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(S. C. Counties - York)

HILL'S IRON WORKS

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Many brave Revolutionary leaders came from York County, South Carolina. Among these brave leaders is found the name of William Hill, born in 1741 in Ireland and is said to have been of English stock transplanted to north Ireland.¹

A number of the family came to America at the same time. They first settled in York County, Pennsylvania but later all migrated south. This section in which William Hill settled was then known as the New Acquisition. It was a strip of land fourteen miles wide and sixty-five miles long that was awarded to South Carolina from North Carolina by a boundary commission in 1772.²

William Hill was probably attracted to this section by the belief then prevalent that the land which he bought was rich in iron ore. As late as 1826 this belief still existed for we find Robert

¹ Dumas Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, Volume IX, William Hill, 48.

² Yorkville Enquirer, October 28, 1919

Mills saying of it, "There is a mine near Hill's old iron works that is inexhaustible; it rises like a mountain in the plain, and is quite isolated; from the top of it you have a commanding view for about twenty miles round. The whole is an entire mass of iron ore about two miles in circuit."³

Hill was a man of property and bought a large tract of land on Allison Creek near the Catawba River. Before the Revolution he acquired grants aggregating some five thousand acres, in several localities but mainly near Allison Creek. There he built a home, a grain mill, and a saw mill, and in partnership with Isaac Hayne, a planter and breeder of fine horses from Colleton District, set up an Iron Works, although it was against the English law in 1770 for the colonist to manufacture.⁴ In March 1776 William Hill secured a loan of one thousand pounds currency from the South Carolina treasury to complete the iron works. In 1779 he advertised Aera Furnaces offering - wholesale or retail - farm **smith's tools** tools, kitchen ware, swivel guns and cannon up to

³ Robert Mills, Statistics of South Carolina, (Charleston, 1826), 771.

⁴ Yorkville Enquirer, October 28, 1919

four pounders with their balls. He also advertised for a hundred Negroes but had to send all the way to Troublesome Iron Works in Virginia for labor.⁵

The foundries were located on Allison Creek at what is known as Miller's Mill and Sam's Mill and the ore was brought from Nanny's Mountain,⁶ a distance of about two and one-half miles, over a tramway to this point.

The furnace operated on the catalan plan, the ore being reduced with charcoal from Hill's timber lands. The lime used came from Kings Creek near Broad River.

These works were a most important enterprise, and of great benefit to the whole vicinity. Farm tools, kitchen ware and in 1780 most of the different kinds of cannon balls⁷ used at the siege of Charleston - all came from Hill's Iron Works. Cannon were also made at the iron works, but one account says, "They

⁵ Malone, Dumas, Dictionary of American Biography, Volume IX, William Hill, 48.

⁶ This mountain according to History of York (York Chamber of Commerce) was named for William Hill's wife, but according to Dr. David Bigger it was named for his daughter-in-law, Nancy Cabeen.

⁷ A number of these cannon balls are now in the possession of Mr. Clyde Bigger, who lives near the site of Hill's Iron Works.

hardly deserve the name cannon, being small, rough, and unmanageable affairs."⁸

William Hill's warm championship of the patriot cause, before and during the Revolutionary War, and the invaluable military products marked his iron works for destruction by the British. Although carefully guarded, the iron works were burned by the British in June 1780, and Hill lost his entire establishment. Hill gives this account of it, "And from there a certain captain Hook⁹ with a Company of Horse and about 500 Tories came to the Iron Works, destroyed all the property they could not carry away. Burned the forge furnace, grist and saw mills together with all other buildings even to the Negro huts, and bore away about 90 Negroes all which was done before Col. Niel¹⁰ returned with the army to camp."¹¹

Governor Rutledge who visited the place later

⁸History of York, York Chamber of Commerce, 1.

⁹ Christian Huck, formerly a lawyer of Philadelphia.

¹⁰ Andrew Neel, who had been elected Colonel of the Regiment at the same time that William Hill was elected.

¹¹ Salley, A.S., Jr. (Editor), COL. William Hill's Memoirs of the Revolution; (Columbia, South Carolina, 1921), 8.

wrote to the South Carolina members of Congress,
 "It is really melancholy to see the desolated condition of Mr. Hill's plantation in the New Acquisition; all his fine iron works, mills, dwelling houses, and buildings of every kind, even his Negro houses reduced to ashes, and his wife and children in a little log hut."¹²

The loss of the iron works was felt both by the soldiers and the farmers. It was said to have been one of the bitterest blows which could have been inflicted by the enemy. The farmers did not know where to obtain implements necessary to till the soil and "feared they might be forced to return to the wooden plow."¹³

Nothing shows the deep feeling of the people of the vicinity concerning the loss of Hill's Iron Works more than the prayer offered by Elder John Miller, an Irish Whig of Rutherford County who was noted for his originality. More than one good Presbyterian echoed "Amen " to his prayer made sometime after the burning of the iron works. With all

¹² Yorkville Enquirer, October 28, 1919

¹³ Moore, Maurice Augustus, Reminiscences of York (Published first in Yorkville Enquirer; later in pamphlet), 12.

