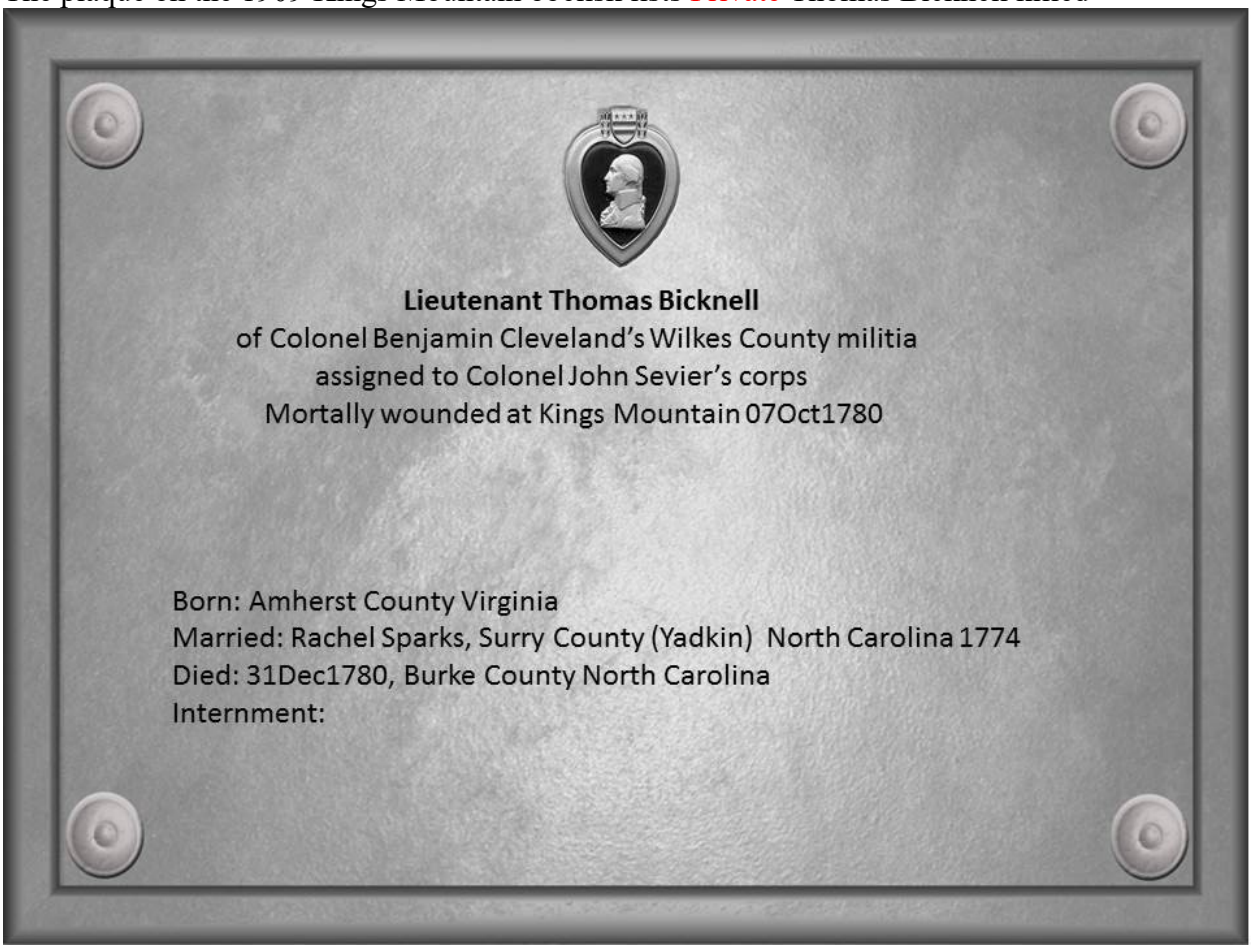
The plaque on the 1909 Kings Mountain obelisk lists Private Thomas Bicknell killed



Thomas Bicknell was born in Amherst County Virginia to William and Rosanna Cash Bicknall. Before 1770, he and his brother Samuel had moved to Swan Creek in Rowan (divided into Surry (1770), then Washington (1776) then Wilkes (1777)) County North Carolina. In 1774, Thomas married Rachel Sparks at "the meeting place" near the forks of the Yadkin. These scant imprecise details bespeak much of the history of the settlers of the frontier.

