

The Search For Tryon Courthouse

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By RAY JIMISON

Gazette County Editor

CLOVER, S. C. — Whoa there.

There never was a court-

house between Bessemer City and Cherryville, N. C.

So says W. J. Davis, a student of history who is the great great nephew of Jeffer-

son Davis, the president of the Confederate States of America.

The "J" in Davis's initials stands for Jefferson.

"As I understand it, old man

Christian Mauney lived there and one room of his house was used as a courthouse and the other room was the jail."

Of course, added Davis, the jail wasn't used very much. "Back then, people generally settled things between themselves."

A historical marker at Tryon proclaims that Tryon County was formed in 1768. It was named for Gov. William Tryon and the county was divided in 1779 into Lincoln and Rutherford counties. "The courthouse stood here," is inscribed on the marker.

Sure enough, the remnants of a foundation are nearby, surrounded by a grove of pine trees.

The first Tryon County Courthouse, says Davis, was three miles west of Clover near Henry's Knob Mountain. The foundation is in an almost inaccessible wooded area.

Several weeks ago, the York County Historical Commission erected a historical marker on the road from Clover to Henry's Knob. It proclaims the site of the first Tryon County Courthouse.

Most of York County was in North Carolina when Tryon County was formed in 1768 from Mecklenburg County.

LINE SETTLED

Then, in 1772, the present boundary between North and South Carolina was established and this area became a part of South Carolina. The courthouse was moved, therefore, to the pine grove near Tryon School in Gaston

County.

"I understand they were going to build a courthouse at Tryon but for some reason they never got it built," said Davis.

Historical research indicates that the pine grove in Gaston County was chosen for the site of the courthouse, prison, and stocks but the Revolutionary War intervened and they were never built.

It was at Christian Mauney's house that patriots of Tryon County assembled Aug. 14, 1775, and drew up a set of resolutions, one of several that antedated the Declaration of Independence at Philadelphia. In 1779, the territory was divided and Tryon County abolished.

But, back to the first Tryon County Courthouse near Clover:

The erection of the marker several weeks ago was somewhat of an accomplishment and marked the end of a search of many years for the site.

SEARCH STARTED

Interest sprang up about 20 years ago when it was discovered that The Court of Tryon was located within three miles of Clover. Several years

later, maps were located in both Raleigh and Columbia showing "the fort on Twelve Mile Creek" and Henry's Knob Mountain near Clover.

The map had an inscription, "Here the Court of Tryon County was held."

Fascinated, researchers were alarmed that a spot of such historical significance had gone unmarked. There were no records to show where the courthouse had been.

The search began among the people living near Henry's Knob but produced nothing. Then, almost miraculously, the name of W. J. Davis popped up, chiefly because the York County Historical Commission had taken up the search.

Davis, who will be 72 this month, had not been to the site in some 35-40 years. He didn't know if he could find his way back or not since several sawmills had cut away all landmarks.

Davis recalled that he led a

number of Historical Commission members to the site but was unable to find it.

He went back on his own and found it. Returning later, Davis and a party of interested people walked about a mile through bushy woods that had been cut over for timber twice in the past 30 years.

SUCCESS

They reached the spot, about three-fourths-of-a-mile south of Henry's Knob. There,

they found the historical spot on a beautiful rolling plateau lying on the west side of a small branch. A large spring drain entered the site just about 200 feet from the old courthouse place.

"We were thrilled," wrote a member of the party.

Davis recalled that he first visited the spot in 1914. An old Negro who had been a slave, took him. The ex-slave was 106 years old at the time.

He had been known by several names because he had been owned by several masters. One master was a man by the name of Henry and the little mountain known as Henry's Knob is named for him.

Davis was named chairman of the Tryon Courthouse marker committee by the Historical Commission. His job was to gather the correct information and have a historical marker erected.

This was in 1960. He began compiling information in 1961 and a few weeks ago the marker became a reality. "One thing you must do is to be sure you get the information right," said Davis.

MISPLACED

One reason the old courthouse site was lost was probably due to the fact that Henry's Knob was misplaced on an ancient map which Davis has in his possession.

His search for the correct information for the marker took him to Charleston, Charlotte, and Hickory, N. C. The original log courthouse at York, the county seat, had burned long ago. Records burned with it.

Fact is, the courthouse at York has burned three times. The present courthouse there

is the fourth.

"For some reason, you can find more in the records at Hickory than most any other place," vowed Davis.

The actual marker cost only \$155.

