

## REVEREND JOHN ROOKER

At age 19 John Rooker moved from Northumberland County, Virginia to Warren County, North Carolina where he taught school for two years. In March 1776 he enlisted in the militia to fight the "Scotch Tories" and in August he volunteered to fight Indians in Kentucky under Col. Daniel Boone. The next year he returned to Warren County, N.C., bought a wagon and team and for the next two years hauled supplies to the army.

April 20, 1780, Rooker married Anna Hawkins, the daughter of John Hawkins, Esq., a court justice, member of the Anglican Church, and well-to-do. In September of the same year he joined the Baptist Church in Warren County. In April 1783 he began to preach. In November 1790 John Rooker came to York County, South Carolina. Before he started his own church he may have been [this is debatable] in the congregation of Ellison's [later known as Allison] Creek Baptist Church with Davis Collins, pastor.

May 1, 1792 the Baptist Church of Christ called Sugar Creek Church was constituted by Abraham Marshall of Columbia County, Georgia, consisting of 13 members [John Rooker, John Dinkins, John Smith, James Spears, William Pettus, Juba the servant of M. Harris, Margaret Dinkins, Celia Weathers, Mary Smith, Ally Spears, Alice Weathers, and Mary Cooper] and John Rooker, pastor [in 1839 John Rooker said that he had outlived all of the original members]. In 1793 John Rooker started a mission for Catawba Indians, which he kept up until the mid-1820s. He used a Pamunkey Indian by the name of Robert Mursh [sometimes Mush or Marsh] as assistant pastor and John Lewis as the teacher of a missionary school for Indian children. The mission school was located in the Indian Land of Lancaster County.

Flint Hill Baptist Church thrived and a second building was built in 1811. This building was enlarged in 1828. In 1833 the Rev. John Pritchard and nine others were dismissed to establish a church in Charlotte which became known as the First Baptist Church of Charlotte, N.C.

In 1833 Rooker applied for a military pension as a private in the N.C. militia. He received \$43.33 annually.

By 1836 Rooker was infirm and the Rev. James Thomas came to preach and assist. In 1837 Thomas left and no minister came to conduct the service so the people went to Rooker's house. There he preached a sermon, "Finally, Brethren Farewell," a sermon that "touched the people mightily," and was probably his last sermon.

When Rooker died on June 21, 1840 at the age of 86 he was buried according to his will's instructions: "...in the northwest corner of the Baptist Sugar Creek graveyard..." There is also a mammoth flint rock, six feet high, at the front entrance of the church with a plaque that commemorates him.

The location of Flint Hill Baptist Church is one mile west of Sugar Creek and one mile east of Highway #21 in York County, South Carolina but close to Highway 51 west of Pineville, North Carolina.

Will of John Rooker. Film #229697  
State of South Carolina  
York District

I John Rooker of the State and district aforesaid, calling to mind the frailty of human nature, and having far advanced in age, but in full possession of my rational faculties that Almighty God in mercy hath been pleased to bestowe on me, do make and order this my last will and testament in manner and form following, revoking all others but this and this only.--

First I desire for my body to be decently interred in the Northwest corner of the Baptist Sugar Creek Graveyard, at the discretion of my wife, children and friends.

2nd I desire to give my Soul and body to Almighty God who first gave it.  
3rd I desire for all my lawful debts to be paid.

4th I lend to my wife all my land, Negroes, stock of all kinds, household furniture, kitchen furniture, farming utensils, with all and everything else that I may be in possession of.

5th I have given my daughter Betty Reeves all I allowed for her.

6th I have given my son Jennings all I allowed for him to have.

7th I have given my son John Hawkins all I allowed for him to have.

8th I desire after the death of my wife for all my land to be sold on credit of one, two, and three years. Credit and the payments secured by a mortgage on the lands and for my son Jacob to have one half of the proceeds of this sale, and the other half of the proceeds of this sale be equally divided between my three grand sons, William, John & Moses, sons of my son Joseph Dorris. Also what perishable property my wife may leave divided in the same manner, except the following property

9th I give to my daughter Eleanor Harper, Sukey, [and?] Milly or Mildred, two Negro women, one of which is now in her possession, and the other after the decease of my wife.

10th I lend to my daughter Mary Wyatt Spears a Negro woman and children now in her possession/ the woman called Sylvia and her children after her decease Mary Wyatt Spears, the said Negroes to be divided amongst my grandchildren Viz., Clarissa, Mary Ann, G. T. Reeves, John, Moses, sons of my son Joseph Dorris Rooker deceased, & Susanna Dorris Adairs oldest daughter, and Jacob Rooker's oldest daughter Mary Ann Margaret Jane

11th I give to my daughter Susanna D. Adair all the children left of a Negro woman deceased, called Judy which died in her possession & my Negro Girl Mary Elvira.

