

Site Of Old Fort To Be Perpetuated With Marker

SUNDAY, JULY 20, 1930. THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

GIGANTIC INDIAN ARROWHEAD ON PEDESTAL OF NATIVE ROCK TO BE UNVEILED NEXT SUNDAY

Last Outpost Between Early Settlers and Indians on West—
Both Catawbas and Cherokees Will Participate—Great-
Great-Granddaughter of Woman Who Was Born at Old
Fort Will Unveil Monument—Rev. Clarence Stuart McClelland, Jr., to Make Dedicatory Address.

(According to the best information obtainable the site of what is now Old Fort was designated by the Crown of England, through a regularly appointed commission, for the erection of a blockhouse for the use of the Catawba Indians as a buffer against their hereditary enemies, the Cherokees, who were in greater numbers and continually on the warpath against the Catawbas and the whites, who were pushing in at the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains country.)

The Catawbas, however, refused to use the refuge provided for them, probably because of the indisposition of all Indians to fight at close quarters. They drifted south as the whites pushed in, and the remnants of that tribe are now isolated on a reservation in South Carolina. Eventually a terrible massacre occurred in the vicinity of the fort, practically all white inhabitants who could not reach the fort being killed by the Cherokees. The fort covered an acre of land over a flourishing spring at the headwaters of the Catawba river.

It is pretty well established, therefore, that the fort was built by the white man for the friendly Catawbas, but was used by the whites against the Cherokees, who were later subdued by General Rutherford, for whom the county and town of Rutherfordton were named. The whites then laid claim to all the land up to the crest of the Blue Ridge mountains, seven miles west of Old Fort.

But after the Revolutionary War Benjamin Franklin and his aides did not adhere to this proposition, when they, out of deference to France and the Marquis de LaFayette, went to Paris to perfect the treaty of peace between England and the United States. They laid claim to all the lands lying between the Blue Ridge mountains and the Mississippi river, basing their claim on the fact that Daniel Boone had, in the meantime, established himself in what is now known as Boonesville, Ky.

The French were not agreeable and wanted all the territory lying between the crest of the Blue Ridge mountains and the Mississippi river to be ceded to Spain, presumably as a buffer state to keep the colonies from encroaching on the Louisiana territory, which France later sold to the United States. Franklin and his party then retired to London and settled the peace terms direct with England.)

BY J. B. HICKLIN.

RESURRECTING the colorful chapters of history of western North Carolina of more than 150 years ago for background, descendants of those hardy pioneers who settled the fertile valley of the Catawba river will unveil the largest arrowhead in the world at a celebration to be held at Old Fort next Sunday.

SITE OF "OLD FORT."

The monument occupies the approximate site of the "old fort" that marked the western frontier of the American colonies and North Carolina from 1756 to 1776, and is dedicated to the memory of that gallant band who braved the dangers of a hostile and unknown wilderness to establish another outpost of the white man's civilization.

Invitations to men prominent in the building of this section and state, and leaders of both the Cherokee and Catawba Indian tribes to take part in the celebration attending the unveiling have been issued, and a program rich in historical significance and abounding in interest arranged.

The principal address from an improvised platform in the shadow of the shaft in the heart of the town will be made by the Rev. Clarence Stuart McClelland, Jr., of Fletcher, president of Westminster Abbey of the South association, and son of a Confederate general of distinction; county; but tradition and legend J. Hampton Rich, Winston-Salem, handed down through the generations of the Boone Memorial Highway association, has likewise

accepted the invitation to be present, as have a number of others widely known in this and other states. F. A. Sondley, Asheville, outstanding historian of western North Carolina, is expected and will perhaps throw additional light on the early history of the settlement heretofore unrecorded.

Pretty Margaret Nesbitt, nine-year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. N. Nesbitt, of Old Fort, and direct descendant of one of the first settlers of the valley, will draw the string to unveil the monument. Her maternal ancestor was born in the Old Fort.

