

Belair in Lancaster County

Railroad bypassed community.

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In the Indian Land of Lancaster County, there is a community called Belair. No one knows how it got the name.

Some say it was named by Lafayette and that the word is French for "good air." The major flaw with that argument is that Lafayette was never in Belair (although it has been written many times that he was).



Nearby history

LOUISE PETTUS

Others say that there was an old stagecoach stop with an inn that had a large bell to toll the arrival of the stage. The bell was held up by tall timbers — thus, "Bell (in the) Air."

The earliest use found is in the name given by Fowler Williams to his school, Belair Academy, which was in operation at least by 1808. In 1813 Belair Post Office was an official designation and Fowler Williams was the postmaster. The name stuck.

As the years went by and Indian Land became an official township of the county, there were four communities or subdivisions. They are Belair, Barbersville, Pleasant Valley and Osceola. All except Osceola are north of Twelve Mile Creek, which was the southern boundary of Lancaster County's section of Indian Land.

Belair is north of Twelve Mile Creek, bounded on the west by the Catawba River, east by the N.C. line and north by Pleasant Valley. On a larger scale, Belair is 10 miles south of Pineville, N.C., 7 miles west of Fort Mill and 16 miles north of Lancaster.

Belair Village was surveyed Nov. 12, 1840, by John H. Rooker, who in the next two or three years would survey most of Belair's lands for the landholders who were exchanging Catawba Indian leases for state titles. The village was 10 acres in size with three streets: Main, Troup and Meacham. On the plate the name is spelled Bellair.

Belair Village failed to grow although it had several stores and the office of Dr. Charles L. Clawson. In 1849 Francis Spencer of York district purchased the entire village.

At that time there was a stir about building the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta Rail Road. Some powerful interests, including John Springs III of Fort Mill, were arguing that the roadbed should be laid entirely east of the Catawba River. If that happened, Belair was a good candidate for a depot.

Instead, the railroad chose the present Southern Railroad route and created the towns of Rock Hill and Fort Mill. We can only speculate that, if the railroad land had taken the alternative route, Belair might have become the dominant town in the Catawba Indian Land and Rock Hill would still be a rural landscape — an interesting thought.

Belair's first church was called Six Mile Creek Presbyterian Church and was on the border of the Camden-to-Salisbury road that served as the boundary line between North and South Carolina. The founding date of the church is lost but a congregation applied for a minister as early as 1768.

The oldest known tombstone in Old Six Mile Cemetery is that of Col. William Hagins, who died in 1790. Hagins lived on Tar Kiln branch, which empties into Six Mile Creek. Until the 1880s Six Mile Cemetery served as the community's burial ground, no matter the person's church affiliation.

The second church was Mount Arrarat Methodist Church, founded in 1835 by Rev. Adam Ivy and his Methodist friends. David and Eliza Hagins let the Methodists have 6½ acres off their Indian lease. The church lot plate is interesting in that coming off the odd-shaped church site is a long narrow strip of road two poles wide that embraced the wagon road leading to the main road. Eventually, the name Mount Arrarat was dropped and the church today is called Belair United Methodist Church.

In the pre-Civil War era Belair had a number of plantations larger than average. The largest were owned by families named Doby, Ivy, Massey, Stewart, Morrow, Hagins, Porter, Rosser and Moore. The Doby name remains on Doby's Bridge Road but John M. Doby sold out in 1856 and moved to Arkansas, where he founded a community called Dobysville.

John Doby was the last to obtain a Catawba lease on the area along the Catawba River known as the Kings Bottoms. It was both the site of a major Catawba village and a stretch of river bottoms that is still considered the richest soil on the river.

When John Lawson traveled through the area in 1701, he said that he saw one field 7 miles long — roughly the distance from where Doby's Bridge spans Sugar Creek southward to the village of Van Wyck.

Belair's first known industry was a "factory" owned by Col. William Hagins. It apparently was a primitive cloth weaving operation. Hagins came to the area in 1745 but the date of establishment is not known. The next industries

were grist mills. At least by 1830 Allen Morrow had a mill on the confluence of Six Mile Creek and Twelve Mile Creek that sawed plank as well as ground corn. At that site Morrow cut the plank to build a replacement Six Mile Church in 1835 that he located on his own land about a mile and a half south of the old location.

Several plantation owners, Adam Ivy, John Doby, Benjamin S. Massey and James Stewart, combined their resources to build a large flour mill they called "Turkey Head Merchant Mills" on the Catawba River at the site of the Kings Bottoms Indian village about 1850. Three of the men — Ivy, Massey and Doby — were partners in a gold mine that was noted in a book by Oscar Lieber, state geologist.

It is likely that they invested their gold profits in the Turkey Head mills. In 1855 Ivy bought out the other interests. The Ivy Mill, as it later was called, was destroyed by the flood of 1916.

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