Lastly I hereby nominate and appoint my friend Isaac D. Witherspoon, Esq. attorney at law residing in Yorkville & James Boyd my Sole Executors & revoking all others but this & this only in witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my Seal this 23rd day of May in the year of our Lord one Thousand Eight hundred and thirty nine.

Signed & Sealed in presence of  
John T. Harper

John Rooker (LS)

Robert Harper

Walker Quinn

(Mecklenburg County, NC Will Book H, pp 750-51)

Sealed: 23rd Day of May, 1839

Signed: John Rooker

(Will also recorded in Mecklenburg Co., N.C. Will Book H, p. 750, v. 1839.)

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John Rooker wrote a book, *An Essay on the Sovereignty of God*, Charleston, S. C.: W. Riley, 1839. There is only one copy known to be in existence and it is in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. In the preface, Rooker wrote:

"I shall here give a very short sketch of my life, and then the reason of my publishing the following treatise.

"I was born the morning of the 12th of March, A. D. 1755, in Northumberland county in the Northern Neck of Virginia; my father was a full blooded Irishman, although American born; my mother's father was of Welsh descent, by the name of Davis; her mother was of English descent, by the name of Hammond, among the first settlers of Virginia. I remained in Northumberland and Richmond counties until February 1774, then came to Bule county, (now Warren) in North Carolina, and served two years in the capacity of a teacher of reading, writing, and arithmetic. In March, 1776, went a volunteer soldier in the American army against the Scotch tories, which were defeated. In August following, went a volunteer soldier to Kentucky, and warred against the Indians until October 1777, then returned to Warren county, North Carolina, bought a wagon and team, drove them two years and sold them. On the 20th of April, 1780, married Anna Hawkins, daughter of John Hawkins, Esq. On the first day of September, 1782, joined the Baptist church in Warren county, North Carolina, and in April 1783, began to preach. November, 1790, came to South Carolina, York district. In 1792, the first day of May, the Baptist church of Christ called the Sugar Creek Church, was constituted by Abraham Marshall, of Columbia county, Georgia, consisting of thirteen members, and on the same day five more joined, by a declaration of their faith in Christ Jesus. With them (so long as they lived,) I continued a member and a pastor, and with the rest every since.

"We were settled in the midst of a Presbyterian congregation, by whom we were much persecuted, although their minister, Dr. M'Ree, ever treated me with politeness and friendship, whose urbanity is well known.

"For the honor of God and His cause, I have written the following Essay, and for the instruction and comfort of His faithful people, that they may not be seduced by the abounding errors, superstitions, bigotry, and delusive fallacy of the Papists, Unitarians, Universalists, Armenians and Antinomians .

"My earnest prayer is, that God may bless my feeble efforts for His declarative glory--the establishing of His people in truth--and I am fully rewarded. And to His great name shall be the praise and glory everlasting--Amen"

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John Rooker's pension application for service in the Revolution is either Number 5051 or 5151, South Carolina. Rooker states that he was a private in the company of Captain Denton (?) of the Regt. commanded by Col. Long. He was "Inscribed on the Roll of South Carolina at the rate of 43 dollars 33 cents per annum ...on the 30th day of March 1831." Rooker's statement:

"...August 1776 Volunteered six months to go to Kentucky to guard inhabitants from the Ravages of the Indians was in that service till March 1777 and on the Seventh day of that month enlisted as a volunteer under Col. Daniel Boon and served seven months and after we had a Reinforcement of a hundred men under the command of Col. Hogan (?) of Virginia and then was discharged and returned to North Carolina Bute County now Warren and Franklin, Removed to South Carolina York District Dec. 6th 1790 where I have ever since resided. [At this point the handwriting changes] I never had any written discharge from my service. That he was on duty altogether about fourteen months. He has no written or documentary evidence of his services nor can he procure the evidence of any person here that he knows of ....He refers to Benj. Chambers the judge of the Court of Ordinary for York District and to Bartlett Meacham to prove his character for veracity and their belief of his services.

"He hereby relinquishes all claim whatever to any pension or annuity except the present, and declares that his name is not on the pension roll of the agency of any state. Sworn to and published this 16th Oct 1832 in open court. [Signed in a shaky hand] J Rooker.

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Affidavit of Anna Rooker:  
State of North Carolina  
Lincoln County

Illegible....1845. Personally appeared before W. Reeves a Justice of the Peace in and for the county aforesaid. Anna Rooker resident of North Carolina in the county of Lincoln, aged 86 years: who being first duly sworn, according to law Doth on her oath make the following Declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the provision made by the Act of Congress, passed July 7th 1838, entitled, an Act granting half pay and pensions to Certain Widows. that she is the widow of John Rooker who was a private in the war of the Revolution and was a pensioner under the act of Congress of June 7, 1832 and was inscribed on the pension list of the South Carolina Agency at the rate of 43 Dollars 33 Cents per annum. She further Declares that she was married to the said John Rooker sometime in the year seventeen hundred and eighty and that her husband the aforesaid John Rook Died on the 24 day of June 1840. that she was not married to him prior to his leaving the service but the marriage took place previous to

the first of January seventeen hundred and ninety four, viz. at the time above state.

