

The Hunter and Indian Trader Came Here Before the Settlers

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Old records either in Lancaster or Columbia fail to reveal the identity of the first white settler in Lancaster county. The first deed to land in Lancaster county was made in 1751 to William McIlhenny but the fact that white people were buried in this county previous to that date is a well known fact. It is said and widely accepted that the first burial of a white man in Waxhaw cemetery occurred in 1728.

It is probable that the first white settlers in this county were hunters as a number of them braved the dangers that were incurred and built log cabins in the upper part of the state in the days when the buffalo still roamed the hills and valleys. Later on came the Indian traders and we know but little of their activities although the names of a number of such traders who dealt with the Catawbas are among the state records.

The only tribe which could be called a Lancaster county tribe were the Waxhaws, a small tribe which lived in this county in about the same locality which was afterward called The Waxhaws. At that time the Catawbas lived along the river that bears the same name and this tribe was one of the larger tribes of the state at this early day.

It was the Cherokees and the Catawbas who supplied the white traders with the largest amount of skins and furs. Of course other tribes of Indians dealt in such articles but these two tribes were responsible for the greatest amount of business done by the early traders.

In 1747 there were exported from Charleston two hundred pounds in weight of beaver skins, and seven hundred and twenty hogsheads of deer-skins worth nearly two million dollars, according to John H. Logan in his History of Upper South Carolina. Even then it was said the trade had declined as the deer were becoming less plentiful.

The first records in this state concerning the Waxhaws and Catawbas were registered in 1709. We know little of the Waxhaw tribes as they were practically wiped out by a great plague of smallpox which swept over the state before the middle of the eighteenth century.

In 1738 a slave ship from Africa arrived in Charleston, carrying with it the small-pox. It was communicated to the town and thence a party of Indian traders conveyed it to the Indians where it acted like a spark upon the dry grass of the prairie. Indians in all sections of the state died like flies and the number of Catawbas was greatly reduced while the Waxhaws were so diminished by this plague that they ceased to exist as a tribe.

Adair, a historian who wrote of the early days gives the following description of the spread of this disease:

"At first it made slow advances; and as it was a foreign and to them a strange disease, they were so deficient in proper skill, that they alternately applied a regimen of hot and cold things to those who were infected. The old religious doctors and old Magi who were consulted on so alarming a crisis, reported that the sickness had been sent among them on account of the adulterous conduct of their young married people who in the past year had violated the ancient laws of marriage. To those fla-

gitous crimes they ascribed the present disease, as a necessary effect of divine anger. However, it was thought needful, on this occasion to endeavor to stop the progress of such a dangerous disease."

"Immediately they ordered the reputed sinners to lie out of doors, day and night with their breasts frequently open to the night dews to cool the fever. They were likewise afraid that the disease would pollute their houses, and by that means cause their deaths. Instead of applying warm remedies, they at last in every visit, poured cold water on their naked breasts, sung their religious mystical songs with a doleful tune and shook a salabash, with the bubbles over the sick, using a great many frantic gestures, by way of incantation."

"When they found their theological regimen had not the desired effect, but that the infection gained upon them they held a second consultation and deemed it the best method to sweat their patients, and plunge them into the river, which was accordingly done. Their rivers being cold many of them died. Upon this, all the Magi and conjurers broke their old consecrated psychic pots, and threw away all the other pretended holy things which they had used as medicines, imagining they had lost their divine power by being polluted, and shared the common fate of their country. A great many killed themselves; for being naturally proud, they are always peeping into looking glasses by which means seeing themselves disfigured, without hope of regaining their former beauty some shot themselves, others cut their throats; some stabbed themselves with knives and others with sharp pointed canes. Many threw themselves with sullen madness into the fire, and there slowly expired, as if they had been utterly divested of the native power of feeling pain."

Such was the character of the Indians with whom the Indian traders did business. These Indian traders

were colorful characters and while they made large profits they had to undergo many hardships in this unsettled country.

Names of a number of early traders who dealt with the Catawbas are on record in Columbia archives but there were no Indian villages that can be located on maps. Names of Indian towns are available but their location is not known.

In the earliest years of Indian trading no rules and regulations were made by the provincial assembly for carrying on trade with the Indians. As this trade attracted men of desperate character who had little sense of any responsibility it passed in 1707 an act which required all Indian traders to be licensed. The act read as follows:

"Whereas, the greater number of those persons that trade among the Indians in amity with this government, do generally lead loose, vicious lives, to the scandal of the Christian religion, and do likewise oppress the people among whom they live, by their unjust and illegal actions, which, if not prevented, may in time tend to the destruction of the province: therefore, be it enacted, that after the first day of October next, every trader that shall live and deal with any Indians, except the Itawans, Sewees, Santees, Stonos, Kiawas, Kussoes, Edistoos and St. Helenas,

for the purpose of trading in furs, skins or slaves, or any other commodity, shall first have a license under the hand and seal of the Commissioners hereafter to be named; for which he shall pay the public receiver the full sum of eight pounds, current money. The license shall continue in force one year and no longer, and he shall give a surety note of one hundred pounds currency."

Although the province had good intentions and would have protected the Indians against the sale of rum and enslavement by the white traders these evils persisted after the enactment of the license law. An Indian Agent was appointed but he was not able to enforce the law in the vast wilderness over which the traders carried on their operations.

It was in 1711 that the circumstances arising from some of these abuses, occasioned the first notice in state records of the Waxhaw Indians and the Warlike Catawbas. The superintendent, John Wright, was ordered by the board to proceed with an expedition to Savannah town and thence send messengers to the Waxhaws, Esaws and Catawbas, inviting their head men to meet him and the chiefs of Savannah town at the house of one Benjamin Clea, where he was to inquire strictly into all the complaints recently made to the government by those nations.

The traffic in Indian slaves continued for a number of years to a certain extent. In 1754 when the French and Indian War was on the following letter was sent to the In-

dian board by Mathew Toole who was a licensed trader with the Catawbas: "The Catawbas held a council yesterday in the king's house, and have resolved to go with the English against the French. They want me to and my people to go with them, and we are willing to go, even without pay, on one condition—that we be allowed to keep, as our own property, whatever plunder in the way of Indian slaves that we may be able to capture."

In 1718 a Catawba trader named Eleazer Wiggon represented to the state board that the Indians were greatly dissatisfied with the Charleston traffic claiming that traders from Virginia were coming to this state with more attractive offers for their pelts.

In York county is a Buffalo creek and just over the line from Lancaster in Kershaw county is a community called Buffalo. These names were evidently given because of the prevalence of these animals in the early days.

When the first white settler entered this county he beheld a romantic and pleasant site. Logan describes the section as follows:

"The face of this region of romance, interspersed with forests, and prairies and vast brakes of cane—the latter often stretching in unbroken lines of evergreen for hundreds of miles, from the alluvial country on the south, to the interior sources of the streams, was not surpassed in picturesque beauty and grandeur by other sections. As late as 1775, the woodlands, carpeted with grass, and the wild pea-vine growing as high as a horse's back, and wild flowers of every hue, were the constant admiration of the traveler and adventurous pioneer."

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