

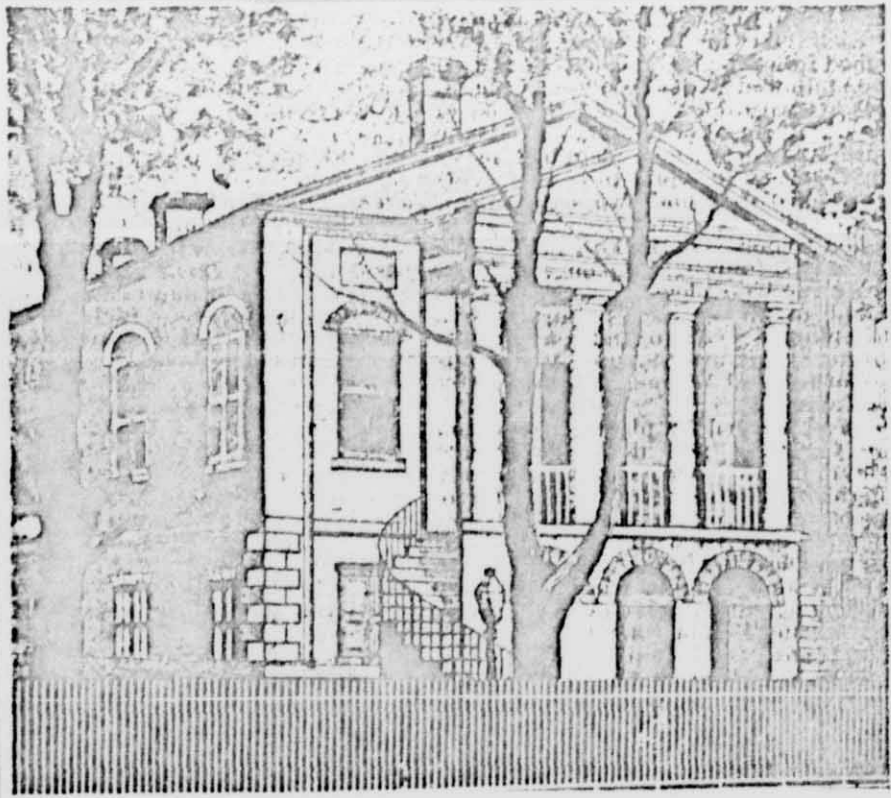
S.C. Counties - York - Cities and Towns
York

#153Y (S. C. - COUNTIES - YORK)

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History of York

Issued by York Chamber
of Commerce, York, S. C.



YORK COUNTY COURTHOUSE IN 1824.

History Of Town,

Enquirer Revealed

Yorkville Enquirer: March 12, 1970

(Editor's Note: A history of York was written some years ago by the late Mr. John R. Hart, Sr., and copies of it were once mimeographed for the York Chamber of Commerce to distribute to interested persons.

The Chamber has received many requests from students wanting to know the history of York and THE ENQUIRER is taking this opportunity to print the works of Mr. Hart in two installments.)

HISTORY OF YORK

The town of Yorkville, as a town or village, has very little Revolutionary history, except such as may come to it from the fact that it was a part of the country lying between Broad and Catawba Rivers, which section became one of the principal battle fields of the latter part of the Revolutionary War. When Drayton and his patriotic colleagues were stirring up the spirit of resistance to the mother-country in Charleston, the up-country took very little interest in the war-like situation. In fact, when Drayton was sent from Charleston as an emissary to stir up a spirit of resistance among the settlers residing between the Broad and Enoree Rivers, the Reverend William Tennant, a Presbyterian minister, was sent upon a similar mission to those people residing between the Broad and Catawba. Both returned to Charleston with the report that the people of this section could not be aroused. In justice to this section, it should be

