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# YORK

## The CHARLESTON Of the UP COUNTRY

YORKVILLE, now York, was settled in the 1750's by Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who came here from Pennsylvania and Virginia. The tri-county area of York, Chester and Lancaster in South Carolina is named after that same tri-county group in Pennsylvania.

These Scotch-Irish settlers came down "The Great Wagon Road to the Garden of the Waxhaws." They fanned out from historic Waxhaw into this area. In what is now York County they settled around the intersection of two old colonial roads called Fergus' Crossroads.

The Crossroads was named after a tavern which was owned by the Fergus family. A small hamlet grew around this crossroads, but the early churches were all founded outside the town. The four original churches in the county are known as the "Four B's." They are Bethel, Bethesda, Bullock Creek and Beersheba Presbyterian Churches. All four of them trace their formal organization back to the 1760's, and all are within approximately 12 miles of York.

During the Revolution armies led by General's Sumter, Morgan, Cornwallis and Lord Rawdon all marched through the Crossroads which is now the intersection of York's main streets, Congress and Liberty. General Sumter's headquarters was just south of the town and York County was the center of partisan resistance after the fall of Charleston. After that capital city fell to the British they considered that the State had fallen also.

There was no resistance and it seemed the war in the South was finished. Yates Snowden in his history of South Carolina says that the entire State had fallen except for York County. The historical facts seem to back his statement.

Captain Christian Huck, a Philadelphia Tory, was sent to the Up Country to stamp out any last resistance that might be brewing. He met none until he reached York. He burned Col. William Hill's Iron works

on Allison Creek and by doing so he destroyed the only iron works south of Virginia. The old Revolutionary cannon on the Battery in Charleston was made, according to its plate, at "Hill's Iron works near Yorkville."

The day after Huck burned the Iron works he marched down to Brattonville, the plantation of Col. William and Martha Bratton. Col Bratton was with Sumter and Huck tried to convince Martha Bratton that her husband should join the British.

He assured him a commission if he would do so, and tried to get Mrs. Bratton to tell him where Col. Bratton was. She refused to tell him even when he threatened to cut off her head. The threat was about to be carried out when the officer second in command intervened and saved her life. That night Col. Bratton and 175 of his men slipped up on the sleeping British force of 400 cavalry and 100 Tories. When morning came they surprised and defeated them.

Huck was killed and all of his men were either killed or captured. This battle of Huck's Defeat was the first armed resistance after the fall of Charleston. The fires of rebellion were rekindled all over the up country and a series of battles and skirmishes followed, most of which were either in York County or near its boundary. (Hanging Rock, Fishdam Ford, Fishing Creek, Stallions, Cowpens and, of course, Kings Mountain, ("the turning point of the Revolution.")

Three months after Huck's Defeat at Brattonville or Williamson's Plantation came the complete disaster for the British at Kings Mountain 16 miles northwest of York. McCrady in his History of South Carolina says that if you seek to find "the first link in the chain of events that led to the British surrender at Yorktown, you will find it at Huck's Defeat in York County." Certainly another important link in that chain would

be Kings Mountain which is also in York County. Col. James Hawthorne, one of the leaders at Kings Mountain, lived in York and was the County's first Sheriff.

Yorkville was selected as the county seat for York County in 1785 when the county was created. A school was conducted in the town from its earliest days. Dr. Joseph Alexander, a Princeton graduate and the minister at Bullock Creek Presbyterian Church operated one of the first, if not the first, classical school in the Up Country at his church. Among his students were several ministers as well as Judge William Smith (York's first resident lawyer) and William Crawford who later ran against Andrew Jackson for President. At about the same time that Crawford was at Bullock Creek, Andrew Jackson was attending school under the minister at Bethel Presbyterian Church to the north of York. William Smith built York's first mansion, served in Congress, and was offered a seat on the Supreme Court.

With the coming of cotton culture the plantation idea spread over the Up Country. Nowhere in this section of the State did it reach a higher degree of development than in York County. Yorkville reflected this development in its fine homes and a general air of prosperity. A male and a female school were established early in the 1800's. The first newspaper in this section of the State was established in Yorkville.

