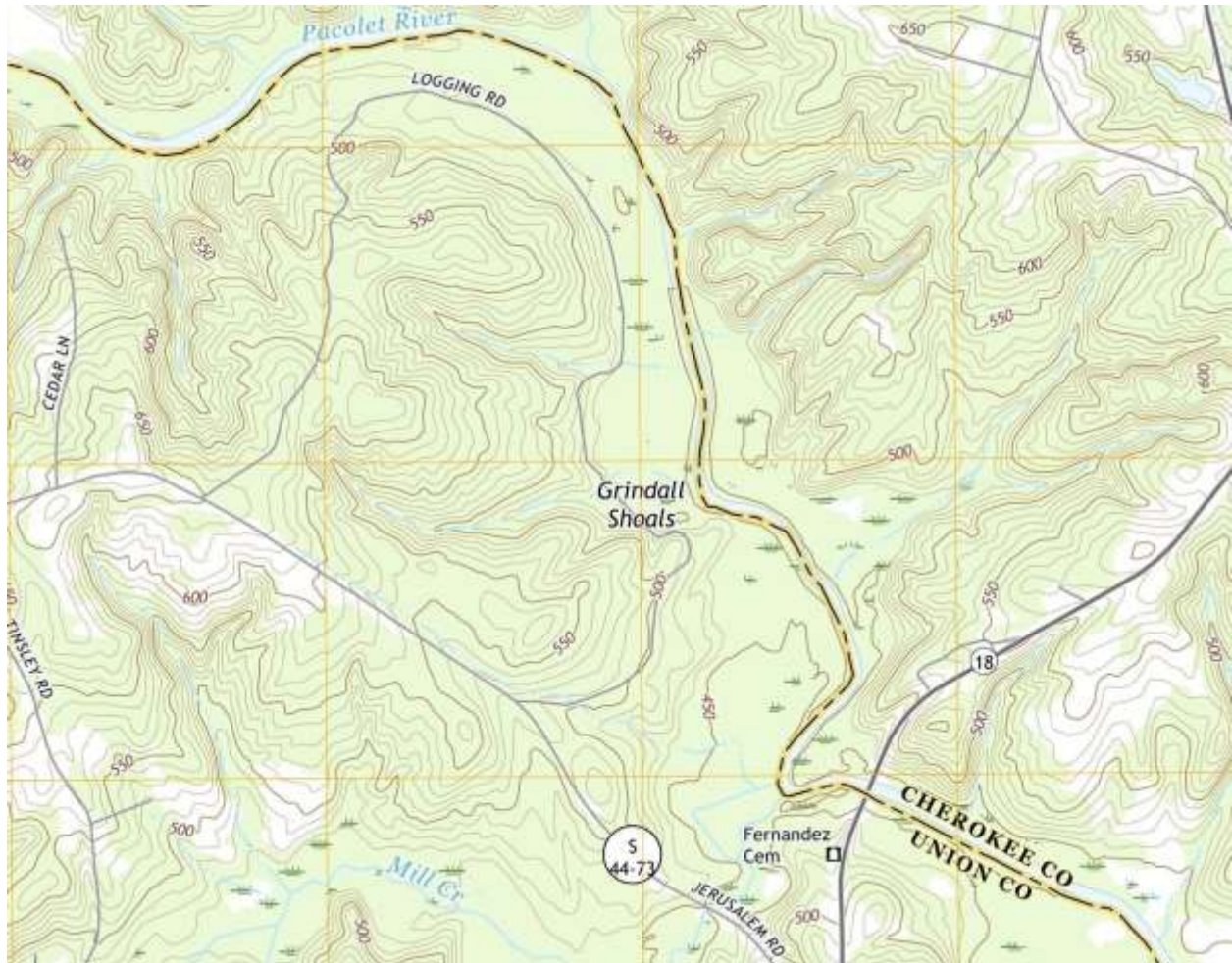
Photo from <https://glendalesc.com/bailey.html>
by Clarence Crocker. Image also found in
Bailey's book.

Unexpectedly, or coincidentally, the topic of Grindal Shoals came up again five years later when my father (Richard Sr.), Dr. Alva S. Pack III, James Anderson, and I partnered to buy a two-hundred-acre hunting property. We founded Grindal Shoals Sportsman's Club. This partnership, now led by George Lunn of Wellford, owns the north side of Grindal Shoals on the Pacolet River at Highway 18, just north of Jonesville in Cherokee County. I recalled the title of

Bailey's book and wanted to discover more about the property in which I was involved, so I returned to the Kennedy Room.