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Colonel Hill erected at Nanny's Mountain the first iron works in York County, and possibly the first built in the State. 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, a distance of about two and one-half miles, over a tram-way to this point. The ruins of the old works and some of the "Slag" can still be seen upon the creek banks; while, up to a few years ago, at least, the cut and grading of the old tram-way was still easily distinguishable. At these iron works were made some of the cannon that were used in the Revolutionary War. They hardly deserve the name of cannon, being small, rough, and unmanageable affairs. It is stated that when Huck's party approached Nanny's Mountain for the purpose of destroying the iron works (which it afterwards did accomplish) that several of these little cannon were mounted upon a high hill north of Allison Creek and a show of resistance made, but at the first discharge one of the cannon burst and the remainder were hastily rolled down the hill and thrown into the mill pond. One of these cannon was afterwards found and brought to Yorkville, and for a number of years lay behind the counter in Dr. Kuykendal's drug store. Huck's party, as stated, eventually destroyed the iron works, and they were never rebuilt.--It is told as tradition that a good old Scotch Presbyterian elder in praying for the success of the American armies, asked, among other things, "Dear Lord, whatever else may happen, not let the British destroy Billy Hill's iron works." Nanny's Mountain is named for Colonel Hill's wife, Nancy Hill. Hill's Manuscript is regarded as a very accurate account of those skirmishes and battles of the War in which he participated.

The first regiment of patriots organized in York County (then commonly called the New Acquisition) had for its Colonel, Thomas Neel, and for its Lieutenant-Colonel, Ezekiel Polk; and for its Major, Joseph Robinson. These are the only officers given. I have never been able to find any record of these officers later in the war, except Thomas Neel. He is mentioned as being in a body of rangers later organized.

While there were only two battles of any importance fought in York County (King's Mountain and Huck's Defeat), yet this territory was constantly traversed by the British and Americans. King's Mountain and Huck's Defeat are fully described in the various histories. It is only in recent years, however, that the true importance of these victories has been recognized by the historians. The incidents of these two battles are familiar to every student of history, and need no re-statement here.

Bullocks Creek seems to have been even before the War, an important meeting place for both Whigs and Tories. Here it was that Lacy, Hill, and Bratton met to plan for resistance to the British; and here it was that Cornwallis is said to have encamped while on his way to the assistance of Tarleton, and while there encamped heard the news of the disastrous defeat at Cowpens.

It may interest some to know that Bullocks Creeks Church was originally called "Dan", and the same people who established this church pushed further up on Bullocks Creek and established Beersheba. So these two churches were formerly known as "Dan" and Beersheba."

I have often been told that the road turning off from the Pinckney Road at the plantation of Mr. R. M. Carroll, about ten miles south of Yorkville, was laid out and constructed by the British engineers for the use of the British troops on their way from Blackstock and Wigginsboro to Broad River and across into Spartanburg and Union counties. I am also told that there was once a large British camp composed of a number of Cornwallis' troops at a point on the Lincoln Road, near where Mr. Bruce Youngblood now lives. What is now known as the Limestone Road crosses the Lincoln Road at this point. This Limestone Road, allowing for the inaccuracies of the early maps, was evidently adopted, in part at least, from the old Indian Trail leading from the Cherokee to the Catawba Nation. This trail, as I am also told, has been used as a road, and is still being so used at many points, and some of the older settlers around Leslie station in this county still speak of it as the Indian trail.

York County had its share of Tories, who formed themselves into bands in order that they might more safely plunder and harass the Whigs. One of these bands was located on Fishing Creek, and another near King's Mountain Battle Ground. They cared little for the British cause, but were intent upon plunder. Chester, Fairfield and Union also had their bands of Tories. Dr. Lathan states in his "South Carolina in the Revolution" that some time in September, 1780, a party of these Tories was passing through York County, and stopped at the house of a man named Stallion (Some authorities give it as Stallings.) This man lived on the plantation formerly owned by B. T. Wheeler, about fifty yards north of the bridge on the road leading from Wheeler's saw mill to J. T. Lowry's plantation. Both the Stallions were Tories. The Stallions that lived on the Steele place, married a sister of Colonel Love, the great-great-grandfather of Dr. William Love, formerly of McConnellsville. Colonel Love and his sister, Mrs. Stallion, were true Whigs. By some means Colonel Brandon of North Carolina and Colonel Love, who lived within a short distance of the Deviney place, learned that a band of Tories was at Stallions. Brandon and Love gathered up a few men, surrounded the house of Stallion, and fired upon it, but without killing anyone. Mrs. Stallion, fearing that the Tories would be taken and perhaps all shot, her husband included, partially opened the door for the purpose of surrendering to the Whigs and begging her brother, Colonel Love, to spare the life of her husband. Mrs. Stallion is said to have had on a man's hat, and just as soon as her head was seen, a ball pierced it, and she fell dead. It was generally thought that Colonel Love fired the shot that killed his sister, Mrs. Stallion. Stallion is said to have leaped into the yard, and frantically cried to Colonel Love, "You have killed my wife--you have killed your sister." So filled with anguish were the hearst of the Whigs at this terrible tragedy that they retired without further molesting the Tories.