When York County was a part of North Carolina, it formed a portion of the county known as Tryon which included the present counties of Gaston, Lincoln, Catawba, Cleveland, Rutherford, and just about all the present counties in the southern part of Western North Carolina.

Records show that the courthouse of Tryon was located near where the road from Salisbury to Smith's Ford, on the Broad River, now crosses the road from York to Lincolnton. This road is known as Kings Mountain Rd.

Thus, the marker was placed three-fourths-of-a-mile from Henry's Knob at the junction of Highways 161-51, two-and-a-half miles from Clover.

LOST IN HISTORY

History, for some mysterious reason, failed to clearly mark the site of the first

Tryon Courthouse.

In the laws of North Carolina—1774, Chapter XII, the following is found:

"Whereas the commissioners heretofore by law appointed for erecting and building a courthouse, prison and stocks for the County of Tryon by reason of the South boundary line, have neglected to discharge the trust reposed in them within the time limited; and whereas the money collected from the inhabitants of the said county for that purpose remain in the hands of the sheriffs and other persons unappropriated. . . ."

Cyrus B. King, assistant state archivist for South Carolina, pointed out that from this preamble to a law that goes on to appoint new commissioners, it would appear that no courthouse was built prior to March, 1774.

A letter from W. L. McDowell Jr., acting director of South Carolina Archives Department, to Mrs. Nan Weller Carson, said in part:

"Our original copy of Mouzon's map published on May

30, 1775, indicates the New Acquisition boundary but not site of the Tryon County Courthouse. We also have a certified copy of Henry Mouzon Jr.'s 'Map of Part of the Counties of Mecklenburg and Tryon lately added to the Province of South Carolina' which was surveyed in 1772 but it does not indicate the location of a courthouse."

Thus it was that W. J. Davis, who resides on a farm on Faulkner Rd., some three miles from Clover, uncovered what history had hidden.

But he had the help of an ex-slave who has long been dead.

With the erection of the marker, the search is at an end.

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Davis Hopes To Restore Foundation Of Courthouse

By RAY JIMISON

CLOVER, S. C.—W. J. Davis has visions of restoring the foundation of the original Tryon County Courthouse near here.

Davis has personal recollections of having visited the site of the ancient courthouse back in 1914 when ruins of the old structure were still visible.

As chairman of the historical marker committee, Davis hopes to see that a road, or trail, is opened to the site which now is almost inaccessible.

He hopes the pillars of the old building can be restored. "I hope to help get a road cut to the site. Then, I can set the old pillars up," he declared.

DISCOVERED IT

It was Davis, after a search that covered years, who found the site of the old courthouse.

Until his discovery, historical references told only that a portion of York District (county) formerly belonged to North Carolina. It was known that it was part of a county known as Tryon.

Included were the present North Carolina counties of Gaston, Lincoln, and Catawba.

The Courthouse of Tryon was said to have been located "near where the road from Salisbury to Smith's Ford on Broad River now crosses the road from York to Lincolnton, known as the Kings Mountain Rd."

Another reference refers to the courthouse as having been in Kings Mountain Township near Bethany Church.

At any rate, all references apparently placed the site near Henry's Knob some two-and-a-half miles from Clover.

The New Acquisition came about in 1772 when portions of North Carolina became part of South Carolina. Included was the Tryon County Courthouse.

Davis tells of his discovery of the site this way:

HIS STORY

"Back when I was a boy, I often heard my grandfather, Isaac N. Davis, speak of Tryon District. Also, I heard C. Thad Thomas speak of it. It was located three-quarters-of-a-mile south of Henry's Knob in what is known as Henry Woods.

"Uncle Jake Falls, an old ex-slave, was born as a Henry and was given to Mr. Henry's daughter, who married a Herndon. He was then sold to Eli Falls.

"Then, in 1914, he moved on my place. That's when I talked to him about the Tryon Courthouse. I asked him if he could show me the place where it had been and he said he could if I gave him time.

"We went to the site one evening. At that time, you could still see where the pillars and decayed logs had been. He showed me the spring where they got water. Today, you can still see the spring drain. Uncle Jake's father had showed him this place many times before.

ONCE A YEAR

"Back when the courthouse was in its glory, officials would come once a year to hold court. They would stay at S. Henry's about 30 days or longer each year.

"Walter Beamguard and I measured the place and it was 20 x 40 feet as well as I remember. We got that information for Andy Tate. Now, those papers containing that data cannot be located.

"He told us that when the line was established between North and South Carolina, it was run two-and-one-half miles north of Henry's Knob. The courthouse was moved to what is known as Tryon School."

