

House in the Horseshoe Virtual Field Trip

The Skirmish

Middle School

Standards

8.H.1.3 Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives.

8.H.1.4 Use historical inquiry to evaluate the validity of sources used to construct historical narratives (e.g. formulate historical questions, gather data from a variety of sources, evaluate and interpret data and support interpretations with historical evidence).

8.H.2.1 Explain the impact of economic, political, social, and military conflicts (e.g. war, slavery, states' rights and citizenship and immigration policies) on the development of North Carolina and the United States.

8.H.2.2 Summarize how leadership and citizen actions (e.g. the founding fathers, the Regulators, the Greensboro Four, and participants of the Wilmington Race Riots, 1898) influenced the outcome of key conflicts in North Carolina and the United States.

Vocabulary

Primary source – an immediate firsthand account written by someone who was directly involved

Example: a Facebook post you write about something you did today

Secondary source – a secondhand account written by someone who was not directly involved

Example: a story your friend tells you about her weekend, and you repeat her story to your

Mom

In 1781, a skirmish took place at a lone house in the lush countryside of what is now Moore County, North Carolina. That house was known as the House in the Horseshoe, and it still stands today. Philip Alston, a colonel in the American militia who owned the house, and David Fanning, a Loyalist who commanded his own militia for the British, clashed in a violent, hours-long conflict that proved to be important for local North Carolina citizens, both Patriot and Loyalist. Watch the following videos to meet the men whose names became linked forever with the House in the Horseshoe. After you have watched their videos, watch the reenactment of the conflict that would establish the House in the Horseshoe's place in North Carolina history.

[Meet Philip Alston \(Video\)](#)

[Meet David Fanning \(Video\)](#)

[The Skirmish \(Video\)](#)

When the skirmish between Philip Alston and David Fanning broke out at House in the Horseshoe, many people were involved. They both had militiamen under their charge who were following their orders, and Philip Alston's family was trapped inside the house while it was under fire. We know that the Alstons had a number of enslaved people on their property, but there is no written documentation about what they were doing during the skirmish or how they felt while it took place. In fact, not much documentation at all from the parties involved survives today, and what few primary sources exist contradict each other numerous times.

David Fanning was one of these parties who wrote about the skirmish. Several of Philip Alston's men briefly mentioned the skirmish in their pension applications many years later. However, all of these people wrote their accounts a long time after the events of 1781, some of them as late as the 1830s. Does memory affect how we tell a story? What about who your audience is? Examine the excerpts from the following primary sources about the skirmish:

[David Fanning's Narrative](#)

[Elijah Fooshee's Pension Statement Excerpt](#)

[Stephen Collins's Pension Statement Excerpt](#)

But what about secondary sources? There are, in fact, secondary sources about the events that took place at the House in the Horseshoe! A local reverend named Eli Caruthers was involved with telling the stories of those who took part in the Revolutionary War in North Carolina. One of these stories he told was about what happened between Philip Alston and David Fanning. Eli Caruthers was not actually there at the House in the Horseshoe when the 1781 skirmish happened – he actually started his project in the 1850s, which was about 70 years after the skirmish! Based off of the notes of a man named Archibald McBryde, Eli Caruthers wrote a lengthy account of the Alston-Fanning conflict. How does Caruthers's account compare to what David Fanning, Elijah Fooshee, and Stephen Collins say? Think about these questions as you read the following excerpt from his re-telling:

[Caruthers's Excerpt](#)

Now that you've read three primary sources and one secondary source, what do you think really happened at the House in the Horseshoe? Whose story is correct? Can Caruthers's story be true even if

he was not present at the skirmish? Is it possible to have more than one version of a story, and they're all right? What about the people who did not write down their version of what happened? Temperance Alston, Philip's wife, never wrote what that July 29, 1781 fight was like from her point of view. Does that mean that her point of view doesn't matter? Furthermore, does it mean that her experience should be lost to history? The Alstons also owned around 20 enslaved people at this time, and none of them documented the infamous clash. In fact, none of the enslaved people's were written down, and so we do not even know who was present on the day of the fight. Why? What do you think they experienced? Why did none of them write it down?

Taking all of these questions into consideration, write a brief reflection on why primary and secondary sources are important when researching history. Think about everyone's points of view from Philip Alston and David Fanning to Temperance Alston and her children to the enslaved people whose names we still do not know. Some of them wrote what happened, and others did not. Some might have even written about it, but those documents have been lost or destroyed over the years. Review the lists you made of the facts that the accounts agree on as well as the facts that contradict each other. As you write your reflection, ask yourself what the truth means to you and how it can be affected by history.

I then returned to the head of Little River, on my way to Coxe's Mill : where I was met by two men, who informed me that the Rebels had separated into two small parties ; thinking I should never return fr̄m. Wilmington : I passed on and got intelligence of Col. Altstine lying on the banks of Deep River, with a party of 25 men. We marched all that day and night following ; and just as the day dawned, we advanced in three divisions, up to a house, they had thrown themselves into. On our approach, we fired upon the house, as I was determined to make examples of them, for behaving in the manner they had done, to one of my pilots, by name, Kenneth Black. They returned our fire, and the action continued upwards of 3 hours, when after killing four of them, and wounding all the rest, except three, they sent out a flag to surrender. Col. Altine's lady begging

their lives. On her solicitation, I concluded to grant her request; and after the capitulation I gave the following paroles to Col. Philip Alstane and his men.

