

Polly Slocumb

Series: Legends



This gourd dipper reportedly hung from Polly Slocumb's saddle on her famous ride. Photo courtesy N.C. Museum of History.

In 1776 Mary Hooks, called Polly by her family and friends, married Ezekiel Slocumb. The couple lived in Wayne County. Polly became famous after a story about her spread across the state. Here is the tale of Polly Slocumb's ride.

On February 25, 1776, Polly watched Ezekiel ride off to fight with the Patriots in the Revolutionary War. The next night she dreamed that her husband was bleeding, maybe dead, on the battlefield. She woke up, jumped out of bed, and got dressed. She left her young son, Jesse, with a servant and rode her horse thirty miles (some versions of the story say up to sixty miles) to the battle at Moores Creek Bridge.

By dawn Polly was halfway to the battlefield. Soon she could hear the gunfire. She arrived just as the fighting ended. Polly spotted an injured soldier wrapped in Ezekiel's coat. When she washed the blood off his face, she discovered that the man was not her husband but one of his friends! She realized that he was the man in her dream. Polly was relieved to find Ezekiel alive. He left with his fellow soldiers to another battle. She stayed and spent the day caring for twenty wounded men on the battlefield. That night she rode home to her son.

The North Carolina Museum of History has a gourd dipper that Polly supposedly used to take water to the hurt soldiers that day. Some people think that objects such as the gourd dipper prove that a legend is true.

But is this story true? Did Polly Slocumb really have that dream and ride all night to reach the battle? Study the evidence and decide for yourself.

- Ezekiel Slocumb was fifteen years old in 1776. Fifteen was young for a Revolutionary War soldier. Military records show that Ezekiel did not join the army until 1780.
- Family records show that the Slocumbs' only son, Jesse, was born in 1780.
- No reports of the battle at Moores Creek Bridge mention that Polly was present.
- The battle lasted less than five minutes and happened at dawn.
- Only two Patriot soldiers were injured in the battle.

If the story isn't true, how did it get started? It may have started with Polly's doctor, who claimed to have heard it from Polly herself. The doctor passed it on to the author of an 1848 book about women in the Revolutionary War. Later the story went into the first major book about the history of North Carolina. Some people say that it had spread around the state long before it appeared in print.

However it started, the legend continues because it highlights qualities that people admire: bravery, patriotism, helpfulness, and love. You might say that Polly Slocumb's ride carried her into history!