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ROBERT MURSH

From around the year 1800 until his hero's burial on Dec. 7, 1837, Robert Mursh was a resident of this area. It is not known for certain whether he lived in York County's Fort Mill District or Lancaster County's Indian Land District but he was certainly connected both with the Catawbias and with Flint Hill Baptist Church of upper Fort Mill District. Mursh was a Pamunkey Indian and assistant pastor to Rev. John Rooker, pastor and founder of Flint Hill Baptist Church.

Mursh fits none of the stereotypes of an Indian of his day. In the first place, the Virginia native was well-educated. He graduated from the Indian School at the College of William and Mary in 1769.

In 1776, Mursh enlisted in the 15th Regiment of Virginia Continental Line. His Revolutionary War career is well-documented because he applied for a pension in his old age and his widow continued to receive it after his death. The records show that Mursh fought in the Battles of Brandywine and Germantown in Pennsylvania..

When his first enlistment term was up, Mursh reenlisted. This time he was sent to Charleston, South Carolina where he was taken prisoner of war at the fall of Charleston in 1780. For 14 months Mursh was held prisoner before being exchanged at Jamestown, Virginia. Jamestown was close to his Pamunkey River home and he probably visited there but he quickly reenlisted and spent the remainder of the war years in a Georgia campaign.

It is not in his pension application papers, but some of Lyman Draper's correspondents in 1873 stated that Mursh fought in the Battle of Hanging Rock in Lancaster District. This would indicate that he was probably with the Catawba Indians attached to Gen. Thomas Sumter's army.

Mursh returned to Virginia and married Elizabeth October 1, 1782 in a traditional Indian ceremony. Later, they were remarried in a Baptist ceremony. A page from the family bible was sent to Washington to substantiate the pension claim. The birth records of the Mursh children showed: "Kitty Mursh Born August 16th 1784; John Mursh was Born May 6th 1786; Robert A. Mursh was Born March 26, 1788; Sarah Mursh was Born March 29th 1790; James Mursh was Born March 13th 1792; Philadelphia Mursh was Born Febr. 5th 1794; Betsey Mursh was Born Novr 14th 1796; Patsey Mursh was Born July 28th 1798; Rhoda Mursh was Born Febr 21 1800."

It is thought that Robert Mursh and his family came to South Carolina to live among the Catawba Indians at the request of Capt. John Nettles. Nettles was a Catawba Indian who had also been a student at the College of William and Mary at the same time as Mursh. Nettles was interested in supplying missionaries to the Catawbias.

Mursh became the pastor of Hopewell Baptist Church, an offshoot of Flint Hill Baptist Church which was located on the east side of Sugar Creek in Lancaster District. Hopewell was both a church and a school. The schoolmaster was James Lewis who taught five of Mursh's children.

In spite of Mursh's and Lewis's efforts, the Catawbias could not be persuaded to accept Christianity or show much interest in schooling.

Joseph White of Fort Mill District wrote about Mursh: "He had adopted in full the dress and habits of the white man, when I saw him in 1827. He was a Baptist preacher-- pronounced Marsh...son was called Mush. The son lived in Chester County,

married a Catawba woman. [Robert] Mursh was a man of excellent character. Six feet high and raw-boned when young and in his prime but he became somewhat fleshy."

Under an 1818 Act of Congress, Robert Mursh applied for a Revolutionary War pension in 1820 (eventually receiving \$8 per month). He listed his wife Elizabeth, aged 59, three daughters, Sally, 28, Elizabeth, 22, and Rhody, 20, and 7 grandchildren, Philadelphia, Nancy, Aley, Joseph, John, Miranda and Fanny, all between 1 and 8 years of age, as totally dependent upon him. The value of Mursh's land (50 acres), house, furnishings, livestock and tools was listed as \$389. 63.

In 1847, 10 years after Robert Mursh's death, his daughter Rhoda Mursh appealed for continuance of the pension with a plea of extreme poverty. The plea must have fallen on deaf ears. There is no further record of any action on the part of the Pension Office.

By Louise Pettus