

Brevard, Alexander ^[1]

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April 1755–1 Nov. 1829

Alexander Brevard, Revolutionary War officer, planter-enslaver, and iron entrepreneur, was a native of Iredell County ^[2] but spent most of his adult life in Lincoln County ^[3]. The first Brevard ancestor in America was a Huguenot ^[4] refugee who fled France when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685. After a brief sojourn in Ireland, this young man settled in Maryland and fathered a large family, including a son, John Brevard. John Brevard ^[5] remained in Maryland long enough to learn the blacksmith trade and to marry Jane McWhorter. Sometime in the decade after 1740 he established a home in Iredell County, near the head of Rocky Creek.

When the American Revolution ^[6] began, the John Brevards had eight sons, including Alexander and Joseph, and four daughters. All the Brevards were Whigs. When the British under Cornwallis crossed the Catawba River ^[7], they passed near the Brevard home; according to family tradition, a British contingent, finding only Mrs. Jane Brevard at home, burned the house and all the surrounding outbuildings to the ground. The explanation offered was that the family had eight sons in the rebel army; clearly, the family took the country's cause seriously.

By 1775, Brevard had acquired the rudiments of education and was prepared to devote his energies to service against the king. Early in the war he participated in the Snow Camp expedition against South Carolina Tories. He returned home in March 1776 but was soon called to go to Cross Creek to quell a rising among Scottish Tories. Subsequently, he joined the Continental Line as ensign in the Fourth North Carolina Regiment; in December 1776 he was promoted to first lieutenant. He fought in several battles in the North, most notably at Brandywine and Germantown in the abortive defense of Philadelphia. He went into winter quarters at Valley Forge, but with his health so endangered by the rigors of campaigning that he was ordered home by General Washington himself. In 1779, Brevard became a captain in the North Carolina Militia; he joined the southern army of Horatio Gates in the campaign of 1780. He acted as quartermaster at the Camden fiasco ^[8], where, anticipating defeat, he tried unsuccessfully to save the wagons and supplies in his charge. After a change in commanders in which Nathanael Greene ^[9] replaced Gates, events in the Carolinas moved rapidly to a conclusion. Brevard served throughout the campaign, undergoing the fiercest fighting at the Battle of Eutaw Springs, S.C., where he commanded a beleaguered company that sustained heavy losses. He resigned his commission on 1 Jan. 1783.

After the war, Brevard married Rebecca Davidson (1762–1824), the daughter of Major John Davidson ^[10] (1735–1832) of Mecklenburg County ^[11], a practical blacksmith, opponent of British authority, planter, and ironmonger. In about 1792, Davidson, Brevard, and Joseph Graham ^[12] (1759–1836), another Revolutionary War hero and son-in-law of Davidson entered partnership with Peter Forney ^[13], a pioneer in the Lincoln County iron industry ^[14]; they purchased a share in the "big ore bank" ^[15], a few miles east of Lincolnton, and made plans to erect facilities to manufacture iron products. Brevard moved his family to Lincoln County and settled on Leeper's Creek, where he built Mt. Tirza Forge; on adjoining land, Graham built Vesuvius Furnace. In 1795, Forney sold his interest in the partnership, and the others continued to operate under the name Joseph Graham and Company, with Davidson leaving actual management to his sons-in-law. The business proved highly lucrative, and additional land was acquired. By 1804, when Davidson sold his interest to Brevard and Graham, the company assets included over five thousand acres; the rights to enslave nine people; improvements, equipment, and stock valued conservatively at \$5,000; and cash and notes receivable in the amount of \$8,876. Brevard and Graham continued the partnership as Brevard and Company until 1814, when the business relationship was dissolved. Subsequently, Brevard built Rehoboth Furnace near Mt. Tirza Forge. He manufactured and sold iron until his death in 1829; and the business remained in the family, despite declining profits, until 1870.

Like neighboring ironmongers, Brevard also engaged in various agricultural pursuits, which proved to be complementary. He amassed a large estate and enslaved many people. His success was due to his marketing practices. Seeking ever broader markets, he began to send iron products by wagon down the Catawba River Valley into South Carolina to Camden and below, especially when dry weather prevented boats from ascending the water highways from Charleston. His brother Joseph ^[16] (1766–1821), a prominent Camden lawyer and judge, acted as agent in the ensuing transactions, advising his brother of market conditions and storing and selling iron as necessary. This outlet was invaluable.

Brevard never sought political office but was content to conduct his business, enjoy his family, and play the role of good citizen. Despite a retiring disposition, his manner was frank and candid. Industrious and honest, he was a devout Presbyterian. His marriage with Rebecca Davidson produced ten children; seven—Ephraim, Franklin, Harriett, Robert, Joseph, Theodore, and Mary—survived their father. Brevard was interred at Machpelah ^[17], a small Presbyterian church near his home, which was the burying ground of the Brevards and Grahams.

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Additional Resources:

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Williams, Max R. ^[28]

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