

Revolutionary veteran founded churches

John Rooker also tried to establish a mission for Catawba Indians

On June 7, 1832, Congress, for the first time, voted to reward eligible Revolutionary War veterans with pensions. It was a little more than 50 years after Yorktown, the last battle of the Revolution.

Surviving veterans had to prove their service at the courthouse or swear to a judge. They were required to furnish evidence by "living witnesses, by documentary proof, by traditional evidence or by the rolls."

John Rooker, 77, of York District went to the courthouse and took with him what George Taylor, the examining clerk, called "traditional evidence."

NEARBY HISTORY

Louise Pettus



Rooker furnished a statement that he entered the service in Franklin, N.C., in August 1776 as a private for six months "to go to Kentucky to guard its inhabitants from the ravages of the Indians." In March 1777 he volunteered to serve under Col. Daniel Boone and did so for seven months until Col. Hagans of Virginia brought reinforcements of 100 men.

After this service Rooker returned to North Carolina and stayed until Dec. 6, 1790, when he "removed to South Carolina York District." Rooker had no written evidence or discharge papers, and knew no one in 1832 who could testify of his service. He offered as character witnesses the

name of Benjamin Chambers, the judge of the Court of Ordinary (the probate judge) of York District, and Bartlett Meacham, a citizen of the Fort Mill township.

Rooker's claim was approved. For the rest of his life Rooker would receive a United States treasury check for \$43.35 annually. Rooker died June 24, 1840, and is buried at Flint Hill Baptist Church, one of the three churches he founded in York County.

The widows of veterans were eligible for pensions of lesser amounts if they were married to the pensioner before Jan. 1, 1794. Five years after her husband's death, Anna Hawkins Rooker, then 86, applied for her pension. She swore she married John Rooker in Lincoln County, N.C., in 1780.

In neither pension application was there any reference to children or other family members

who might be able to support their parents. The Rookers had four sons and five daughters.

Anna Hawkins Rooker also had to have character witnesses. Willis Reeves appeared before James Quinn, a York District justice of the peace, and testified to Anna Rooker's character. Reeves also submitted a two-page preface torn from a book written by John Rooker. The book was titled "An Essay on the Sovereignty of God" and was published in Charleston in 1839. One copy survives and is in the Louisville Theological Seminary.

In his book preface, Rooker described his military service and its aftermath more fully than he

had on his pension application, but in neither case did he mention having been wounded in the war. Some of Rooker's parishioners, however, vividly recalled his hands were wounded in the Revolution. One account said he would hold up "his hands all cut to pieces by saber wounds."

Rooker not only ministered to the Sugar Creek Baptist Church (the first name of Flint Hill) and occasionally filled in at other churches, but also tried very hard to establish a successful mission among Catawba Indians. His assistant pastor was Robert Mursh, a full-blooded Pamunkey Indian who had a Catawba Indian wife. He also set up a school in Lancas-

ter District among the Catawbias, which was taught by James Lewis.

David Hutchison, a state-appointed commissioner for Catawba Indian affairs, once wrote that Rooker settled near the Catawba towns "with a view of teaching and preaching. I had high hopes that he would be successful ... and I believe exerted himself to the best of his abilities. The result of which he candidly acknowledged to me was, that he thought he left them much worse than he had found them..."

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