HOME-COMING DAY.

The event will serve something of a homecoming day. Sturdy families from over the whole country-side, many bearing the same family name of the first settlers, will gather to renew friendships. True, the section has developed into the prosperous and thickly populated McDowell county; but tradition and legend handed down through the generations have made the past seem very real and vital to them, and at heart

these people are of the same hardy stock that first cleared the fields with a gun at their side. They will come from modern homes instead of rude log cabins, as did their forefathers, and travel in high-powered automobiles instead of astride a horse or on foot, but they will not belittle their forebears or forget the hardships which they endured to cut a path through the wilderness.

The arrowhead, chiseled out of a slab of pink granite at the Salisbury quarries, stands 14 1-2 feet in height on a picturesque stone base of slightly more than 15 feet. Located on highway No. 10 and near the Southern railway depot, it attracts the attention of tourists from all corners of the country passing daily through this great mountain territory. The boulders of the monument base, washed smooth over the countless years by the rippling waters of Davidson's Mill creek nearby, stand in a basin of sparkling water where mountain trout will play and water plants flourish.

A brass tablet riveted to the base bears the inscription:

"This marks the site of the Old Indian Fort built A. D. 1756, the western outpost of the United States and of North Carolina until 1776.

A UNIQUE MARKER.

Street space is wisely provided for those attracted by the unique memorial to draw aside and learn the significance of the marker, and enjoy its clear-cut beauty. And large numbers of those visiting Old Fort see the monument and have the meaning of the town's name indelibly impressed upon their memory.

The exact site of the old log fort which stood for so many years before falling in decay was some 50 or 60 yards from where the monument stands, on Davidson's Mill creek. Because of the spot's inaccessibility and distance from the main artery of travel the nearer location was selected in the realization that the slight variation would make no material difference.

Near the original site of the fort stood until a few years ago the old Burgin homestead, a landmark the country over. Fire of undetermined origin destroyed it. There a large spring of sweet, cold mountain water bubbled. The early settlers depended on it for their water supply and it continued in constant use by residents of the community until Old Fort installed a municipal water works system some years ago. This famous spring figures in more than one dramatic story when Indian attacks made it of supreme importance to quench thirst and combat flames that may have threatened the blockhouse.

INTERESTING TRADITION.

Tradition has it that the old fort was already built when the whites first invaded the region. The unverified story points out that the Catawbas had erected it as a stronghold against encroachments of the Cherokees, with whom they never made peace, and that the whites rebuilt and strengthened the fortifications as a means of protecting themselves against the hostile Indians. Though the Indians, principally the Cherokees, had been pushed back over the Blue Ridge mountains, the story goes, raiding parties often made night attacks or swooped down upon whites who had wandered too far from assistance.

Miss Gertrude Dula, publicity chairman for the Memorial association, believed that the explanation

of the origin of the fort in error after careful study and a chat with J. A. (Jim) Dalton, 90-year-old resident of the community, who is gifted with a remarkable memory and has interested himself with the history of the section.

"I never heard tell of Indians building a fort," this remarkable old man is quoted as saying. "It is against all their nature to build fortifications. They roved the woods, did their fighting from behind trees in the 'bushwhacking' fashion and didn't come out in the open to make a stand without being led by whites. I've never heard my father and other old settlers talk about the Indians building the fort, and I'm sure they knew it was the whites who first built it."

NO WRITTEN RECORD.

Unfortunately most of the early history of the section is unchronicled because most of the settlers had had no education advantages and could neither read nor write. Battling against the elements and ever on the alert to beat off Indian attacks they had no time to write their experiences had their education permitted. Hence most of what is known of the first settlers has been handed down by word of mouth through the generations and very likely some inaccuracies have crept in and many of the vital facts forgotten.