Computers had barely hit desktops, and Google Search did not exist. Therefore, the research took manual effort, cross-referencing Dewey Decimal cards in library catalogs and talking to experts in Spartanburg County history. Being a good digger, my stack of newspaper articles, memoirs, eyewitness accounts, and more grew into a sizable compendium. *Gaffney Ledger* articles from a century ago gave pointers too! For the next thirty-five years, life got in my way. My research languished in a file cabinet once again.

When I opened the Grindal Files next, I could sit down and consider what I had uncovered all those years ago. It became clear that important Revolutionary War events once swirled around the backwoods South Carolina pioneer community known as Grindall's Ford. To find



Excerpt from U.S. Geological Survey Map extracted 2/27/2022 by Richard C. Meehan, Jr.

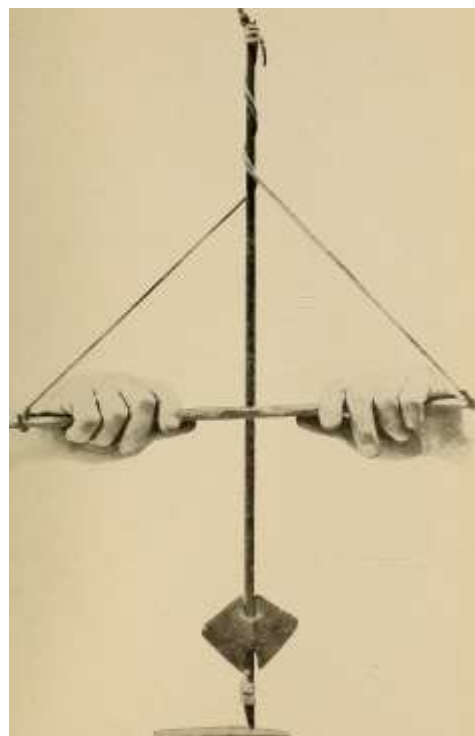
details about this once-important river crossing, I had to learn to spell—differently. To find the name of Grindal in source materials is rare. Reverend Bailey’s book used modern spelling, but few other sources do. However, if one uses spellings such as Grandale, Grindle, Grendel, Grindall, Grindal, Grendale, Grendall, Gryndell, Gryndel, Gryndale, and others, one can find a wealth of historical data. Keeping this in mind, let us go on a short journey of discovery.

Around 1755, John Grindal purchased “the land that contains the shoals...first granted to Richard Carroll in 1752.” (Grindal Shoals Gazette, Ivey) He changed the name from Carroll to Grindal Shoals. The shoals offered a prime location for commerce, as a network of roads linked the area to Spartanburg, Union, Gaffney, Rock Hill, and the Lower Ninety-Six District of South Carolina. These locations were then known as Spartanburgh, Cow Pens, Rock Hill, and Ninety-Six. Once prime Cherokee hunting lands, the Grindall’s Ford settlement grew and prospered in the Pacolet River Valley. The Native Americans of the Cherokee Band were not happy about it,



Cherokee "Bannerstone" found by James Anderson on Grindal Shoals Hunting Club property circa 2010. "It was just on top the ground.

Dimensions: 4" L x 3.5" W x 1.5" D"



