

**JOHN DUNCAN-A FIRST SETTLER**  
John Duncan—Upcountry Pioneer  
Pioneers Played Rough Games

John Duncan, Scotsman who came to America in 1752, about 7 years later was in the Waxhaws area of Lancaster County accompanied by a slave he had purchased in Pennsylvania along with a wagon drawn by two fine horses. It is said he was the first slave-holder to settle in the upcountry of South Carolina. And the wagon was the first vehicle of its type to roll over the soil between the Broad and Saluda Rivers.

Duncan didn't stay long in the Waxhaws but headed for the area where present day Saluda and Laurens counties join—following the same trail as the Calhoun and Pickens families who also had stayed in the Waxhaws for a short time.

Duncan was not only one of the most affluent upcountry early settlers but one of the most observant. In his old age he looked back and gave his son a wonderful description of the countryside, the people, the culture and habits of the pioneer movement he had participated in. The son wrote down his father's exploits as well as his own. John Duncan spent 7 years in the Carolina backcountry before moving on as a pioneer in Tennessee.

Duncan's descriptions of the South Carolina backcountry were sent to Robert Mills who wrote Mills' "Statistics of South Carolina," which accompanied his Atlas. In Mills' "Statistics . . ." one can find the most detailed information available on each SC District's history, its flora and fauna and something of the various cultures that settled this state.

Duncan wrote about the hunting dress. Buckskin furnished the material for shirt, leggings and moccasins with buckles and beads on them. He said, "the men clubbed their hair and tied it up in little silk or deer skin bags." Duncan continued, "Another time they wore their hair cued and rolled in black ribald or bear's gut dressed and dyed black. Again the men shaved off their hair, and wore white linen caps, with ruffles around them."

As for women's styles they seem more drab than the men's. "The women's dress was long-cared caps, Virginia bonnets, short or bed-gowns, long gowns, stays, stomachers, quilted petticoats and high wooden-heeled shoes."

The pioneers loved games, both indoor and out. Duncan wrote of "whist" and "pitch dollars." Someone would put up a beef, or some other property, to be shot for. The men "went fox hunting, on deer drives, threw nine pins, wrestled, jumped, ran foot races, fiddled, danced, played blind man's buff, also shuffle the brogue, whatever that may have been, rimming the thimble, selling of ponds, crab and taylir, grinding the bottle brother, I'm bobbed, black bear dropping the glove and swimming and diving." It was an active life that kept them fit and trim.

The lives of the pioneers were obviously not as bland as present-day movies and books (especially textbooks) seem to make them. Indeed, some of the "sports" were so vicious that they are outlawed today. "Rough and Tumble" was a form of wrestling that prevailed in which men who participated let their

fingernails grow long and toughened them by hold their fingernails over burning candles—the better to gouge out eyes and rip out tongues.

James Duncan, the son, fought with a Colonel Grant and his men in wars with the Indians and later in the Revolutionary War. His hunting ground was the whole country between the Catawba and the Saluda rivers—the same hunting ground of the Catawba Indians who proved to be on friendly terms with the white hunters. There was more than enough game for all.

It was a tough life. About the pioneers it was said that, “They were men to whom it can be perfectly natural to build a bark hut far in the depths of the forest, as was the practice of the hunters, for a night’s lodging with no other tool than their tomahawks, and not only prepare their meal, after securing it with their trusty rifles, but sleep without blankets under their improvised shelters lying on a pile of twigs and rush. . . .The pioneer training was no small item as it contributed to gaining our independence over disciplined troops.”

By Louise Pettus