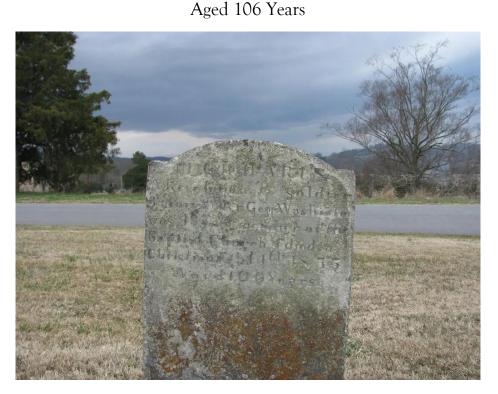# Corporal Hugh Harris, Patriot and Christian

By Donna Cox Briggs

As a member of the Cemetery Survey Team, I've seen many unusual tombstones, but the marker for Hugh Haris caught the whole team by surprise. The original marker was badly worn and it took us a while to extract the inscription,

HUGH HARIS

A Revolutionary Soldier

3 years under Gen Washington

was 48 years a member of the

Baptist Church died a

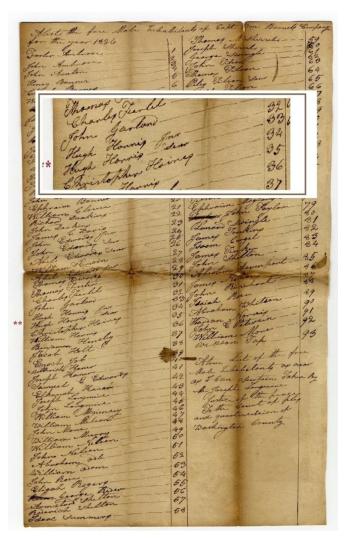Christian Feb 1_th 1855

Aged 106 Years

What? He fought with General Washington? Died at age 106 years?? These two items were the most intriguing and piqued our interest, but our cemetery work called and we moved on, but none of us forgot about Hugh Haris.

It was my idea to work up the property of Hugh Haris for our new project, "Early Landowners of Northeast Tennessee," but we soon found out that Hugh's land grant was in modern-day Unicoi County, having received a land grant on Indian Creek, near the Flagpond area. His property there had been already been platted by researchers.

With that knowledge, we decided not to focus on the early land grants, but we wondered how he came to be buried in the New Salem Cemetery, thirty miles from Flagpond. It was time to do some research on Hugh Harris.

In 1803, after the Revolutionary War, he settled in western North Carolina (Burke County) and received land grants there. Sometime prior to 1824, he made the move over the mountain into northeast Tennessee, first settling on Indian Creek in modern-day Unicoi County (land warrant 10461). Harris is found for the first time on the 1826 tax list in Washington County (Barnet's Company), which proves he had established residency in the county by then. Another land warrant (# 17246) was granted in 1828. The only deed that we could find in Washington County was where Hugh sold his land on Indian Creek to George Harris, his son for $50. The image below shows Hugh Harris Jun, and Hugh Harris Sen[r] on the 1826 tax list.

Next, let's look at the claim that he was 106. The 1850 Federal Census for Washington County, Tennessee showed that Hugh was born in Virginia[1] and listed his age as 92. This would place his birth at 1758. It is common knowledge among genealogical researchers that you look for the earliest record listing an age or birthdate, as the older a person gets, the more likely that the age will become "padded." The earliest statement of his age was in 1823 when he made application for a pension. This document declared his age to be 68 years. This would put his birth at 1755. Hugh's date of birth was consistently put back into the mid 1750's. In the 1840 census, his age was listed at 84 which still kept his birth year sometime in the mid 1750's. If this is true, he surely would have been around 100 years old at the time of his death!

His pension records give a very brief description of his military service and show that he enlisted in Orange County, NC, (May in the 4th NC Regiment, Continental Army. The regiment fought at the Battles of Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth. They camped at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania from 1777 – 1778.

General George Washington was present at the Battles of Brandywine (11 Sept 1777), Germantown (4 Oct 1777) and the Battle of Monmouth (28 Jun 1778). George Washington also camped with his troops at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777 into 1778. This certainly mirrors the movements of the 4th NC Regiment and it seems that Hugh Harris did indeed serve under General Washington. I found it a bit odd, though, that the deposition did not mention that he fought with George Washington.

Hugh wrote a will on October 8, 1853 and it is on file in the Washington County Archives. It states, "I give and bequeath to my beloved with Elizabeth all the property of evry (sic) sort and discription (sic) that I may bee (sic) in possession of at my Death as a compensation for her kindness to me in my old days…"

So, was Hugh 106 years old when he died? Probably not 106, but he was likely close to 100. Did he fight with General George Washington? I believe it is extremely likely that he did!

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