Bannerstone used as weight on a hand drill. By Internet Archive Book Images -

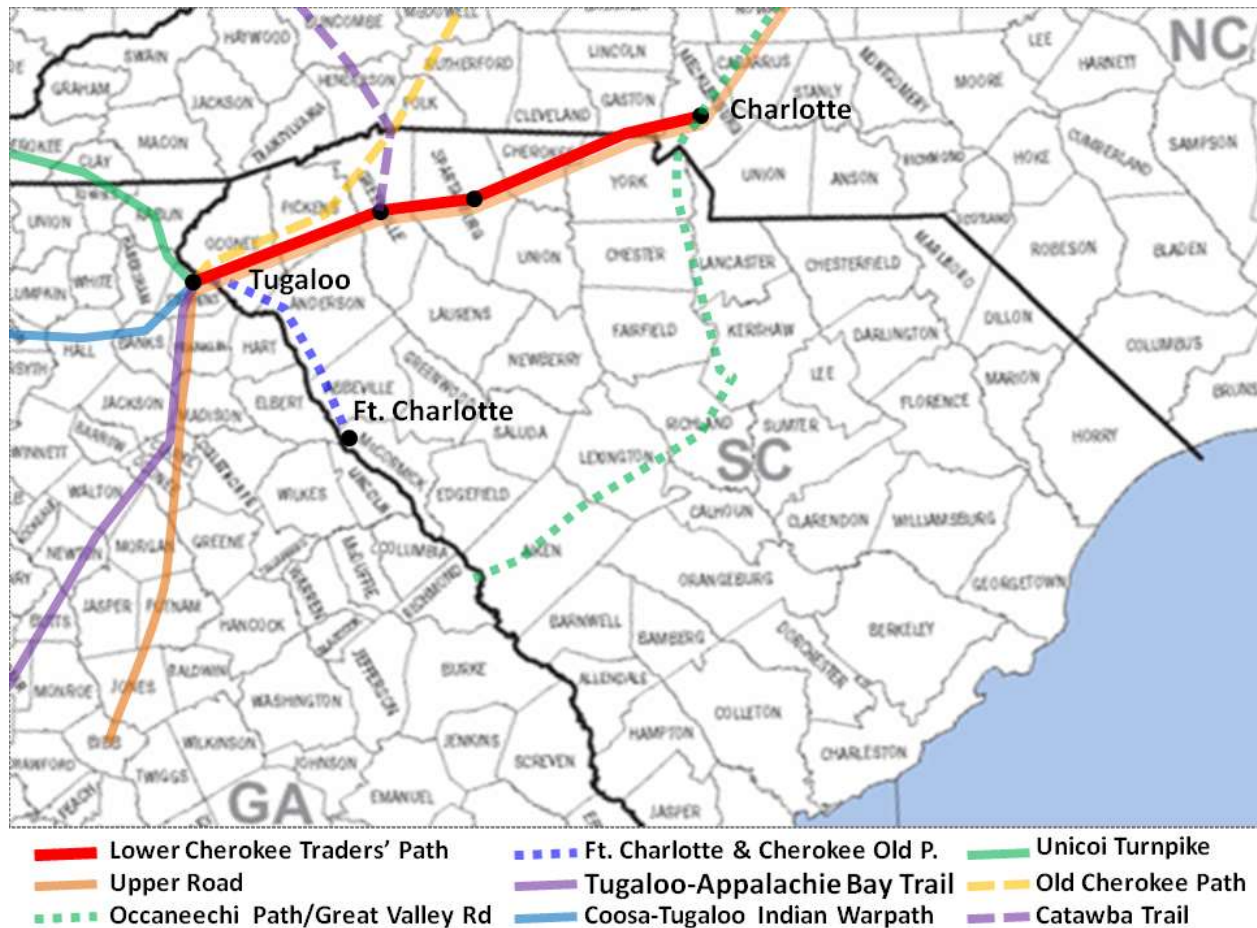
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/internetarchivebookimages/18429816591/>, No restrictions, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=41730748>

so they sided with the British during the war.

Grindal Shoals settlers, led by Captain John Nuckolls, formed an armed patrol to push out Cherokee raiders in 1771. The group included young Ensign Patrick “Pad” Moore, soon to become an infamous Tory raider. These neighbors drove the Cherokee to Tryon, North Carolina. Barely a decade before the outbreak of the war, many of Grindall’s pioneer settlers helped build and garrison Thicketty Fort (Fort Anderson) on Thicketty Creek to protect their homesteads from further Cherokee raids. This fort is about twelve miles northwest of the ford. In 1780, Loyalists under *Captain* Patrick Moore used the fort as a base to launch a reign of terror against the Whig settlers around the ford.

Traditionally, the Native Americans utilized Grindall’s as part of a network of trade routes along the ancient Lower Cherokee Trader’s Path. In prehistoric times, this path linked the Catawba and Cherokee Nations. According to antique maps, Grindal’s, along with several other fords of the Pacolet River, was along this major trade route that cut across Spartanburg County. Thus, it is likely that in 1781, Grindal Shoals residents may have witnessed or participated in trade with Native Americans. By 1800, Cherokees no longer came to the Pacolet River Valley, being forcibly confined in the northern mountains of Georgia at Tugaloo Town. The Catawba Indians, who sided with the Americans, were limited to a reservation near Rock Hill called Catawba Town.

Like many thriving communities, Grindall’s leading citizens cultivated interests in their favorite pastimes. Among those diversions were horse breeding and racing. Captain Wade Hampton I was a renowned breeder. He was also the most prominent slaveholder in American history—over six thousand enslaved people kept his lands profitable. Hampton enjoyed visiting his friend John “Jack” Beckham at Grindall’s. Beckham was a famous horse trainer, hunting



Lower Cherokee Trader's Path image from <https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/index.php?curid=82029>

guide, and scout for Brigadier General Daniel Morgan of the Patriot cause. John Chisam owned a racetrack at Grindall's. These men were friends, and it follows that they would be drawn together by their shared love of quality horseflesh.