Davis said that the site of the marker in Gaston County (at Tryon School) is in what was known at one time as Pickney District. He has two land grants, one recorded in Pickney District and the other in Tryon District.

York County was also a part of Pickney District.

Davis has two other land grants in his possession. One is from King George dated Feb. 19, 1791, for 220 acres of land. Davis's father bought the farm in 1898 and the ancient paper went with it.

This is where Mr. Davis now lives and farms. At 72, he works every day in his fields. The farm and the land grant paper were handed down to him.

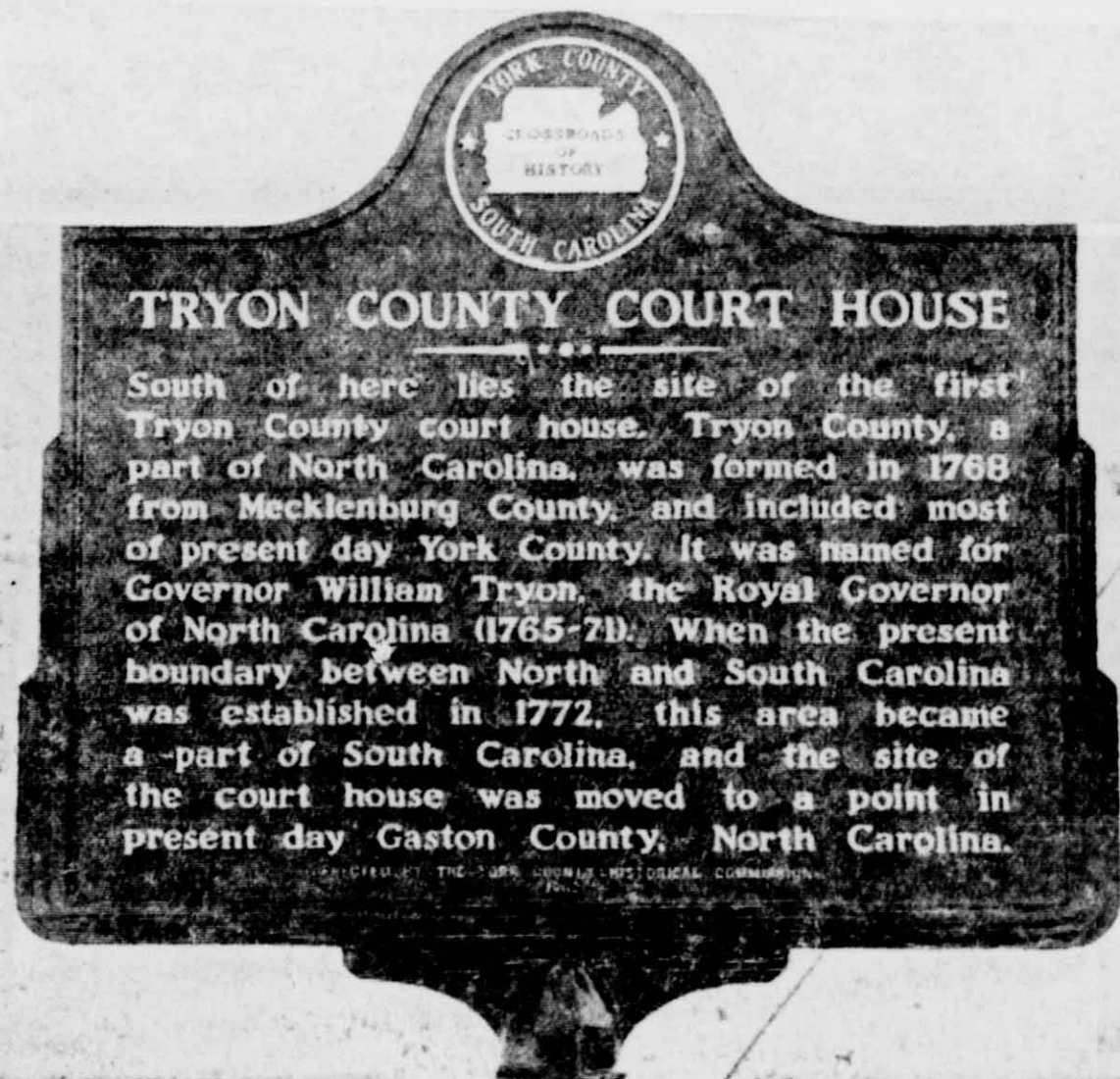
His other grant is from King George III, but Davis does not have the land to go with this paper.

Davis says that one of his ancestors was king of Wales.