As near as can be learned John Burgin was one of the very first settlers who pushed westward into the "land flowing with milk and honey," and erected his rude cabin of logs near the fort. He and four brothers came to America from Wales. He first settled in what is now Statesville and his brothers scattered to other parts of the country, one or more going to Georgia. John had married a Miss Mann, from the tSatesville section. Some years later two of the sons of the Burgins who settled in Georgia came to North Carolina to live with their Uncle John, and married two of his daughters, their first cousins. Then Mattie Burgin, another daughter, married Fletcher Halford and Martha Burgin, a fourth daughter, became the wife of F. M. Harris. From these latter unions came the long line of descent from which little Margaret Nesbitt springs—on both sides of her family. These Burgin women are her great-great-grandmothers, according to the best reckoning.

FIRST PRINTED STORY.

The first printed record of any white man having set foot upon the section of the country which now comprises western North Carolina in the Blue Ridge mountains is found in the North Carolina colonial records and is an account of the surveying expedition headed by the good Moravian Bishop Spangenberg. This band was organized to select a tract of 100,000 acres which the Earl of Granville, who was owner of the western portion of the province of North Carolina, had contracted to patent to headquarters of the Moravians of America, at Bethlehem, Pa., for the establishment of a colony of the Moravian brotherhood of North Carolina. Although the party probably did not reach the interior as far as where the fort was later established, the expedition went over outlying territory in what is now Caldwell county and perhaps touched the eastern rim of the present McDowell county.

Reaching the Catawba river at a point below Island Ford, they journeyed to the mouth of the John's river, then up the John's river to the Blue Ridge at Coffey's Gap, near Grandfather mountain, thence turning eastward and proceeding to the headquarters of the Yadkin, down which they journeyed until they reached Bethabara (Salem) in Stokes county, now Forsyth. The trip was made in November and December, 1752, some four years before the establishment of the fort. The bishop had with him a surveying party belonging to the Earl of Granville, which he was to board and pay wages. Although they surveyed and blue-printed many thousands of acres of valuable land on the main Little river in Alexander, on the Catawba, on John's river and on the Yadkin, as they progressed, they did not settle on any of the tracts. A site in Surry county was finally chosen and a settlement established.

In a diary kept by the bishop on this journey he points out that the country through which he traveled as an "unbroken wilderness covered with virgin forest except where there were patches that the Indians had set fire in order to drive the deer to places more advantageous for slaughter." On Little river they heard that a Scotch-irish family lived some 20 miles distant and that they had built a mill there, but he could find no trail leading to it. They also heard that a hunter, Johnathan Perrot by name, "lived like an Indian" some 20 miles from the Catawba river. There were no road nor paths except the buffalo trails, and no sign of human life was evidenced. The party met a number of Indians from the country "further west" in roving bands on the hunting paths, but no account of bloodshed is given.

From these descriptions it may be concluded that the whites had settled only the eastern portion of what is now Burke county, and had not reached the present Caldwell or McDowell counties and the rich county between there and the Blue Ridge mountains, which then marked the extent of the white man's claims. The only suggestion that the western half of Burke county had even been visited before by whites was the fact that Quaker Meadows, just a few miles from the mouth of John's river, had been considered an important enough projected outpost to bear a name. The name still lives there as one of the McDowell farms.

Soon after this exploration migration started "westward" towards the Blue Ridge. Brave men shouldered their rifles and with their families and a few household furnishings pushed further and further into the wilderness. It was during this migration that John Burgin and other stalwarts like him settled in the fertile valley where Old Fort now stands.

BLOCKHOUSE OF LOGS.

They immediately erected a blockhouse of logs, provided with port holes through which to fire guns to beat off surprise attacks by roving bands of Indians who declined to stay on the other side of the mountains as ordered by the white governors. The attic was furnished as a living quarters in time of danger and there families gathered until the savages had disappeared. With rifles in hand the men went to the cleared fields in the valleys

in daytime to work their crops and returned at night to the fort.

