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Lancaster News - March 15, 1940 - "March of Progress" etc.
Lancaster News 3-15-40
"In of P" ed

Evolution of Lancaster County Given in Detail

By A. S. Salley

Prior to April 12, 1768, the territory which now constitutes Lancaster County was merely a part of South Carolina. It formed no part of any subdivision of the province. On that date, by "An Act for establishing Courts, building Gaols, and appointing Sheriffs and other officers, for the more convenient administration of justice in this Province," the province was divided into seven judicial districts: Charles Town, Georgetown, Beaufort, Orangeburg, Cheraws, Camden and Ninety-Six.

Camden District was bounded by the line which divided Prince Frederick's Parish and St. Mark's Parish, Santee, Congaree and Broad rivers and a northwest line from the northernmost corner of Williamsburgh Township to Lynch's Creek and by that creek to the North Carolina line. The territory now within Lancaster County was within those bounds—a part of Camden District.

Immediately prior to that date the only legal subdivisions in South Carolina were the parishes. They were legislative, ecclesiastical and, to a limited extent, administrative units. The voters of each parish elected representatives to the General Assembly at irregular elections. Every Easter Monday they elected Church Wardens and Vestrymen for the parish. These officers employed the ministers and clerks of the parish, levied a tax for the poor in the parish and disbursed that tax for the benefit of the paupers and for the schooling of those children in the parish whose parents could not afford them schooling. What is now Lancaster County was indefinitely within St. Mark's Parish, which was established May 21, 1757. The Act establishing the parish directed that the northwesternmost line of Williamsburgh Township be extended to the Peedee and Santee rivers "and all the lands situate to the northward of the said line" was constituted St. Mark's Parish.

Section 4. of the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina provided: "Each province shall be divided into counties, each county shall consist of eight seignories, eight baronies, & four precincts, each precinct shall consist of six collonies."

The Lords Proprietors of Carolina on May 10, 1682 issued "Instructions for Maurice Mathews, Esqr. or the Surveyor General of Carolina for the time being" declaring that "for want of having Countys set out and divided into squares wee cannot come as neare as wee desire to the forme of government in Carolina appointed by our fundamentall Constitutions, & that with-out haveing the

Countys so set out land cannot well be devided according to the ballance as our said Constitutions doe direct," and directing the laying off of three counties, Berkeley, Colleton and Craven. The last named county was to be laid off north of Berkeley, "five squares fronting to ye sea and Eight squares deep."

Thus we see that for the time being the only use to be made of these little counties along the coast, extending inland not over thirty-five miles, was to enable the Lord's Proprietors to grant the proper number of seigniories and baronies allotted to a county, after which they would be able to dispose of the rest of the lands to settlers. Each county was allowed representation in the General Assembly in proportion to population. Each county had a sheriff who was also the chief judge of the county. He also supervised the elections of members of the General Assembly.

In 1716 the parish was made the legislative unit and that function of the county was discarded.

By an Act ratified September 20, 1721, county courts were established in the four counties then existing in South Carolina. The court for Craven County was to be held at Echaw, St. James's Parish, Santee. This function for the counties was soon abandoned, and there was thereafter no other use made of the counties than to locate lands thereby and furnish names by which to indentify four militia regiments.

Prior to September 22, 1733, Craven County extended from Awendaw Creek to Santee River, but on that date the bounds of that county were stretched across the Santee by an Act directing commissioners to start a line at the head of Seewee River or Awendaw Creek "and from thence run back a course North-west five-and-forty degrees, and mark a fair line, until they come to Santee river, which line shall be deemed and forever hereafter accounted to be the bounds between Berkley and Craven county; and from the end of said line, the river upward shall be the bounds between the said counties; and that the several other county lines shall be likewise run according to the ancient course, Whensoever application shall be made to his Excellency the Governour, or to the Governour for the time being, for the running the same."

Thereafter anyone who secured a grant to land, or purchased land, to the east of Santee, Congaree and Broad rivers described it, or had it described, as being in Craven County. That part of South Carolina which in 1785 was created as Lancaster County and in 1798 converted into Lan-

caster district thus came to be regarded as in Craven County. With the creation of the districts in 1768 that function of the counties which had been retained from proprietary days, that of locating lands, passed out. All that was left to remind that there had ever been counties called Colleton, Berkeley and Craven

were three militia regiments that bore those names. The Craven County Regiment was organized about 1740 when the section later covered by Lancaster was without settlers. The men of that regiment lived in the territory now embraced by Williamsburgh and Georgetown Counties. As settlements increased other regiments, bearing local names, were organized.

