LUCIUS BIERCE VISITS THIS AREA IN 1822

Lucius Verus Bierce, 21, a recent graduate of Ohio University at Athens, came to York County in October 1822 accompanied by a walking companion, Peter Doty. The two thought they might find teaching jobs.

Doty found employment in Ebenezer Academy (the building still stands alongside Ebenezer ARP in Rock Hill). Bierce was employed by trustees of the Pleasant Valley Academy in the Indian Land of Lancaster District for the usual 3-month term.

Bierce kept a journal. He wrote almost nothing about his students but made many interesting observations about the people and their living conditions.

Bierce noted that the farms were generally one to three miles from each other and not on the side of the road as they were in northern states. Instead, the farmer placed his house on a hill, near a spring, and in a grove.

The soil was clay or swampy and the farmer dug a well from five to seven feet deep. Then he pounded white flint stone as fine as possible and filled the base of the well with the powdered rock up to two feet of the top. Each layer was poured down as hard as possible.

Then the wall of the well was built of the same powdered white flint stone. The spring water rose up through the fine flint which purified the water. Bierce wrote that the worse water became clear and wholesome.

He found the farmers of Pleasant Valley growing cotton, corn, sweet potatoes and figs. He saw no plantings of wheat or Irish potatoes, staples of his home state.

As for diet, Bierce found the white people regularly eating "salt dried pork fried, rice mush, Johnny cake (corn bread) and fried crout (cabbage) for breakfast—pork and crout boiled with sweet potatoes, Johnny cake, and sour milk (buttermilk) for dinner—the same cold, with rice mush for supper." This was the menu for all the time Bierce was in Pleasant Valley. He yearned for bread, apples and cakes.

The making of butter was accomplished by taking sour milk (Bierce called it "bonny clobber"), adding the same amount of sweet milk and churning it until it arrived at the consistency of butter. Then, he said, the butter maker would set it on the table in tumblers and "bite and sup" is the order of the day.

For entertainment, Bierce found that hunting and dancing seemed to rate highest. "Balls are frequent, being given by persons to their friends, where all is free and the expense of the giver." Bierce attended one ball in which there were about 200 people present and he thought the cost was probably $150. Unfortunately, Bierce did not identify the ball-giver or the location.

All classes of people attended the balls, including, to Bierce's surprise, the local minister. He thought that morals were loose, stating that the people paid little attention to the sabbath , or religion, "except the negros have their liberty on that day, which they spend in hunting, fishing or raising a small crop of rice on land allowed them by their masters."

Bierce found superstition to be prevalent. "They would almost as soon burn themselves, as a stick of sassafras, which bodes ill luck." And he said,

"Tattling is far more common here than in those places at the North where I have lived."

When Bierce left Pleasant Valley he traveled down the old Camden to Charlotte road and crossed over the Catawba river at Landsford.. About the river he wrote that it abounded in fish, especially shad and was "literally covered with wild ducks and geese. . . ."

Robert Leckie had recently completed the stonework of the Landsford Canal. Bierce stated, "The Canal is about two miles in length, having four beautiful and substantial locks. They are made of grey granite, and wrought by Irishman in a manner which combines strength and beauty."

Once across the Catawba, Bierce turned northward to seek out his friend Doty, still teaching at Ebenezer Academy. He had completed 27 miles of walking in order to cross the Catawba river on foot and carrying a knapsack that weighed 17 and 1/2 lbs. He did not give a reason for not crossing at the Nation Ford. It was March and the water may have been too high to safely cross.

Bierce spent nearly two weeks with Doty before parting. Then he walked the 22 miles to Chesterville in a rain.

Chesterville, Bierce wrote, was ". . .a beautiful village of about sixty houses and capital of Chester District. . . ." He spent one night there and headed west, crossing the Broad river by ferry at Pinckneyville on the Union District line. There, Bierce found "a beautiful girl and a plenty of Goshen cheese."