Amherst County records the William *Bicknall* 1781 will. Wilkes County archives hold the last will and testament signed Thomas *Bicknell* but written by Burke County's Joseph Dobson as *Bignall*. In 1784 Col Benjamin Cleveland ordered 12 pounds per annum with which widow Rachel *Bicknel* could subsist with her large family and her own industry. In Pickens District South Carolina in 1845, the clerk wrote Rachel *Biecknell* to which she affixed X, her mark for a federal widow's pension. Literacy was sparse and records were scattered. We are alphabetizing with the federal archive spelling among the dozen spelling variations.

In 1763 King George proclaimed that the settlers' water must drain to the Atlantic. His Royal governors had already granted land whose water drained to the Mississippi. Settlers without royal favor or money to buy from those favored few, lived in fear of penalty or loss of their

homesteads. In 1778, Thomas and Samuel Bicknell were able to enter their land claims on Swan Creek near Yadkin River. Under colonial rule, their farms had been unrecorded.

The Anglican church kept the official records of births, marriages, and deaths in Virginia and the Carolinas. Baptists and Presbyterians were not allowed to have churches, so Thomas and Rachel (Sparks) were married at "the meeting place." By royal decree they were unmarried and lived in the sin of adultery. Their children were officially bastards with no proof of birth. Far away in New Bern, the royal governor seemed to care about them only to the extent that they paid their taxes.

On the second day of the new Wilkes County court on 03Mar1778 Thomas Bicknell was appointed constable, a deputy sheriff. In 1779 he was appointed as a tax collector for Captain Herndon's district. Much of the county's taxes went to support its militia companies. After a year of tax duty, he resigned to concentrate on military duties. Land, religious liberty, dignity, and a voice in taxes were important enough to fight for. Despite the ongoing need to tend flocks and fields and now his three children, Thomas became a soldier. Colonel Cleveland tried to keep active duty to no more than three months at a time, primarily defending against Tory Loyalists who were disrupting the Patriot organization and even their existence. Rachel and Thomas had two more children by 1780.

Rachel stated that Thomas sometimes volunteered, sometimes was drafted. His first militia duty was under Captain Richard Allen. He was a lieutenant under Allen when called to Charleston in 1780 where they helped to prevent the Tories from burning the city. Bicknell was at times called out under William Lenoir, Joseph Herndon, and/or Benjamin Cleveland. In the Kings Mountain expedition, Captain Allen stayed with the foot soldiers at Cowpens while his friend Lt. Bicknell fell in with Col John Sevier's troops in hot pursuit of Ferguson's soldiers. Snead Davis (Federal pension file S32204) stated that his captain was Thomas Biecknell, probably because Thomas was acting in behalf of Captain Allen.