At the house of the other Stallion, a party of Tories was attacked by the notorious Jack McCain and two others were killed.

After the battle of King's Mountain, Tarleton and his men passed through the upper edge of York County searching for such of the heroes of King's Mountain as might have remained in this section. They visited the house of Colonel Watson near Rocky Allison Creek, killed all his geese, and carried off the salt that was stored there. This last named loss was a severe one, for salt was very scarce and all the salt of the neighborhood was stored at Colonel Watson's by consent. It is said that one of Tarleton's men scratched his name on one of the stones of the chimney of Colonel Watson's house, and said that after the war was over the Whigs conquered he was coming back to live in this house. He never came.

Some historians say that after the Battle of King's Mountain, Lacey retired with his men "to the high hills of Bullocks Creek" to await the arrival of Tarleton. Dr. Lathan fixes this spot just north of Scott's mill (about five miles west of Yorkville on the Sharon road.) I have been told that several British soldiers were buried in front of where W. L. Hill's store now stands in Sharon. No one can give me any particulars. It might not be unreasonable to assume that what was meant by the "high hills of Bullocks Creek" was the high ridge on which Sharon is built, and the British officers referred to and said to have been buried in front of Hill's store were prisoners.

The County is full of local tradition of historical interest. Like all tradition, of course, there are many inaccuracies, but perhaps there is a kernel of truth in it all that may be worth preserving.

The first authentic reference that I have been able to find regarding the town of Yorkville is contained in a deed from William and John Fergus to William Hill, Jr. This deed is dated the 21st day of October, 1793, and reads as follows:

"In consideration of the sum of One Hundred Pounds to them, the said William and John Fergus, in hand paid by the said William Hill, Jr., Two Hundred Acres of land in York County, South Carolina, including "York Ville", being a part of a tract of land granted by patent to John Miller from His Majesty's office in North Carolina, and being dated the 25th day of April, 1767 and from him conveyed to William and John Fergus." I have examined the records in Lincolnton, N. C., at Columbia, S. C., and have had them at Raleigh and Wilmington, and I have never been able to find the original grant or letters patent. The following description of this tract might enable someone to locate it: "Beginning at a hickory tree near the road from Yorkville to Caleb Powers plantation, and running north 70 W. 240 poles to a post oak at Alex Ramsey's near John Caraghan's; thence N. 40 E. 270 poles to a point on the east of the wagon road from said Court House to Matthew Dickson's; thence S. 58 E. 46 poles to a black-jack on one side of the glade; thence S. 40 E. 270 poles to the beginning, including "Yorkville." While this deed was dated 1793, William Hill had evidently obtained possession of the "village of York Ville" at an earlier date, as will be shown later.

Some of the older citizens tell me that where Yorkville now stands at the intersection of Liberty and Congress Streets was known as "Fergus Cross Roads." Another tradition says that Fergus Cross Roads was near the residence of Mr. Joseph Dickson at the extreme north end of the town, and that a tavern stood just across the road from where Mr. Dickson's house now is where "molasses and rum was sold." Dr. Morris Moore, in his "Reminiscences of York," says that the first house in Yorkville was built on the spot where the Presbyterian Church now stands, and was owned by one Robert Smith. He gives the places of the second residence as being on the Nichols lot, and states that it was built by "Gentleman Alec Love." Dr. Moore states further that the third domicile was a large two-story log building erected by David McCall, and by him was conducted the first "house of entertainment," but that in a few years David McCall sold out to his brother, John McCall, and that for many years thereafter, John McCall conducted the only inn or tavern in the village.