General Griffith Rutherford is said to have been in military command at one time, although it is probable that no formal body of troops was at hand for protection of the first settlers. An interesting and vivid insight into the difficulties that beset the colonists as late as 1776 may be gleaned from a communication which General Rutherford sent the committee of safety at Salisbury:

"July ye 12th, 1776.

"Honored gentlemen:

"This is to furdre to acquaint you of our troubles; this day I reced an express from Co. Blackman and it gives me account, that Last Week there was 40 Indens on Crooked Creek and that one Middleton is killed ther—Indens was seen Meney miles furdre Down the Cattaba River. I am pplid Daley tow for Reliefe; Ancesly waiting for youre Instructions; pray send, if Possible, at Least 1,000 lbs. more Powder, besides what you first Voted, for people in the frunters will move off if not supplied with that article. I Plead for Expedition. Mr. Alston the Berer is appointed Commissire for a Large Number of Men and as Salt is Not to be got without youre approbation I Hope you will Give orders to the Marchants of Cross-Creek to Let the Commesarys of Salisbury District have at Least 300 bushels.

"I am Gentlemen youre Humble servt.

"GRIFFITH RUTHERFORD."

BATTLES WITH INDIANS.

People of this section took little or no part in the Revolutionary war, and some no doubt knew little of the fighting until months after battles occurred. They were kept busy beating off the Indians when outbreaks would follow comparative quiet after peace-pipes had been smoked and treaties signed allowing the whites to settle undisturbed.

An interesting story handed down through the family is told by "Mister Jim" Dalton. He says his father told it to him as a boy.

Young men of the fort who had gone out to shoot wild turkeys which they heard calling from the surrounding hillsides were often found pierced by an Indian's arrow. After deep thought over the coincidences, one young leader determined upon a plan. When next the plaintiff mating call of a wild turkey was heard, he packed his rifle on his shoulder and crawled through the underbrush towards the spot from which the sound came. Sliding behind a boulder he placed his hat on the top of the rifle and raised it above the ledge. A swift arrow immediately darted from the brush and stuck in the hat. An Indian brave stepped silently into view, believing he had killed his intended victim. The rifle level quickly and a clack rang out through the quiet forest.

The Indian leaped into the air in the throes of death agony.

DEBT TO THE FATHERS.

The idea of erecting some memorial marker to explain the origin of the name of Old Fort was first conceived some years ago by the Women's club of the town. Only a modest attempt was projected. It was then that civic leaders became interested and proposed that a monument of a bit more ambitious proportions be attempted. Public subscriptions were sought and each

county in the state invited to send a stone which was to be placed in the monument base. However, only a few stones were received and funds did not grow to sufficient amount to warrant completion of the project at that time.

Interest, however, never died in the hearts of many of the foremost citizens and a year or so ago a monument of attractive proportions was decided upon. Funds were again sought and this time were swelled to the needed amount. Dr. P. H. Mashburn was named president of the memorial association formed, and Dr. D. M. McIntosh secretary. They had valuable assistance from D. T. Roughton, D. W. Adams and others of the community, and succeeded in the realization of a dream that they believe will add materially to the historical interest of the town and section and stand for many generations to remind the young people of their debt to the first settlers.

TRIBESMEN PRESENT.

The fort, according to legend, was erected by the Catawbas as a defense against the hostile Cherokees. The two tribes, inasomuch as history relates, never made peace. But when the marker is unveiled it is planned to have the chief of the Cherokees, at Cherokee, and the chief of the Catawbas, now on a reservation in South Carolina, journey to the scene where their ancestors battled with bow and arrow and tomahawk, and smoke the pipe of peace.

While the Catawbas and Cherokees were battling for supremacy the white man arrived and ultimately took charge of the fort. And he, in turn, used it as a defense against the red man. And here it was that the great-great-grandmother of little Martha Nesbitt, was born.