When railroads began to be built over the State in the early 1850's Yorkville offered the Columbia and Charlotte road "a handsome bonus" to come through the town. The company turned the offer down and so several of York's wealthy merchants and planters organized the Kings Mountain Railroad Company and built their own line from York to Chester where

it connected with the main line.

The railroad brought an unequalled boom to the town. The

population doubled between 1850 and 1860. Large hotels and imposing store buildings were constructed. In 1852 Bethel Presbytery decided to organize a girls school somewhere within the Presbytery. York's bid was accepted and the Yorkville Female Institute was founded. This school became one of the most widely known in this section of the South. At about the same time that the Female Institute was established, Micah Jenkins and Asbury Coward were graduated from The Citadel and came to York to organize a military school.

They were only 19 years old and their idea was not considered sound, but they succeeded in founding the Kings Mountain Military School. They began the first semester with an enrollment of 12. In 1855 they had constructed a very large and handsome building which was considered a model of school construction at that time. By the beginning of the War Between the States, the Kings Mountain Military School was the largest and by far the most important preparatory school in the State with an enrollment that almost equaled the University's.

In 1861, on the eve of the War, Yorkville was "the up and coming town in the Up Country." The town's per capita wealth was second in the State and at that time South Carolina was the third wealthiest State in the nation. The streets of the town were macadamized and a local gas company served the town with lights so that the town was lighted according to the Yorkville Enquirer "like the streets of London and Paris."

Two important schools flourished in the town. A railroad connected Yorkville with a main line and made the town a depot for a large back-country. One of the State's major roads ran through the town. At least two large hotels were operated in Yorkville, one of which advertised itself as "the State's largest and finest." (One had 30 rooms,

the other 45); large for a Southern city at that time and certainly for a small town.

Yorkville had a theatrical

group, an opera house; six organized churches. The Church of the Good Shepherd, Episcopal, and the First Presbyterian Church were housed in outstanding buildings. There are only three Gothic Church buildings in the Up Country which are ante-bellum; these two churches occupy two of them.

The first Presbyterian Church has been described in literature twice as an outstanding example of architecture. One architect said "you may find a church such as this in Charleston, there are one or two in Columbia, but you can not find anything to compare with it in the Up Country." In the other book it is described as "one of the most outstanding examples of church architecture in the Piedmont South."

There was the Lyceums for discussion; military companies for parades; Bratton Hall and the Garrison at KMMS for balls and dinner parties that were too large to be held in the beautiful manor houses that lined the streets; the town was considered an educational center for the Up Country, there was an air of refinement, culture and well being that, through the intervening 100 years which have not been so kind, still lingers along the tree lined streets and around the 35 ante-bellum buildings which still survive.

York well deserves its long standing nickname "The Charleston of the Up Country." "York," says an old issue of the Yorkville Enquirer, "went to war with all her resources and her whole heart." Several companies were organized in the town, including Major James Hart's Battery which has a distinguished history of its own.

Micah Jenkins, still in his twenties, commanded the Fifth South Carolina Volunteer Regiment. He was made a general and was killed at the Battle of the Wilderness. Communications were slow and the train coming up from Chester usually carried the latest news. They blew short bursts from the whistle if the news was good and long wails if it were not. The citizens of the town would rush to the depot to learn the news each time the train arrived.

When Micah Jenkins was killed the train blew its solemn

wail the entire trip from Chester. Everyone knew some great misfortune had taken place and rushed to the station. Micah Jenkins' young wife and her children learned of his death at the station along with the other citizens of the town. Asbury Coward served throughout the War as a distinguished officer and returned to Yorkville when it was over to reopen the School.

Jefferson Davis and his cabinet and escort of two thousand cavalry stopped in Yorkville on their flight toward the south after Lee's surrender. Davis stayed overnight at the home of Dr. J. Rufus Bratton on South Congress Street. Dr. Bratton held a reception for his visitors that night and hundreds of the town and county's citizens came to pay their respects to the President. According to Dr. Bratton's diary, there were no dry eyes in the crowd and the ladies took Davis' hand and told him tearfully, "You are my President."