Prior to 1776 if a man residing in what is now Lancaster County, desired to vote for two men to represent St. Mark's Parish in the Common's House of Assembly he had to journey all the way down to the parish church located in the present Clarendon County. Additional parishes would doubtless have been established to make it more convenient to voters, to enable the settlers to have churches, ministers, schoolmasters, vital records and other advantages enjoyed within the existing parishes, but the British government prevented it by vetoing bills passed for that purpose. That was one of the arguments offered by the leaders of the revolutionary party for independence. So when a call was made in 1774 for an extra-legal assembly called a provincial congress the upper part of South Carolina was cut up into extra-legal units called election districts. At the election held in December, 1774, for delegates to the first Congress the "District Eastward of Wateree River" included what is now Lancaster County. That district was allowed ten delegates. Those elected were: Col. Richard Richardson, Joseph Kershaw, Matthew Singleton, Thomas Sumter, Aaron Loocock, William Richardson, Robert Patton, Robert Carter, William Wilson and Ely Kershaw. Most of these men lived near Camden, but I believe Robert Patton lived in what is now Lancaster.

At the election held in August, 1775, the first seven named of the previous delegation were reelected. Three new delegates replaced Carter, Wilson and Ely Kershaw. One of these was William Massey who undoubtedly lived in what is now Lancaster County. This second provincial congress set up an independent government in South Carolina, by adopting a constitution and resolving itself into a general assembly, the first of the State, March 26, 1776. The General Assembly then elected a president, a vice-president and a full force of State officers, executive and judicial. John Rutledge was made president, Henry Laurens vice-president and William Henry Drayton, chief-justice.

By an ordinance ratified March 16, 1783, commissioners were appointed for each of the districts for dividing the same into counties "in order to the establishment of courts of inferior jurisdiction." These counties corresponded, as regards their functions, about to our present majesterial districts, only they covered much more territory. Thomas Sumter, Richard Richardson, Frederick Kimball, Thomas Taylor, Richard Winn, Edward Lacey and John Moffatt were the commissioners named to lay off the counties and "recommended a proper place as nearly central as possible in each of the said counties, for erecting court houses and goals, and shall make report thereof to the first session of the General Assembly, to be held after the last day of December next."

The purposes of this Ordinance were carried out under the terms of an Act ratified March 12, 1785, Seven counties were established in Camden District. They were Clarendon, Richland, Fairfield, Claremont, Lancaster, Chester and York.

Lancaster County was bounded by the Wateree River "beginning at the mouth of Pine-tree creek, thence up the river to the mouth of Twelve Mile Creek, thence to the North Carolina boundary, thence along the said boundary to the north branch of Lynch's Creek, thence down the same to the fork thereof, thence along the line of Claremont County to the beginning."

It will be observed that the greater part of the present Kershaw county, including the town of Camden, was included in Lancaster County. In 1791 a portion of Lancaster County was erected into Kershaw County, and by an Act ratified December 21, 1792, the line between the two counties was to "commence at and run from Stark's ferry, on the east side of the Wateree river in a direct line to the ford of Hanging Rock Creek, on the main road leading from Camden to Waxhaw's, from thence down the main Charleston road to George Millers, thence in a direct line to Harrison's Ford, on Great Lynch's Creek."

By an Act ratified December 21, 1798, the nine districts then existing in the State were divided up into twenty-four districts, and the counties and county courts were abolished. Camden District was divided up into six districts, Sumter, Kershaw, Fairfield, Chester, Lancaster, and York, and the name Camden was abandoned as a district name. Lancaster District was to comprehend the county of that name, according to its present limits.

There have been some disputes in the years since the passing of that Act over the line between Lancaster and Kershaw, but not much territory has changed from one district, or county, to the other, so that for one hundred and forty-one years Lancaster County has functioned,

first under the term district, and then under the term county, to which it was changed by the constitution of 1868.

Apr 21 '41