Maps of James Cook and Henry Mouzon, made in 1771 and 1775 respectively, show that just before the formation of York County, and while this district was still a part of Camden District, certain wagon roads, one leading southward from King's Mountain, another running westward to what was called Pinckney's Ferry on Broad River, intersected and at the intersection of these two roads on the water-shed midway between the two rivers, another road branched out in the direction of "Charlottesville," crossing the Catawba River at, or near, the present Wright's Ferry and the intersection of these roads was known as "Fergus Cross Roads."

York District was cut off of Camden District in 1785 and a commission appointed to select a site and build a Court House at some suitable point in the county. About 1786 the town of Yorkville was laid out and founded at the intersection of these roads. I have never been able to find these maps of Cook and Mouzon, but I got this information from an old paper prepared by Colonel W. C. Beatty in 1839. This section being settled by emigrants from Pennsylvania and Virginia, it is easily seen where the count gets its name of York,--just as our adjoining counties got theirs of Lancaster and Chester. The town was first known as Yorkville. It seems to me that now would be a very good time to drop the "ville", just as Chester, Union, and Sumter have their "Ville," and Charlotte its "burg."

The first deed that I find on record is from William Hill to John Gee, and is described as follows: "A certain lot of ground No. 17 in the town called "Yorkville" and adjoining Mr. Bailey's on N. W. side of Congress Street, 66 ft. in front and 330 ft. in depth." This deed is dated in 1788, and the price paid for the lot was Eight Spanish Milled Dollars.

The next deed is from William Hill, who styles himself "Iron Master," to Elijah Bailey, "planter." This lot is of the same dimensions and is known in the plat of the said town as Lot No. 16, adjoining to and South of the Court House lot. This deed is dated one year earlier (1787) though not recorded until later. The price paid for this lot was "Two Pounds, lawful money." I have what is said to be the original map of the town, and from this map, as well as the description, it is fixed as being that lot at present owned by Mr. Harry I. McCaw. As a matter of curiosity, I traced the title, and found that Elijah Bailey conveyed to Robert McCaw, and from that time to the present it has continuously been the property of the McCaw family.

All the lots in the village of Yorkville were originally laid off with a frontage of 66 feet, and a depth of 330 feet, with the exception of the eight lots lying on Liberty and Congress Streets,--two lots on each side of the said streets at their intersection. These lots are each ten poles in length and eight poles in depth. The lot where the Court House now stands was designated as the Court House lot. Directly across the street was the "goal lot." Where the Witherspoon building stands was known as the "market lot," and the Nichols building was the "church lot." The lot now owned by Dr. R. A. Bratton consisted of three lots, namely, 34, 35, and 36, and was sold to Robert Glendennin in 1813. The Witherspoon lot on the corner of Congress and Liberty Streets was first conveyed to John Brown for the consideration of \$1. This was in 1801. When the town was originally laid off, it was the evident intention of the owners to donate a lot for a church and a market. The lot where Mrs. Neely now lives was indicated on the old maps as being the school house lot.

Beginning with lot No. 16, which is on the West side of Liberty Street just South of the Court House, the next lot, No. 17, was sold to John Keown for one pound, seventeen shillings, and four pence. We find among the early owners of lots following on down this street, William Hackett, E. A. Crenshaw, Thomas McNeel, and Thomas Williams. While, on the other side of Congress Street in the same block and beginning at Jefferson Street, we find that after the three Glendennin lots, now owned by Dr. Bratton, that George Galhraith, and John Feemster, and Peter Quinn owned lots up to the old jail. This block was settled earlier than any other portion of the town. Beginning at Madison Street on the east side and coming south, we find that Lot No. 41 is the first lot, and it was sold to Aaron Williams. The next lot to A. A. McWhorter, No. 39 to the same party. The next lot was sold to Judge Smith,

and the next three to Johnathan Beatty; the next to John Eggleston. On the west side of Congress Street, beginning with Madison Street and coming south, we find that Samuel Wright owned practically all of the property until you get back to about where Mr. Stroup's store now stands. Then came A. Quay with two lots, and next B. Chambers. In all the deeds to Samuel Wright they are written to "Samuel Wright, shoe-maker." I am told that this old man came here, as did many others, with a pack on his back, but soon acquired quite a considerable amount of property.