Thoughts surely turned that night to those thousands of grey clad men and boys who would never come home again and to those thousands of others who would spend the remainder of their lives maimed. Thoughts also must have turned to all of those sacrifices and pains that had been in vain, now that their cause and their young nation had fallen.

General Wade Hampton rode into town shortly after Davis and his party had left. He had hoped to catch them and plan to continue the war west of the Mississippi.

Yorkville was the center of resistance again during the Reconstruction era. Federal troops were stationed in the town and occupied the Rose Hotel. Graft and corruption ran rampant. Theft from public funds was open and unpunished. Major Lewis Merrill in charge of the United States Cavalry stationed in Yorkville became notorious. The Federal government armed and equipped Negro Militia companies which roamed the countryside burning barns and gins and threatening the lives of the citizens.

One company used York's main street as a drill ground. Ladies were shoved from sidewalks and ordered out of the way. Yorkville ladies walked around rather than cross in front of the Rose Hotel where the Federal troops were quartered. The Federal troops shouted insults and obscenities if they walked by and York men were powerless to avenge them.

In 1868 the first Ku Klux Klan in South Carolina was organized in Yorkville. The Negro militia companies became more and more threatening. One company led by Jim Williams, marched to Erattonville plantation and camped in front of the "Brickhouse." There Williams threatened to "kill all of the Brattons from the cradle to the grave." They built a bonfire in front of the house in the grove and rose garden and fired several times at the house.

Just before dark Mr. N. B. Bratton crawled out onto the upstairs gallery and armed with a Winchester rifle and a dueling pistol dared the militia to come one step toward the house. They did not. The next night the Klan paid a visit to Williams and described in the stark language of the time, "with the noose of death around his neck, he swung out into eternity." His body was left on the front piazza of the Brickhouse with this terse note attached, "Here is Jim Williams on his big muster. K.K.K."

At this same period Major Merrill was making nightly arrests of York citizens. Hundreds of the town and county's most prominent citizens were arrested and taken to the old Mills jail in Yorkville. They were arrested without warrants or without even being told why they were arrested. They were usually kept several days in the Yorkville jail and then released. Several served prison sentences in Albany when they were finally tried.

Dr. Bratton fled to Canada and took out Canadian citizenship papers. He practiced in Ontario until he was kidnapped by Pinkerton detectives who were hired by the United States government and brought back to Yorkville for a trial. Realizing that he would not receive a fair trial, that being the reason that he had left originally, his friends contacted the Canadian government. They exchanged notes with the U. S. government and forced his release and return to Canada.

The town of York was the scene of several organized raids by the Klan. One spectacular raid was made on the Federal Headquarters in the Rose Hotel (now a rug mill on South Congress Street). Major Merrill and the local Scalawags were having a party there when the Klan rode into town several hundred strong. They raided the party, dumped the barrels of whiskey into the

street and shot holes through them. Several members of the party jumped through the windows in their attempt to escape. No one was injured or harmed in any way, but the party was over for the night. York County was declared in a State of Rebellion by Congress in 1872.

Based on these incidents Thomas Dixon, who was a frequent visitor to York, wrote his famous book, *The Clansman* on which the motion picture "Birth of a Nation" was so based. Dr. Bratton was supposedly the prototype of Dr. Cameron in the book. "The Little Colonel," in that book was, in fact, Col. Leroy McAfee who is buried in an unmarked grave in the Rose Hill Cemetery in York. According to local tradition at least one of York's beautiful old homes was considered for "Tara" in "Gone With the Wind." This house, an architectural gem, served as an Inn or Tavern in 1820.