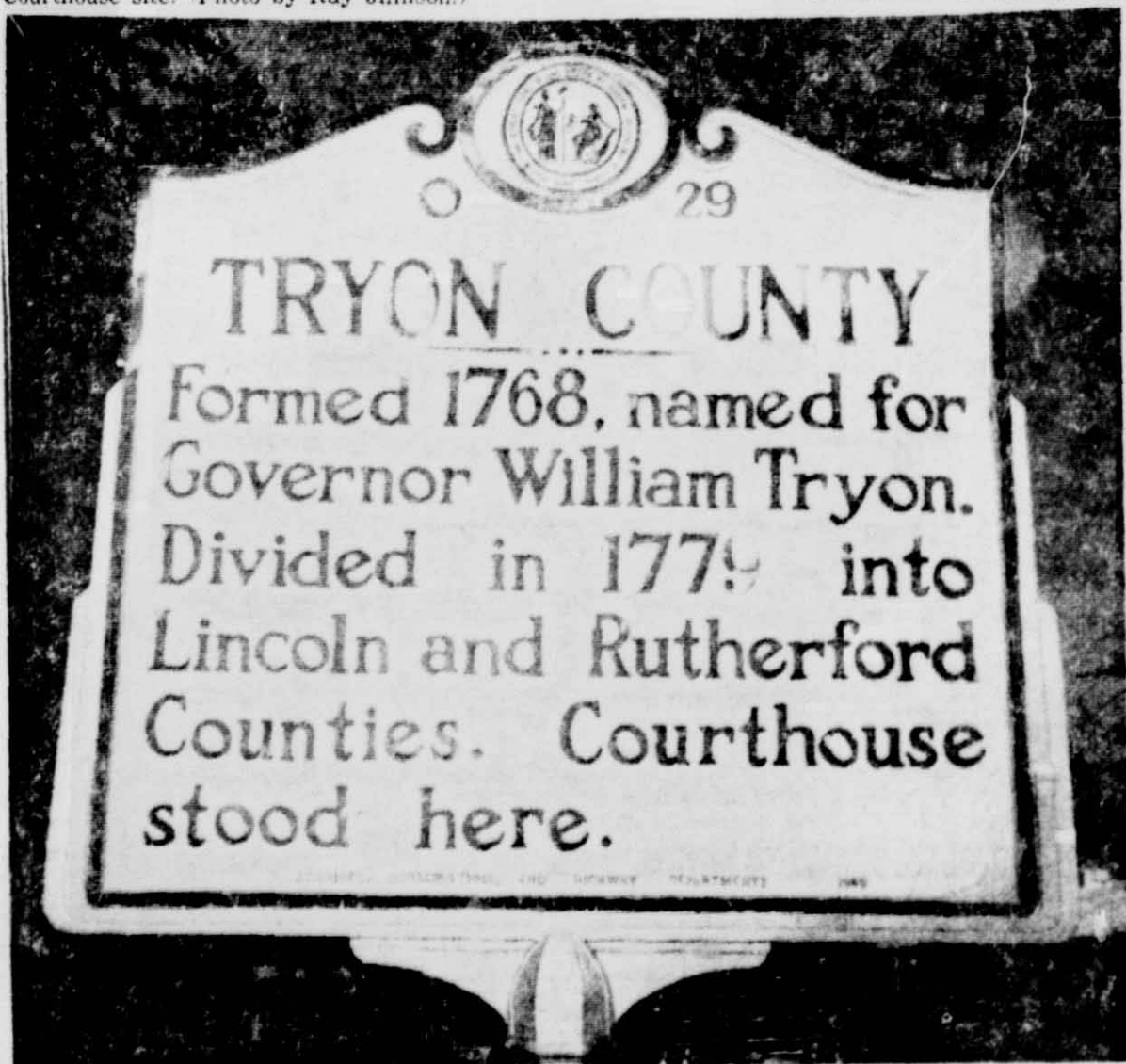
MADE DISCOVERY

W. J. Davis, a descendant of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, is credited with discovery of the original Tryon County Courthouse site. (Photo by Ray Jimison.)



THE ORIGINAL

This marker is in South Carolina, near Clover, and calls attention to the first Tryon County Courthouse. (Photo by Bob Glendy.)



NO COURTHOUSE?

This marker is in North Carolina, at Tryon School, and calls attention to the Second Tryon County Courthouse. W. J. Davis says this courthouse was never built but was housed in one room of Christine Mauney's home. (Photo by Ray Jimison.)

-THE GASTONIA GAZETTE, Sun., April 28, 1963

Kindness of:
Mrs. Jessie Huey Laurence
Rock Hill, S.C.