

Dreadful floods regularly cut swath through Catawba Valley

Before the Catawba River was dammed, major periodic floods, or freshets as they were called, occurred with increasing frequency after the Civil War. The reason for this can be traced back to the extension of

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railroads into the mountains of North Carolina.

The railroads made it possible for timber interests to clear-cut the mountain forests and haul the lumber to market far more easily than it was possible to do when only

wagon-pulled oxen and horses were available.

Forest fires burned out the undergrowth. By the summer of 1901, the Catawba Valley of North Carolina had been laid barren with no attempt at reforestation. The inevitable happened when a great deal of rain fell in western North Carolina in July 1901. The freshet tore vegetation from the riverbanks and created new channels. Up and down the Catawba as far south as Camden, cornfields were washed away completely. Sand filled wheat fields 3 or 4 feet deep.

At Rock Hill, the Catawba's current ran 10 miles per hour, which was called a "terrific and harmful pace." It was the highest volume within memory. Farmers despondently figured that they would get low prices for the land if they could sell it. No one wanted to live on the river in those days. In addition to the flooding, there were swarms of mosquitoes.

Along came Dr. Gill Wylie, a Chester County native, who had made his fortune as a New York surgeon. He was able to gather enough money to build India

Hook dam. When James Duke, the tobacco tycoon, bought out Wylie, he also bought up the rights to the shoreline of the lakes created by electric power dams. In 1931, the federal government established the Great Smokies National Park and reforested millions of acres both in the park and outside.

No more great floods.

By 1800, it was the custom of many to attend the "Catawba Falls Picnic," held on May 1 of each year.

The shad were running upstream undeterred until 1904, when the building of the dam at Great Falls made it impossible for the fish, burdened with roe, to leap the barrier. As the crowds increased, some of the campers began arriving days before the big event in order to find a good campsite.

Just looking at the falls was a treat, but there were other pleasures, such as exploring the caves along the Catawba's banks at that spot. Some of the larger caves carried their own names such as "Wahseeiah's Cradle," "Lovers' Retreat" and "Haiglar's Council Chamber." The last is a reference to King Haiglar, a famed Catawba chief.

On April 30, 1890, the rain came down in buckets for more than two hours, drenching the picnickers who couldn't wait for the traditional May 1 party. People sought shelter in the caves, recesses and fissures. An observer reported that, in this instance, there were "more people than caves."

It is believed that J.P.A. Davidson of Pleasant Valley community in Indian Land was the first Confederate soldier to fire a musket in the Civil War.

Davidson left South Carolina on April 19, 1861, and fought in the

Battle of Bethel in Virginia on June 10. He carried the musket in numerous battles.

Davidson was captured at Gettysburg, Pa., and lost an arm. After the war, the bachelor boarded in various homes in the community, managing to survive on his pension of \$72 a year. He died in March 1916 at 74.

There was a time when all clothing was hand-sewn. If not made in the home, then the gentleman had a tailor and the lady had a favored seamstress. "Ready-made" clothing is, for the most part, a product of the 20th century. In the 1870s, Yorkville was a small town, but it also had a store owned by William Latimer that employed eight seamstresses. And Kate Russell also employed 8 seamstresses. Yorkville had at least 15 more seamstresses.

Some of the tailors and seamstresses were specialists, noted for a particular skill. One of the specialties was "mantua-making." A mantua was a style of dress that was loose-fitting and opened in the front. The mantua was widely used as a maternity dress. In 1889, Yorkville could boast of pioneers in the speciality. Mrs. M.A. Snider had nearly 20 years experience and Mrs. M.S.A. Bludworth had 17 years' experience.

"Hand-made" included a wide range of goods. The Carolina Buggy Co. of York, for instance, had 21 workmen who turned out eight buggies a week. The assembly line had not come into being, but there was some division of labor. Blacksmiths and their assistants were largely responsible for the wheels. Others prepared the wood, chiefly poplar, oak, hickory and ash.

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