



Virginia C.A.R. Patriots of the Round Table Margaret Catherine "Kate" Moore Barry

Militia Scout, Messenger and Spy – Heroine of the Battle of Cowpens

This month (January 2023), we will commemorate the 242nd anniversary of the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina – a Patriot victory that historians consider to be a significant turning point in the American Revolution. As we continue to recognize some of the lesser-known patriots without whom the Victory at Yorktown would not have been possible, it is fitting that the January Patriot of the Roundtable was known as the “Heroine of Cowpens.”

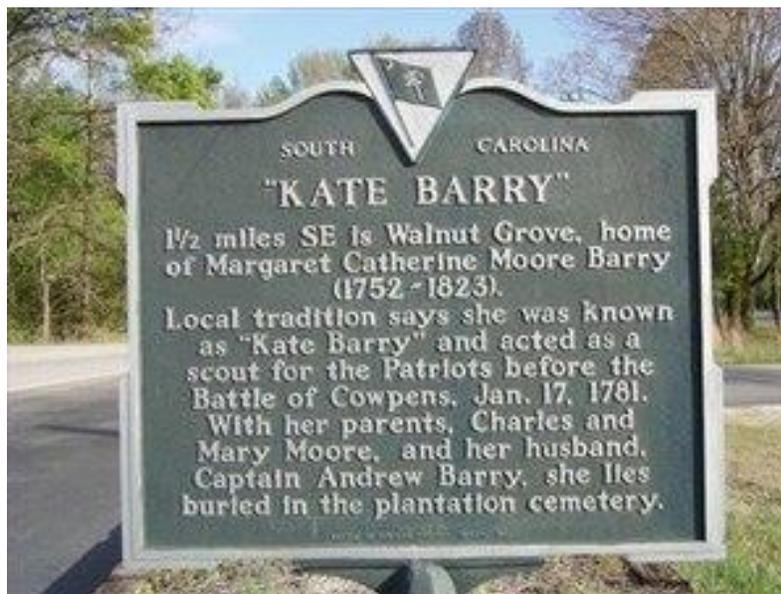
Kate Moore Barry was born near Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1752. The oldest of ten children, Kate lived with her family at the Walnut Grove Manor. Her family was one of the first English families to settle in the area. In 1767, at the age of fifteen, she married Andrew Barry and moved to a farm just two miles away from her childhood home.

Barry’s husband joined the Continental Army as a captain and commanding officer when the Revolutionary War began. Barry herself was also supported the patriot cause. She served as a scout for the patriot militia, a messenger and a spy for the American troops in the area and fought with Daniel Morgan's army in the South Carolina backcountry.



Miniature portrait of Kate Moore Barry, given to a Spartanburg history museum by her descendant, actress Amanda Blake (1929-1989), who was famous for her role as saloon proprietress “Miss Kitty Russell” on the television western Gunsmoke.

As the British chased the Patriots towards Cowpens in January 1781, the Patriots prepared for a fight. Barry – still a young woman at just 29 years old – is rumored to have tied her newborn baby to her bedpost and, using her extensive knowledge of the local woods and trails, set out on horseback to warn her neighbors of the British advance. The next day, January 17, 1781, the British attacked, and some accounts place Barry on the battlefield with her husband. The Americans defeated the British at Cowpens, killing 110, wounding 200 and capturing 500 British soldiers. The Continental Army casualties were only 12 dead and 60 wounded, although the total number of casualties may have been closer to 128, including militia.



John Marshall, later the fourth Chief Justice of the United States and himself a veteran of Brandywine and Valley Forge, would write that “[s]eldom has a battle, in which greater numbers were not engaged, been so important in its consequences as that of Cowpens.”

This defeat slowed Lord Cornwallis’s invasion of North Carolina and led him to chase General Greene and his patriot forces into North Carolina and Virginia. Thus, the Battle of Cowpens set up the chain of events that would lead to Cornwallis being in Virginia in the summer of 1781 when his commanding officer, General Clinton, ordered him to find a protected harbor for the British fleet. Cornwallis found what he thought would be the perfect spot: *Yorktown*.

After the battle, Barry was given the title “Heroine of the Battle of Cowpens,” as well as medals for her work as a messenger and spy. She died in 1823 and is buried with her husband near Moore, South Carolina. Her home, Walnut Grove Plantation, still exists today as a tourist attraction in Roebuck, South Carolina, just outside Spartanburg.

Discussion Questions and Activities for Local Societies

What does a battle in South Carolina in January 1781 have to do with the victory at Yorktown in Virginia 9 months later?

Find a map of the 13 original states and mark the sites of the last major battles of the Revolution in the south and indicate which side won at Camden, Kings Mountain, Cowpens, Guilford Courthouse, Petersburg, the Virginia Capes and Yorktown.



Kate Moore Berry's gravestone.

Resources

[The American Revolution - \(Margaret Moore\)](#)

[Kate Barry - Wikipedia](#)

[Margaret Catherine Moore Barry | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](#)

Babits, Lawrence E. (1998). *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.