

A shared heritage links 3 counties

The common thread dates to first settlers – nearly all Scots-Irish

York, Lancaster and Chester have some common characteristics. The original settlement of all three counties was overwhelmingly Scots-Irish. Most of these came down from the western frontier of Virginia and Pennsylvania during the French and Indian Wars.

The first settlement was in Lancaster County in an area called the Waxhaws, named for an Indian tribe that had been absorbed by the Catawba Indians several decades before white settlers came. Geographically, the heaviest influx came to the rich country between the present-day town of Lancaster and the Catawba Indian land north of Twelve Mile Creek.

By 1756 the Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Church had been established. The Presbyterian synod listed about 120 families in attendance.

In 1956 the church marked its 200th anniversary. One of the speakers was Julian Starr, editor of the Lancaster News and a descendant of those early settlers. Starr, a prize-winning journalist for his reporting of the Lindbergh baby kidnapping case, mused that

NEARBY HISTORY

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there must have been something special about the Waxhaws. He said he had made a list of distinguished Americans who had roots in the tiny community. He had 96 names on the list (which was considerably more than the 1956 membership of the church).

Lancaster County is the native ground of some interesting and important people. The best known are President Andrew Jackson, Dr. J. Marion Sims (considered the father of gynecology), astronaut Charles Duke (who walked on the moon), Col. Elliott White Springs (aviator, author and mill owner) and Gen. William Richardson Davie (Revolutionary War hero, governor of North Carolina, founder of UNC Chapel Hill, Jefferson's envoy to France).

Lancaster County also has more "history" in the sense that it abounds in historic places and events to chronicle:

- Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Church, the first church in the S.C. Upcountry.
- Important Revolutionary War battle sites Buford Battleground, Hanging Rock.
- Andrew Jackson State Park.
- The tour markers of George

Washington's 1791 stops.

■ Two Robert Mills-designed historic buildings (the courthouse and jail).

■ Haile Gold Mine, the most productive gold mine east of the Mississippi River.

The Waxhaws community had an unusual number of natives who entered politics. Besides a U.S. president, there was Stephen D. Miller, S.C. governor (and also father of the famed Civil War diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut); William Smith, a judge and U.S. senator (represented York County but was born in the Waxhaws and educated there); James Hervey Witherspoon, a S.C. lieutenant governor; and his son of the same name, a member of the Confederate Congress; and current Gov.

Jim Hodges, a native of Lancaster.

Business leaders native to the Waxhaws include William Henry Belk, founder of Belk stores; William States Lee, designer of who designed the Duke Power system and father of a later president of Duke Power; and John T. Stevens, a leader in the cotton oil business. There were four Heath brothers who owned banks, cotton mills, railroads, a fire insurance company, cotton brokerage house, etc.

All of that, and today most people seem to think "Waxhaws" is a town in North Carolina that dropped its "s!"

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