Sworn to and subscribed on the day and year above written before.

Anna

her X mark Rooker pensioner Witness: James Quinn  
(Part of John Rooker's Pension File, National Archives, Washington, D.C. The North Carolina Marriage Bonds, Warren County, p. 216, gives the Rooker's bond as issued 20 April 1780--they could have been married that day or later.)

School: Found in a letter of David Hutchison in the Palmetto-State Banner, August 30, 1849, a copy of which is bound in the front of a newspaper sized folio marked on the outside as Ku Klux Klan which is in the York County Public Library, Rock Hill:

"The next attempt was made upon a larger and more extensive scale, subsequent to the Revolutionary War, and about the time the Indians ceased spending their winters down the country. It was by old Mr. Rooker, a clergyman of the Baptist Church, who settled near their towns, purely with a view of teaching and preaching and I had high hopes that he would be successful, being a man of cheerful and happy disposition, and fond of Indian amusements, such as hunting and fishing, and withal a zealous professor. He staid with them three years, 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 worse than he found them. He said for some time at first he had great hopes. They attended preaching and behaved orderly; more so than the whites generally did; but after awhile they seemed uneasy and disgusted, and began gradually to decline attending, and finally declined altogether. His school he thought for some time encouraging; the children behaved well, were obedient, and learned fast, until they reach 10 or 11 years. They would then take to traveling about with the older ones, and forget all they had learned; taking no pains to retain, much less improve what they had learned.

"About a year after Mr. Rooker left them, a Northern Indian with his family came and settled among them, of the name of John Mush [incorrect, the man was Rev. Robert Mush or Mursh, a Pamunkey Indian whose son was named John]. He was also a Baptist minister, and appeared to be an humble and good Christian...the old man settled among them with the same view and benevolent intentions, that Mr. Rooker had done, and with just about the same result, or rather worse, as he thought---He continued with them five or six years, the most of his time teaching and preaching, and then with great reluctance left them...."

School: "Ramsay's History of South Carolina" by Dr. David Ramsey, Vol. II, Walker, Evans & Co., Charleston, S. C. 1858, pp. 203-04: "In the year 1802, a missionary scheme was formed by the Charlestown Association [of the Baptist church] which was placed under the direction of a special committee, and the

Reverend John Rooker was appointed missionary to the Catawba Indians. A school was also opened among them, and a considerable number of the Indian children have been taught to read and write, and a few the use of figures. The Indians have treated the preacher and school-master with respect, and attended their instructions with apparent seriousness. Some of them have become more enlightened and civilized; but none have hitherto made any regular profession of Christianity."

## JOHN ROOKER'S REVOLUTIONARY WAR PENSION

On June 7, 1832 the United States 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, by incidental evidence, or by the rolls."

John Rooker, aged 77, of York District went to the courthouse and took with him what George Taylor, the examining clerk, called "traditional evidence." What Rooker furnished was his statement that he entered the service in Franklin, N.C. in August 1776 as a private for 6 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 served under him for 7 months until Col. Hagans of Virginia brought a reinforcement of 100 men.

After this service Rooker returned to North Carolina and stayed until December 6, 1790 when he "Removed to South Carolina York District." Rooker had no written evidence, no 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 (Probate Judge) of York District and Bartlett Meacham, a citizen of Fort Mill District.

Rooker's claim was approved. For the rest of his life Rooker would receive a United States treasury check for \$43.35 annually.

The widows of veterans were eligible for pensions of lesser amounts if they were married to the pensioner before January 1, 1794. Five years after her husband's death and a year before she died, Anna Hawkins Rooker, then age 86, applied for her pension. She swore that she married John Rooker in Lincoln County, N.C. sometime in the year 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 nine children-- 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 by W. Riley in 1839. (A copy of the book is in the Louisville Baptist Seminary - the only known copy.)

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 being wounded in the war. Some of Rooker's parishioners, however, vividly recalled his hands as wounded in the Revolution. In a letter to Lyman Draper in Draper's MSS one man recalled that while Rooker was preaching he would hold up his hands "cut all to pieces by sabre wounds." This in contrast to another veteran who hid his hand inside his coat.

Rooker occasionally filled in at other Baptist churches. He tried very hard to establish a successful mission among the 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 Lancaster District among the Catawbas which was taught by James Lewis.

David Hutchison, a state-appointed commissioner for Catawba Indian affairs, once wrote that Reverend 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 worse than he found them...."

Rooker died June 24, 1840 and is buried at Flint Hill Baptist Church, one of three churches he founded in York County. Six years later his widow was buried in a field on a farm they once owned near Clover beside two sons, Jennings and Joseph Dorris Rooker. Anna never joined her husband's church. She remained a faithful Episcopalian all of her days.