A Famous Tory, Ambrose Mills.
Tradition states he came as a baby to Maryland with his father and grandfather.

After his marriage to Mourning Stone, he settled in Virginia where he farmed on the banks of the James River.

He moved the family to the area of Wateree, S.C., in 1765. There was a grant of land containing 600 acres to Ambrose Mills filed on Dec. 16, 1766, in Craven County, S.C., bounding "on the said river on Patrick McCommicks and Frances Laton ... one Pickett .. Richard Ricklands."

His wife and children were killed by Indians at Pine Tree Hill in Camden County in South Carolina. William was the only survivor.

Ambrose later married Anne Brown of Chester, S.C., and had three more sons and three more daughters. About 1767, the first child from his second marriage was born in South Carolina.

In 1770, he bought a tract of land containing 640 acres in Old Tryon County from Thomas Reynolds for 100 pounds on both sides of Green River, including the mouth of Walnut Creek. Reynolds had bought the property in 1760 and there was a cabin on it called Powell's cabin.

He established a trading post and a sawmill by a spring. It is said the basin was hewn from solid rock. (Jackson tradition is that it was either Gabriel Sr. or David Sr. who carved the basin for Mills). It was called Mills Spring.

During the Revolutionary War, he was a colonel with British forces, commander of Tory Cavalry at the Battle of Kings Mountain on Oct. 7, 1780. He was captured and taken to a field on Biggerstaff's farm, where he was hung by American forces Oct. 14, 1780. In addition to being a Tory who fought against Patriot forces, he was accused and found guilty of inciting the Cherokee to attack the frontier of South Carolina.

The farm was near Gilbert Town in Rutherford County. The bodies were cut down by Mrs. Biggerstaff and an old man. Eight of the nine persons hung were buried in a shallow trench some two feet deep. From "Kings Mountain and Its Heroes" by Lyman Draper.

In a letter to Gen. Smallwood Nov. 10, 1780, Lord Cornwallis wrote: "the hanging of Colonel Mills who was always a fair and open enemy to your cause, was an act of the most savage barbarity."

His second wife, Anna, married John Carrick in 1790. In the court proceedings on administration of the estate (he died intestate) it states that in 1782 she and Col. James Miller were named administrators of the estate, but since she re-married in 1790 the administration changed to his son, William, from his first wife. William was appointed guardian for the children still living at home (Ambrose and a younger sister). William filed three suits against John Carrick concerning the estate "in order to compel him to give security for the estate of the deceased."

The following was written by Lyman C. Draper, 1881, no.5, pg. 481

"Of the Loyalist leaders but little can be gleaned from history or tradition. Colonel Ambrose Mills, among the unfortunates who were executed at Bickerstaff's, was born in England, about 1722 and was taken while yet young to Maryland.
He married Miss Mourning Stone, settling on James River, and finally removing to the frontiers of South Carolina, where his wife was killed by Indians, during the Indian war of 1755-61, leaving an only son, William.

He afterwards married Miss Anne Brown, of the Chester region, sister of the wife of the noted Loyalist leader, Colonel Thomas Fletchall; and, settled on Green River, in Rutherford Co., North Carolina; by this second marriage had three sons and three daughters.

In 1776, he served against the Cherokee Indians.

In 1778, Colonel Mills and the notorious David Fanning raised a corps of five hundred men with the design of joining the Royal standard at St. Augustine, when one of the parties betrayed their plans. Mills and sixteen others were apprehended, and conveyed to Salisbury jail; Fanning undertaking to rescue him on the way, but his force proved too weak to affect the purpose. Mills was, in course of time, liberated; joined Ferguson with the Loyal militia of his region, fought at Earle's Ford and King's Mountain; and, as viewed a century after the occurrence, he was too severely dealt with at Bickerstaff's."

The following was written by By Tony Earley, Forest City Daily Courier Staff Writer

Baxter Hollifield led Forrest Lyda to where Stowe Upton told him years before that the hanging tree stood. Upton grew up close to the spot and Samuel Long, who owned the farm, showed him the place. Long, who lived to see the far side of 80, died close to thirty years ago. His father farmed the place before him. "This is the spot, as near as I can figure it," Hollifield told Lyda in a clearing surrounded by scrub woods. The walk in was on the bed of an old road, where maybe armed frontiersman and condemned men walked 205 years ago. Skeletal briars reach for travelers now, and beggars' lice cling to pant legs, trying to get somewhere else. Lyda stepped forward into the clear place and looked around like a man expecting to see ghosts rise from the ground. "Within a hundred feet of here," he said quietly, "My great-great-great-great-great grandfather's buried. Col. Mills is buried here. Merrill hung here, too." Col. Amborse Mills and William Merrill are Lyda ancestors - men on opposite sides of the Revolutionary War. Both men were hanged from the same tree in the bloody days following the Battle of Kings Mountain.

Col. Mills, a Tory, was hanged by Merrill, along with eight other supporters of the Crown. Merrill, a Patriot, was dragged from his Rowan County home four months later by Tory nightriders and taken back to the hanging tree. Mills' son William, who had been left for dead on top of Kings Mountain, swung him off.

Forrest Lyda is a talker. He can't finish one story without starting 100 others. A historian, he talks about what he has learned backtracking his ancestors into the past. The farther back he looks, the more he has to say. He can't explain every capillary of a bloodline to a listener, but he tries.

Ambrose Mills was captured during the Battle of Kings Mountain on October 7, 1780 along with 40 to 50 other Tories. They were lucky they ever made it off the mountain. One hundred British troops and Loyalists were gunned down in a mountaintop hollow that day after they laid down their weapons. William Mills, bleeding from wounds in his shoulder and heel and left for dead, was discovered by a party of Tories who had been foraging for food when the blood ran on the mountain.

The victorious over-the-mountain-men marched their captives westward and decided to hang them a week into the march. Nine Tories swung from the tree before Captain John Sevier caught up with the frontiersmen and convinced them to stop the slaughter. Col. Mills was the second man hanged that day. William Merrill slapped the horse, avenging his brother's death.

Legend says that Martha Biggerstaff and a slave buried the nine men in a common grave. Charles Chitwood's body was exhumed later by his family and buried in the Biggerstaff family cemetery several miles away.

Forrest Lyda loves telling the story of how the Mills and Merrill families united in marriage 40 years later. William Merrill's granddaughter Catherine married William Mills' grandson, Ambrose Jones Edney, knotting a happy ending of sorts around the violence of the war and the hanging tree. Even so, the differences between the families weren't easily forgotten and new ones rose within the political struggles of the new nation and the coming of the Civil War.