Another pastime was entertaining guests in the home. Since Grindall's Ford was a hub of commerce, the plantation owners were wealthy. With wealth came leisure. Records show that Christie's Tavern, the Sims-Marchbanks Meeting House, and a few private homes held dances and lively gatherings. Before electronics, meetings between friends and family would fill the evenings instead of radio or television shows.

Today, Grindal Shoals is only a footnote in history. Several hundred years of water erosion and sediment shift by the Pacolet River (Pacholet, Packollette, Paklet, etc.) has covered this once-famous crossing. A few hundred yards below the ford, toward the Broad River junction, is



Author at remains of Christie's Tavern, January 2022

a modern bridge leading from Jonesville to Gaffney. Grindall's Ford Road, recently renamed Meehan Road in remembrance of my father, is now only a broken, rutted path leading down to the swamps along the river.

Last year I stumbled on further information about Reverend Bailey. I discovered that he served as the first pastor of Glendale Baptist Church and was a local historian in the early 1900s. His church today sits beside Lawson's Fork creek near the infamous Wofford's Iron Works, also

called Wofford's Fort—once a noted Whig stronghold. Benjamin Wofford, son of the builder of the Iron Works, founded Wofford College. Bailey was intrigued by the rich history at his doorstep and managed to write several county histories.

Lawson's Fork runs into the Pacolet River and onward to Grindal Shoals, about ten miles away. Bailey traversed the banks of this waterway to serve his congregation and interviewed

descendants of the original pioneering families that settled along the watercourse, especially those around the shoals. Thanks to him, we have records of the Godelocks, Fosters, Beckhams, Colemans, Sims, Marchbanks, Potters, Thompsons, Hodges, and many others. These same residents became divided politically as the war progressed to their doorstep. The Whigs and Tories around the shoals dealt ruthlessly with each other—a bloody civil war. Some descendants still live around the shoals today. By checking these names against State and ancestry records, I discovered a trove of Revolutionary War-era data.

Comprised of forests, meadows, and swampland, the Grindal Shoals Sportsman’s Club was once part of Loyalist Alexander Chesney’s land grant from King George III of England. Brigadier General Daniel Morgan and his “flying army” of patriot militiamen, around five hundred strong,



arrived to encamp on Chesney's land from December 25, 1780, until January 15, 1781. Early in their stay, Morgan instructed his hungry men to raze Chesney's fenceposts for firewood, roast his livestock, and run him out of town as an example to other thieving Loyalists. The Whig populace was grateful to Morgan, as their Tory neighbors had been sorely abusing them.

Unfortunately, spies for Lord Cornwallis, commander of the Southern Campaign contingent of the British Legion, discovered Morgan's camp. Cornwallis promptly sent his subordinate, Banastre "the Bloody Scout" Tarleton, and his crack troops to engage and destroy Morgan's forces at Grindall's. On January 17, 1781, Morgan instead crushed Tarleton at the Battle of Cowpens, the turning point of the Revolutionary War.

Records show that the Rebels (Whigs) tried to feed and clothe the volunteer soldiery (militia) from already strained winter stores while simultaneously suffering losses from Loyalist

(Tory) raiders. Therefore, the presence of Morgan's forces was both a boon and a curse. His men drove out the Tories to protect the Whigs during those weeks before the pivotal battle. It was a lean, bitter winter for all—cold, rainy. The creeks and rivers overran their banks throughout the Upstate in mid-January 1781.

What made Grindall's Ford essential to the two armies? Easy. There were no bridges. To cross a river, one had to wade it. There were only four stable crossings on the Pacolet River between Spartanburgh and Unionsville. Grindall's Ford was known as one of the best. Christie's Tavern, the foundations of which still exist, was a famous watering hole and lodging house at the time. There were several grist mills and mercantile establishments, a renowned lawyer, relatives of Daniel Boone, and a wily scout named Beckham serving in Morgan's intelligence network. The town of Beckhamsville, S.C., was founded by his relatives. There were successful farms (called plantations), one of which is Whig Hill, another historical site, an actual plantation of some opulence even by today's standards. And so, it goes. People lived and died at Grindal's in the cause of Liberty. Their memories, until now, have been buried in history.

For more about Grindal Shoals, read [Ford the Pacholet](http://fordthepacholet.com) (fordthepacholet.com), a Revolutionary War novel culminating in the pivotal Battle of Cowpens by this author. You may contact Richard C. Meehan, Jr. through his publisher Noggin Universe Press (nogginuniverse.com). This book is available through Amazon, Barnes & Noble and most online bookstores. Reserve your author-signed, Society discounted version in either paperback (\$10) or hardcover (\$20) through Eddie Killian, 803-635-9811, to be distributed on Saturday, November 12, at 2:00 PM during the Fairfield Genealogy Meeting Event.