

In 1700s, a trip to Charleston was a bold adventure

Going to Charleston in the pre-Revolutionary years was an adventure to be remembered for a lifetime.

The planning took weeks, maybe months. No one would dare go alone, so neighbors were recruited.

Sometimes it was necessary to visit the courthouse; Charleston had the only court in all of South Carolina. More often it was the need to go to market.

The Upcountry produced beef, hemp and tobacco, all highly desirable to Charleston traders, whether used locally or exported.

In preparation for the Charleston trip, trade items had to be gathered up, along with the necessary wagons and draft horses. Only the well-to-do farmers had teams of horses. None had mules.

George Washington imported the first mules in America after the Revolution, in the 1780s. Even then, it was many years before mules, always more expensive



**LOUISE
PETTUS**
*Nearby
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than horses, became common in this area.

Giant barrels, called hogsheads, were ordered from the local cooper (the hogsheads didn't make return trips). The hogshead had to be fitted with parts called hoop feloes, gudgeons and shafts so that it became a primitive cart pulled either by a single horse or by two men.

The trip was leisurely. Cows accompanied the party. They had to be strung together by ropes and herded together for their slow-paced journey. They were milked morning and evening, and the party had to allow them some time to graze.

The milk furnished a substantial portion of the traveler's diet, at least on the trip down. The cows would be sold in Charleston and part of the money used to stock other foodstuffs for the return trip.

The whole trip took at least a month and was full of adventure. About the Charleston trip, an elderly York County minister, the Rev. Robert Lathan, recalled in 1876: "It was generally understood that some trick was to be worked on every one that was met. Sometimes in working these tricks the moral law was not observed very strictly."

Lathan gave two examples:

After the close of the Revolutionary War, it seems, four York County men set out for Charleston with a drove of cattle. One of the men was Ezekiel Price. The party took what was then called the "Bratton road" toward Chester-ville. The road joined an east-west road about a mile north of Chester's courthouse town.

When they reached that point, a gentleman on a fine horse was coming from the direction of the Catawba River. He inquired of the four cattle-drivers if they could tell him the direction to Augusta. Price answered by telling him to turn back on the road he had just been. It was a typical traveler's trick.

The traveler ignored the false directions and rode on. When the four drivers got to Chesterville, they passed an inn. The man who had been falsely directed stepped out and, without uttering a word, seized Price and threw him on the ground. While holding Price's throat, the stranger placed his knees on Price's chest and violently choked the man.

When Price's tongue protruded, the attacker bit off the end, rose up and said, "Now tell another man a lie." Price had to have medical treatment and could not go on to Charleston.

The other story occurred before the Revolution. "Big Jim" Henry, who lived near Kings Mountain,

made a trip to Charleston. On his return, near Yorkville, he met a wagon driven by a large man "advanced in years."

Henry stopped him and said, "I have been to Charleston and am nearly home again and have not had a fight yet. Get down sir; I am determined to have a fight before I go home." About that time the man's son came up and said he would fight in his father's place.

Lathan wrote: "Both stripped and had at it with as much energy as if they had been enemies for years. It will no doubt gratify the reader to know that Big Jim Henry got not only a fight but a sound thrashing. Who the young man was, Big Jim Henry never knew; but the thrashing he never forgot."

Lathan thought that a modern day fight (remember, he is writing in 1876) is "... a poor concern. It usually occurs at a place where the parties are sure to be separated about the time they strike the first blow. They foam at the mouth and

rant. This was not the way those old fellows fought. They felt their manhood, and they had an ambition to try the powers of any one who claimed to be a bully."

It was also pointed out that in the "old days" only fists were used, no big knives or pocket pistols. The fight would result only in black eyes and sore ribs.

The minister also observed that, "A man who would have gone to court in those early days of our republic with an assault and battery case would have been regarded by everyone in the community as a consummate coward and a sneaking puppy. . . . A fight cost the community nothing, and a good sound thrashing proved more effective in reforming the disturbers of the public peace than either the county jail or state penitentiary of the present day do."

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.