

Hunting, Fishing Grounds

Early Settlers Found Deer, Turkeys, Small Game Abundant

Hunting and fishing have always been popular in this area, both to supply food and for sport.

Records dating from the colonial period tell of clear, sparkling streams teeming with fish. The Catawba River had an annual shad run that drew campers who seined the tasty fish and held great fish fries — the forerunner of today's fish camps.

Early hunters found deer and wild turkeys plentiful, not to speak of smaller game. As late as 1870, large flocks of wild turkeys were common enough to be seen from the roadside on almost any trip. The last wild geese reported in York County were nesting in thickets on the Broad River near the Ninety-nine Islands around 1865-70.

In 1895, Rock Hill had two hotels that catered to huntsmen from the North who considered this area to be a "veritable paradise" for quail and snipe hunting. The Carolina Hotel, a three-story, 40-room building on Main Street near the railroad, owned the shooting rights on 12,000 acres. The guests of the Carolina, who were transported to the field and had guides to boot, were practically guaranteed

to bag 50-75 quail a day. Along the river, geese, ducks and woodcock were plentiful.

Other hunters stayed in the 40-room hotel on the top two floors of the Roddey Building. The lower floor contained the hotel lobby, the Roddey Mercantile Co. and the First National Bank.

Prominent Rock Hillians were likely to mix pleasure with business by offering to act as guides to Northern hunters they thought were likely to invest in some local enterprises. W.J. Roddey, who was a Winthrop College trustee, often invited the college president, D.B. Johnson, to hunt with his guests. Johnson has lost his left arm when a boy but he was said to be an excellent marksman. Johnson loaded his own gun (it was also said that he could thread a worm on a hook as well as any two-handed person.)



Nearby History

Louise Pettus

A hunter's club called "Rock Hill's 100" (which had 25 members) held an annual "possum hunter's dinner" in early January. Each member brought a guest. For years the dinner was managed by B.W. Creed and John Fewell. The 1904 menu, besides the possum that was the centerpiece, included oysters, quail, turkey, potatoes and wild duck. No sweets were permitted — all foods were products of the wild.

Sometimes "Rock Hill's 100" had their dinners at the West Main Street Armory; other times they met at a river house. The 1914 annual possum dinner was given by F.M. Neely

at the Riverview Farm.

Across the river, Fort Mill hunters, members of the Cole Blease Club of Gold Hill, held an annual Christmas possum hunt. Their meal was served at a camp in the India Hook Hills near the Catawba river at a spot near a sparkling spring situated between two large hills. According to the Fort Mill hunters, members of the Cole Blease Club hunt resulted in "75 rabbits, 16 birds and 4 possums being put on the fire." The Times added, "Of course, 'the refreshments' were there."

After the hunting season was over, thoughts turned to fishing. A favorite place was at the Catawba River shoals at Land's Ford. There the fish were easily gilled or captured barehanded when the water was low.

Another favored fishing spot was below the India Hook dam. Schooling fish were stopped by the dam. Dip nets made out of barrel hoops and loose netting were attached to 6- to 8-foot poles. One person, on a good day, might take as much as 200 pounds of catfish and carp.

One thing each generation of outdoorsmen had in common: They all listened to their elders wail that the trophies of the hunt or the abundance of the fish "t'weren't like it used to be."

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