The Latta building, where the residence stands, was first owned by John McCall, but afterwards sold to James Latta. Lot No. 4 which adjoins it on the north was sold to James Latta in 1805, and is spoken of as being the lot "where the said James Latta keeps his store." When Mr. Latta first came here, he would bring his goods every Court week, and display them in the inn or tavern. From this beginning resulted his large store in Yorkville, with branches in Camden, Chester, Columbia and elsewhere.

Coming south of Jefferson St. on the West Side, all that property now owned by T. E. Smith, Mrs. Parish, and Dr. White, down as far as the property of M. C. Willis, was originally owned by Judge Smith, a very learned, irascible, cranky old man. He built the large white house that was afterwards destroyed by fire while occupied by Major Hart. This building was at one time used as a girls' school. Judge Smith must have attained some importance in the state, for he is spoken of as the "noted opponent of Calhoun." He was once either elected or appointed to the United States Senate, and was afterwards defeated. He became so embittered over the defeat that he moved to Alabama where he died.

The lot where the Presbyterian Church now stands was first owned by John McCaw, and the lot just west of it (the Rawls property) was owned by Johnathan Beatty. The Rawls house, spoken of as "the little red house," was always believed to be haunted, and many interesting tales are told in connection with the strange noises and "spooks" in this house.

Perhaps one of the most important spots in the early history of the town was the head of the hollow near where Mr. Schorb's studio stands. Here was the public spring, and I am told that all of the early settlers did their washing and obtained their water here before the era of wells.

Most tradition is to the effect that Robert Hayne owned the town of Yorkville. This is an error. William Hill first owned it, and Hayne sold many lots for him under the power of attorneyship. Hayne did afterwards buy a half interest in the unsold lots. It seems that the first settlers made a distinction between the "village of York Ville," and the "town of York Ville", for I find deeds reading, "a certain lot of land adjoining the "village of York Ville" beginning at a stake on the west side of Congress Street 4 chains and 50 links S. 25 E. from the S. W. side of Jefferson and Congress Streets, and running S. 25 E. 9 links chains and 20 links to a stake on the dividing between the town land and Ramsey's." From this and other similar deeds, I infer that the "village of York Ville" included the two blocks from Mr. J. W. Dobson's to Mr. J. C. Wilbern's; while the "town" land was triangular in form, extending from about Wright Avenue south to Mr. M. C. Willis' north line, and that the west line of this triangle began at a point near the negro Zion Church, and the east line began somewhere near the residence of Mr. I. W. Johnson, and these east west lines converged near Wright Avenue.

Among the earliest purchasers of land in the "village of York Ville" we find the names of John Geo, Elijah Baylay, Joseph Atkinson, John Meown, Alexander Leave, John Bates, Joseph Kerr, Christopher Thompson, John McCall, John Eggleston, Robert Lathan, John Feomster, Johnathan Beatty, James Ross, Samuel Wright, John Carson, Dr. Josiah Moore, George McKnight, James Latta, William Smith, John McCaw, Alexander Quay, Arthur Falcener, Joseph Boggs, Agerick John Adickes, Robert Clendennin, Samuel Chambers, Andrew McWhorter, James Armstrong White, Levi Welsh, Aaron Williams McNeel, Margaret Lyons, John E. B. Lyons, Samuel Zimmerman, and many others. It could be interesting to trace each of these old residents and their lots as shown on the old map, but it would take too much time.

The town of Yorkville, as stated, was incorporated in 1849 and W. I. Clawson was the first Mayor, with Stanhope Sadler, F. M. Galbraith, T. H. Simrill, and B. T. Wheeler as wardens. The population of the town at that time was about 800.

From 1850 to the breaking out of the Civil War was the era of the time of prosperity for Yorkville. In 1852 the King's Mountain railroad was built; in 1854 the Yorkville Female College was established; 1855, the King's Mountain Military Academy; 1860 gas works was established, and the old chronicler writes that "the town was lighted as London was."

THIS HISTORY IS ISSUED BY THE YORK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,
YORK, S. C. UPON REQUEST.