

NEARBY HISTORY:

Whyte's house of many uses

19th-century home near Catawba River was a tavern, schoolhouse, post office

Sometime in the late 1830s, the Rev. Archibald Whyte built a home for himself, a tavern to serve the public, a schoolhouse and a post office — all under one roof.

A Rock Hill Herald article on March 31, 1949, carried a story about the house along with a photograph of the two-story-plus-basement, wood-frame building



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flanked by two large chimneys. Elizabeth Reed, who wrote a series of articles on historic houses in the Rock Hill area,

labeled it a treasure that “should be preserved for posterity.” Unfortunately, it would later burn, probably by an arsonist, leaving only the two chimneys, no longer standing, to mark the spot.

The house was on Saluda Road not far from the Catawba River. The underpinnings were huge slabs of sandstone brought across the river from a spot near a grist mill owned by the Rev. Adam Ivy. At the time Reed was writing, the Ivy Old Mill had been washed away in the Great Flood of 1916. The Whyte house was then owned by John Roddey, who had built a bridge across the river at that spot only to lose it in the Great Flood. Roddey never lived in the Whyte house but rented it.

Reed wrote that in spite of no particular care over the years, when she observed the Whyte

house in 1949, it was “marvelously preserved.” The basement had a fireplace at one end and several small windows. She thought it didn’t have enough light to serve as a school room.

The main floor had two large rooms which she thought were used as a school room and a parlor, but perhaps housed the tavern and post office. There were two front doors, which would indicate an attempt to separate the house’s public and private functions.

Reed wrote that there were nine or 10 small rooms that must have served as bedrooms. The attic was reached from an enclosed stairway that she likened to a coffin in appearance. The attic was unfloored.

She found plastered walls that in some rooms were remarkably intact after more than 100 years. In other rooms, large amounts of plaster had fallen away, revealing the hand-cut laths behind the plaster and the use of horse hair in an attempt to hold it together.

The bricks in the chimneys were laid so that every fifth row was placed with the end of the bricks exposed rather than the sides, a technique called a “Flemish mold.” She thought the bricks remarkably smooth to have been done by slave labor.

The wide front porch was supported by cypress posts 20 inches square.

Undoubtedly they were hauled up from the S.C. Lowcountry.

Reed wrote: “The house is un-

usual for an old one in that it is not symmetrical on the front. The two front doors and the two front windows are placed irregularly from the end walls. The necessity of two front doors is easily understood when one realizes that the building was a home, a post office and a school.”

The post office was called Nation Ford and still existing are a few hand-endorsed envelopes in Whyte’s beautiful handwriting.

Whyte was present at the signing of the Nation Ford Treaty of 1840, which removed the claim of the Catawbas to their ancestral 144,000 acres and put them on their current reservation. When the state superintendents and head men of the Catawba tribe met near Whyte’s home, they made him the secretary. The historic treaty, now in the S.C. State Archives, is in the handwriting of Whyte.

Besides the roles of innkeeper, postman and schoolmaster, Whyte served as minister of Neely’s Creek ARP church and also served two terms in the S.C. House of Representatives. In addition, from 1855 to 1860, he backed a newspaper called the Indian Land and wrote a number of feature articles.

Whyte’s biographers say that he had the “brightest mind of his day.” Certainly, he was one of the most versatile.

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