solemn fervor he said, "Good Lord, Our God, who art in heaven, we have reason to thank Thee for the many favors received at thy hands, the battles that have been won. There is one great and glorious battle of Kings Mountain, where we kill the great Ginerall Ferguson and took his whole army; and the great battles of Ramseur's and Williamson's and the ever memorable and glorious battle of Coopens (Cowpens) where we made the proud Ginerall Tarleton run doon (down) the road helter skelter; and Good Lord, if ye had na' suffered the cruel tories to burn Belly Hell's (Billy Hill) iron works, we would na' have asked ony mair favors at thy hand. Amen."¹⁴

Hill was an ardent supporter of the patriot cause from the beginning of the contest. He and Andrew Neel were elected the Colonels of a regiment from York. It was then required that each regiment have two colonels.¹⁵ He was throughout the War an active patriot serving under General Thomas Sumter. He fought at Williamson's plantation, at Rocky Mount, was wounded in the hand at Hanging Rock (in Lancaster

¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵ Yorkville Enquirer, October 28, 1919

County), was present but did not actually participate in the battle of Kings Mountain. He claims to have suggested the successful plan of attack that was followed there.¹⁶ He also fought at Fishdam's Ford and Blackstock.

In 1781 when Sumter resigned, Hill and many of his followers seem to have quit the service.

After the Revolution he served many terms in the South Carolina legislature. In 1783 he was a justice for the Camden District, and from 1785 to 1799 he was a member of the county court of York.

Colonel Hill rebuilt Aera Furnace in 1787 and built Aetna Furnace the next year. Hill probably received some assistance from the state of South Carolina in rebuilding these furnaces for in the Journal of the Senate in 1782 a petition is found which was sent to the Senate by the executors of the estate of Isaac Hayne which reads as follows, "That the late Colonel Hayne had a joint property in certain Iron Works in this state usually known by the name Aera Furnace which at an enormous expence in con-

¹⁶ Salley, A.S., Jr. (Editor) Col. William Hill's Memoirs of the Revolution, (Columbia, South Carolina, 1941), 82.

junction with his copartner William Hill he had completed but a short time before the surrender of Charles Town. That immediately after that unfortunate event, the said works were totally demolished and destroyed by British Troops. That the said Colonel Hayne had so strained and exhausted the faculties of his Estate in that arduous and expensive enterprise that your petitioners despair of being able to rebuild them without assistance."¹⁷ This request was acted upon and it was agreed that fifty Negroes from confiscated Tory estates ("should confiscation take place")¹⁸ be sent and they were to be provided with necessary clothing and provision by Hill and Hayne.

After rebuilding the furnaces Hill used a simple method of blowing his fires by a fall of water, which gave a more regular blast than bellows. Besides slaves, he employed miners, founders, woodcutters, and colliers, whom he paid in iron.

Hill was very interested in transportation schemes since the nearest river landing from which

¹⁷ Salley, A.S., Jr. (Editor) Journal of the Senate of South Carolina, January 8, 1782 - February 26, 1782 (Columbia, South Carolina, 1941), 82.

¹⁸ Ibid., 98.

he could ship his goods was at Camden some seventy miles away. Their charter permitted their opening the Catawba for navigation to Camden.¹⁹ In 1782 he was a member of the House Committee on improvement of inland navigation; he was a charter member of the Santee canal company and commissioner for making navigable the Broad.

In 1795 Hill and the executors of Hayne advertised the iron works for sale, with brick house, grist mill, saw mills and fifteen thousand acres of land; but in 1798 he was still operating and sold to the state fifty horsemen's swords and fifteen field pieces with cannon balls.

Apparently Hill had gone deeply in debt for in 1805 a deed shows that the sheriff of York County by order of the executors of the estate of Meyer Moses, sold twenty-four thousand, three hundred and seventy-six acres in sixty-three districts - Turkey, Crowders, and Allison Creek - to Robert and Andrew Hill, sons of William Hill, for the sum of seventeen thousand, four hundred and fifty dollars.²⁰ As to

¹⁹ Wallace, D.D., The History of South Carolina, (New York, 1934), Volume III, 18.

²⁰ Records in York County Courthouse, York, South Carolina, Deeds, Volume F, 484.

whether they continued the iron works there seems to be no record.

In 1815, Colonel Hill wrote his Memoirs of the Revolution largely to justify General Sumter. Because of some of the allusions in the manuscript, his heirs prevented its publication until 1921.

Colonel Hill died in 1816 and was buried in Bethel Cemetery. He was survived by four sons: William, Robert, Andrew, and Solomon who was the father of Daniel Harvey Hill of Confederate Army fame. William Hill also had two daughters: Elizabeth and Rachael. His wife who was Jane McCall survived him two years.

History still owes to the memory of Colonel Hill an important debt. For though his name is frequently mentioned in accounts, his sacrifices and efforts in the cause of freedom are little known.

The site of Colonel William Hill's Iron Works and the birthplace of Daniel Harvey Hill have been appropriately marked by the King's Mountain Chapter

of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Winnie Davis Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. On October 28, 1919 a marker was placed on Allison Creek about nine and one-half miles from York. The inscription on the marker reads as follows:

Hill's Iron Works

"Here were made some of the cannon used by the Patriots of the Carolinas during the Revolutionary War. It was burned by the British under Huck, June 1780. Near that spot was also the home of Colonel William Hill, the steadfast Whig and uncompromising leader who kept the faith in the darkest hour of the struggle for freedom.

Birthplace of Daniel Harvey Hill, Lieutenant General of Confederate States Army, educator, statesman, and soldier. A worthy son of the land we love."

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