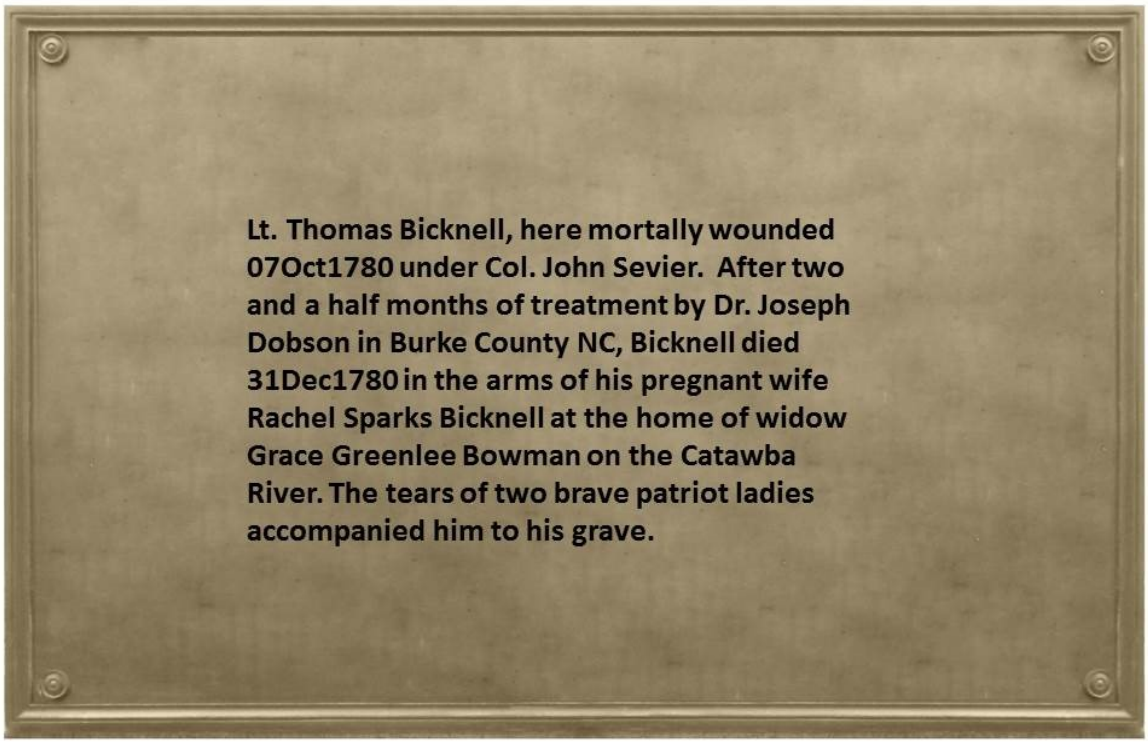
On 07Oct1780, a one ounce lead ball to the hip grounded Thomas Bicknell during one of Sevier's charges up the ridge at Kings Mountain. The colonels assigned two soldiers to each of the wounded. They took Thomas on a horse drawn litter where by 13Oct1780 he was invited into the home of widow Grace (Grizzee) Greenlee Bowman a few miles up the Catawba River from the old Burke County Court House. Dr. Joseph Dobson made the rounds to patriot houses to care for sixteen of the wounded from Kings Mountain. By 16Oct1780, word had reached the Yadkin River and Rachel had left her five children to come to the side of her wounded husband.

By 20Oct1780, Dr. Dobson was so pessimistic of Thomas Bicknell's chances that he asked his patient for his last will and testament. It was witnessed by
-Joseph Dobson,
-hostess Grace Bowman, (whose husband John Bowman was mortally wounded at the battle of Ramsour's Mill 13Jun1780)
-Pilot Mountain's William Terrell Lewis Sr, (who had three wounded sons at Mr. Mackey's [some say at Margaret McDowell's] home)
-William Ragland of Wilkes County
-Gabriel Loving of Wilkes County, (Rachel Loving Siske had lost her husband Daniel Siske in the battle of Kings Mountain)

-and Samuel Bicknell, the brother of Thomas.

On the last day of 1780, Thomas Bicknell died. Rachel went home to her children. On 07May1781, a broken hearted father, William Bicknell died in Amherst County Virginia. On 15May1781 Mary Bicknell, sixth and last child of Thomas and Rachel Bicknell was born on Swan Creek in Wilkes County NC.

Map link, click, zoom, drag

03Dec1845 in Pickens District SC, eighty eight year old Rachel Bicknell testified that she was living with her daughter Mary and on the charity of Mary's husband David Roper. Her pension application was initially rejected. Her file in the federal archived suggests that 21Dec1851 attorney Thomas Lumpkin representing several Pickens area folks in DC brought enough depositions from North and South Carolina to prove that Rachel was in fact the widow of a revolutionary was soldier and she was awarded a pension. http://revwarapps.org/r12399.pdf

The plaque on the 1909 Kings Mountain obelisk lists *Private* Thomas Bicknell *killed*. If I could make a plaque at Kings Mountain, it would contain **Lt. Thomas Bicknell, here mortally wounded, died 31Dec1780 in the arms of his wife Rachel Sparks Bicknell at the home of widow Grace Greenlee Bowman on the Catawba in Burke County. The tears of two brave patriot ladies accompanied him to his grave.**