



The Natchez District and the American Revolution

Robert V. Haynes

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The Natchez District and the American Revolution by Robert V. Haynes In 1775, when the American Revolution broke out, the Natchez District was a small isolated outpost in British West Florida. During the early stages of the rebellion, the population of the district more than doubled as hundreds of loyalists settled along the western banks of the Mississippi River between Walnut Hills (modern Vicksburg) and Manchac. Although most inhabitants were loyal to England or preferred to remain neutral during the conflict, James Willing, a young adventurer and a former resident of the district, brought the war to their doorstep in early 1778 when he led a raiding party which forced the inhabitants of Natchez to take an oath of allegiance and which plundered the property of several well-known Tories south of the town. When Willing and his men reached New Orleans, they were allowed to dispose of their plunder at public auction. Although Willing's Raid exposed British weakness in the Southwest, the governor of West Florida dispatched enough military assistance to regain control over the Natchez district and to prevent Willing from ascending the Mississippi River with provisions for the American army. Spain's entry into the war in June of 1779 upset the precarious balance in the Southwest. In a series of brilliant campaigns, Governor Bernardo de Galvez captured the British settlements along the Mississippi, then seized Mobile, and eventually forced the British to surrender Pensacola. While Pensacola was falling to a superior Spanish force, the inhabitants of Natchez momentarily regained control of the district and threw out the Spaniards.

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