“ I do hereby acknowledge myself a Prisoner of war, upon my parole, to His Excellency Sir Henry Clinton, and that I am hereby engaged till I shall be exchanged, or otherwise released therefrom, to proceed immediately to my plantation on Dunnam’s Creek, Cumberland county (or elsewhere) No Carolina, there to remain; or within five miles thereof—and that I shall not in the mean time, do, or cause any thing to be done, prejudicial to the success of his Majesty’s arms; nor have any intercourse or hold correspondence with the enemies of his Majesty—and that upon a summons from his Excellency, or other Person having authority thereto, that I will surrender myself up to him or them, at such time and place as shall hereafter be required.

PHILIP ALSTINE

Col’n.

Cumberland County,

Deep River; July 29th, 1781.

Witness; DAVID FANNING, *Col’o Com’g Loyal Militia*

In the course of this affair, we had two men killed, and four wounded, who afterwards recovered. A party of Rebels appeared in sight a little time after the firing began; but they did not approach to afford Col. Altstone any support. When the action was over, they ran off; and our horses being quite fatigued, rendered it impossible for me, to pursue them. I then pursued my route to Cox’s Mill, where on my arrival I gave twelve hours leave to the men; after detaching a sufficient number for the necessary guards, to go to their respective homes. Immediately after that, I heard

Excerpt from Elijah Fooshee's pension application, Elijah Fooshee, 1845

"[...]in the latter County we had an engagement [probably the action at the House in the Horseshoe, July 29, 1781]¹ with the Tories under the command of a Tory by the name of Captain Duck, at the house of a man by the name of Alston [Philip Alston]. Three or four rounds were fired by each side -- six of the Tories were killed & four of the Whigs wounded. We were in the house some in each story of the house. One of the Tories (a Scotchman) during the battle got a bundle of flax & run with it after setting it on fire to burn the house, but being discovered by our party was shot down & when examined had three balls in him. This declarant shot one ball at him & two others during the conflict. The Tories fled & were seen by us no more."

Excerpt from Stephen Collins's pension application, Stephen Collins, 1832

"[...] He again entered the Service of the United States in the month of April in the year 1781 under the following named officers to wit Jacob Duckworth Captain, Hopkins Die Lieutenant, Francis Danby Ensign, Philip Alston Colonel Mustered into Service in Cumberland County State of North Carolina – at this time there was a celebrated Tory Commander by the name of Fannon [David Fanning] who was assembling an Army of Royalist under his Command on Deep River we Set out to Dislodge him but he had decamped and fled before we got there, from there we pursued him near the Rath Swamp and then we started to return home and on our return home Alston's command was Divided Captain Duckworth took part of the man and Alston the balance and aforesaid Fannon then following after us, and attacked us when we was in this divided Situation and this Declarant being part of the Command of the said Alston when Said Fannon attacked us and in this action fought between said Alston in said Fannon he was wounded by a ball in the right rist [wrist] which has more or less Disabled me all my life after Receiving the aforesaid wound this declarant returned from the aforesaid Action, then I went to an old Lady in the neighborhood who was a Doctness [sic] other Medical or Surgical aid could not be had, the balance of the Squadron of said Alston being taken by said Fannon this Tour was also a three months Tour of Duty &c."

Excerpts from "Revolutionary Incidents: Sketches of Character, Chiefly in the Old North State" Eli Caruthers, 1854,1856

Capture of Colonel Philip Alston

They arrived on the premises about day-break on Sunday morning, August 5th, and immediately commenced the attack. The sentinels, being asleep, were taken by surprise, and made prisoners. Those at the gate, on the opposite side of the enclosure, were fired on, but not being killed or badly wounded, they ran into the porch where most of the other party were lying asleep. They too were fired on; but as soon as they could get into the house, the doors were fastened and all preparation for defense was made that could be made at the moment. The windows soon demolished; many of the balls passing through the plan, killed or wounded men inside.

The house was a two story framed house; and being weatherboarded, ceiled and painted, was one of the best houses then to be seen in that part of the country. It stands now just as it did then...

On the west side was a large porch, one end of which had been made into a bedroom, with a door opening into the hall; and this was the room usually occupied by Mrs. Alston and her husband. She now kept her bed, which was thought to be the safest place for her; and her two little children were put up into the chimney. This was done by putting a small table or bench into the fire-place, for them to stand on, which was about as high as the front part; and thus they were entirely beyond the reach of the bullets.

...

If he [Fanning] could burn the house they would be obliged to surrender, and his end would be accomplished.

The men all believed that if any of them ventured to go outside of the house, instant death would be consequence, though the flag of peace were waving over their head; and if Alston himself went out, no matter under what circumstances, or who might be with him, he would be picked out and made the first victim. In this perilous and critical moment, Mrs. Alston came out of her bed room or stood in the door; and with perfect composure, requested them to commit this business to her. At first. The men all objected, and particularly her husband, who thought it very improbable that Fanning, under all circumstances, would respect even a lady of her standing, though a wife and a mother, and bearing the sacred emblem of peace; but, she insisted on it they finally consented. Mrs. Alston, raising a white flag, opened the door and went out on the step, where she paused for a moment to see if she could discover any indications of the treatment which she might expect to receive.

As soon as Fanning saw her, he called to her to meet him half-way, which she did; and then, in a calm, dignified and womanly manner, said to him:- "We will surrender, sir, on condition that no one shall be injured; otherwise we will make the best defense we can; and, if need be, sell our lives as dearly as possible." Fanning who could sometimes respect *true* courage, whether in man or woman, promptly agreed to the proposal, and honorably kept his word. The men all then surrendered and were immediately paroled.