Will Rogers and Vice President Charles Curtis, in the veins of both of whom Indian blood flows, have been invited as special guests of the occasion. Others who have been invited to take part in the program include Horace Kephart, of Bryson City, an authority on the Great Smoky mountains, the ancestral home of the Cherokees; Mrs. E. L. McKee, of Sylva, prominent in women's clubs circles; R. E. Simpson, of Cincinnati, O., in charge of lines west of the Southern railway system, who co-operated in securing and delivering the marker; Robert Quillen, editor and nationally-known paragrapher; and others.

In addition to a band, music will be furnished by fiddlers, as representative of the pioneer days in which the fort stood as a bulwark of protection, first for the Catawbas and later for the whites.

CHARLOTTE,

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History

The Indians

Charlotte News, 1938
The Golden Jubilee Ed.

THE hills on which Charlotte is built were in the fork of Indian trading paths by which the upland tribes communicated with tribes along the coast. This section was the home of the Catawba Indians whose name the white settlers gave to the river ten miles to the west of the city. There are no evidences to indicate the sites of the Indian villages, but the old records refer to settlements that extended for several miles up and down the Catawba River. A letter from the Governor of the Province in 1762 indicated that the chief town of the Catawba Nation was about fifteen miles to the southwest of Charlotte on Big Sugaw Creek. As the white settlers came in, the Indians were forced to give ground and their capital was moved to the southern border of the State.

The Catawbas were of Siouan stock whose ancestral home was in the Ohio Valley. The origin of the name is unknown. There is an Indian word, katapa, meaning "divided." John Lawson, surveyor-general of North Carolina, who has left a journal of his travels in the state in 1700, called them the Esaw Indians, derived from their word isaw (river) and referring to their lands along the Catawba. They were also known to other tribes as Cuttawba and Kadapaw.

SMALL BAND STILL LIVING

The Catawba was one of the largest and most powerful tribes among the Southern Indians. They once claimed all the country between the Catawba River and the Blue Ridge Mountains and at the beginning of the eighteenth century they were said to number from 4,000 to 6,000. Either these figures were exaggerated or war and disease diminished their numbers, because there were less than half that many when the first white settlers came to Mecklenburg. In 1755 the tribe had between 250 and 500 warriors, but an epidemic of smallpox in 1760 reduced their number to 60. About 200 Catawba Indians remain today, living as wards of the State of South Carolina on a reservation near Rock Hill.

The Catawbas were generally inclined to be friendly to the white settlers. Their neighbors to the west, the powerful and aggressive Chickasaw, of Iroquoian stock, more bitterly contested the settlement of the whites. Encroachments by the Cherokees on the southern border of the Catawba territory were also a source of contention.

ROBERT LEE HARRIS, 1867-1954

ROBERT LEE HARRIS PAPERS

Kindness of:

Mrs. Robert Lee Harris

November 11, 1954

The last of the
true Catawba Indians

MCF
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#4

(card 2)

(Card 2)

S. C. - Indians - Catawbas

Site of old Fort to be perpetuated...



Arrowhead monument at Old Fort, which marks the site of the blockhouse used, first, by the Catawbas as a defense against their hereditary enemies, the Cherokees, and later by the whites against the depredations of the Red Skins; group of Cherokee Indians (above) in their tribal dress and headgear, some of whom will take part in the celebration; D. A. Harris, Catawba Indian (center groups), who is expected to smoke a piece pipe with representatives of the Cherokees, and the last remaining full-bloods of the Catawbas—Mrs. Laura Blue, wife of Samuel Blue, chairman of the Indian committee, and Mrs. Rachel Brown, and (standing, left to right) Henry Canty, D. A. Harris, Ben. P. Harris and Robt. L. Harris; Rev. Clarence McClelland, Jr., rector of Old Calvary Episcopal Church, Fletcher, and originator of what is known as the outdoor Westminster Abbey of the South, who is to make the dedicatory address, and (center) Margaret Nesbitt, 9-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. N. Nesbitt, direct descendent of the first white female child born at Old Fort, who will unveil the monument.

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