General Wade Hampton came to York on October 13, 1876 as the first North Carolina border town that he visited on his campaign tour. He spoke in "The Grove" (the McCaw's grove at their manor house and by that time the home of Major James Hart). He reminded the thousands of Red Shirts from this section of the State and the thousands of other listeners of their heritage. He spoke of Kings Mountain and its heroes from York, the town and the State's heritage and birthright and asked them to remember those things and to fight to preserve them. When he finished the crowd spontaneously began to sing "Dixie." It was the first time the song has been sung in public since the end of the War and it electrified the crowd. Hampton was driven over the town while tar barrels blazed and lighted up the night and the thousands of red shirted men raced back and forth firing their pistols and giving the Rebel Yell. It was a night long remembered in York. The following month Hampton was elected Governor and with his election came the end of the Reconstruction era.

Thirty-five ante-bellum homes, churches, and schools remain in York today. They are the visible symbols of York's heritage. Many of them are outstanding architectural examples, some have fascinating historic connections, all of them are interesting in one way or another. The building now housing the York War Memorial was formerly owned by Col. William Blackburn Wilson, a signer of the Ordinance of Secession. Across the street from the Wil-

son (or War Memorial) property is the home of the late Judge I. D. Witherspoon, one of South Carolina's distinguished jurists.

In the immediate neighborhood is one of York's oldest houses, at one time occupied by Clara Dargen McLean, a widely known literary figure and one of "South Carolina's Women of the Pen." No other town in the Up Country has so much to offer the tourist interested in history and things pertaining to South Carolina as well as Southern culture as a whole. York's sons and daughters have made outstanding contributions in various fields over the years; they reflect York's heritage.

A three volume study has been written on York's cultural patterns. York was selected for the work because "it represented the best in a small historic town in the Piedmont South." A television series was completed last spring that featured York for the same reasons. The television series was a part of a comprehensive work of the University of St. Louis working under a Ford Foundation Grant to "explain American values to Americans." York was selected to represent Southern culture and value to the Nation. The film crews spent weeks filming the beautiful old homes and other buildings and interviewing representative citizens. The summing up of the series explained that perhaps by showing to the Nation a town such as York which has saved its heritage and its identity in this age of neon and mass conformity, York could show the rest of the Nation a better way to live. York, according to the commentary, was to demonstrate that in some places beauty and the art of living are still important and that those important things still can survive and do survive in a period when many Americans think that progress and "the good life" are represented only in neon, new service stations, super markets and shopping centers.

The Town Council of York has recently had under advisement the question of selling the War Memorial (the William Blackburn Wilson house) for commercial purposes, and in order to forestall the possibility of the destruction of this beautiful and historic building, a group of interested citizens have raised sufficient funds, by private subscription, to renovate the building and establish a York County Memorial Museum. The Museum Association has offered to take the building over from the Town on a long term lease,

at no costs to the Town treasury and without any additional tax levy. The Association would assume the entire responsibility for the establishment and operation of the Museum which would be maintained by small admission fees, and from sources other than the Town treasury. The founders of the Museum propose to use the Museum as a focal point for attracting tourists into this historic area as 150,000 persons annually already visit Kings Mountain battlefield, only a few miles to the north of York. The Museum Association is dedicated to the proposition that the wealth of historical and cultural background can be retained, and at the same time the Town and area can prosper and progress as a result of a planned and developed tourist business.

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*The State:*



The old Moore House on North Congress Street, built in 1822



Kings Mountain Military School, founded in 1854 by Asbury Coward and Micah Jenkins, later respectively colonel and general in the Army of the Confederate States of America. The school plus the Yorkville Female Institute gave York the reputation of an educational center for the Up Country of South Carolina before the Confederate War.



The Latta house and the Wilson house on South Congress Street. The Latta house, with the iron grillwork balcony, was built in 1824 (disputed to be 1799) by Robert Latta, one of the Merchant Princes of South Carolina. The Wilson house was designed by Robert Mills and built in 1820 as the County Jail. It was the scene of important events during Reconstruction.

YORK, THE CHARLESTON OF THE UP COUNTRY, written by S.L. Latimer of The State. Information furnished by John Smith and John Marion. The above information given by Mrs. Elizabeth Hart to Mrs. Josephine M. Huey in an interview. Nov. 25, 1958.