

Land of little worth forced farmer exodus

High transportation costs and thin topsoil contributed to move

Fishing Creek is 40 miles long, stretching from a few miles south of the town of York into Chester County and eventually into the Catawba River not far above Great Falls.

The land Fishing Creek flows through is known as blackjack for the blackjack oak, the dominant tree of the area. Technically, the soil is Iredell soil.

It is not rich and, in the days before commercial fertilizer became available in the 1870s, the thin topsoil could produce for only a short time.

A paper published in 1843 stated that the timber was worth far more than the land. After the timber was cut and the land cleared, the land would produce about 200 pounds of picked cotton per acre for four to five years. Farmers first planted cotton and then corn. Then they planted wheat or oats, harvested the grain and tilled the stalks into the ground to enrich the soil. Then either corn or cotton for a year. The next year they would plant rye and let it rest for three years.

The best blackjack land lay close to the creek. It was worth \$10 an acre; after three years it was worth \$5 an acre and after four years it was \$2 an acre. Creek banks were the richest but they were subject to flooding. Manure from barns and cow pens was used on the gardens and for a few acres of cotton. Cotton was fa-

NEARBY HISTORY

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vored because it was the only crop that could be taken to market.

In 1843, most of the cotton shipped out of Charleston was sent to Liverpool, England. Roads were terrible. It cost a blackjack farmer as much to haul a bale of cotton to Charleston as it did for the shipping company to take the same bale from Charleston to Liverpool.

Horses and mules were expensive, too. They were generally imported from Kentucky, with a horse costing \$50 to \$100 and a mule \$40 to \$50.

In the hard drought years of the mid-1840s, many of the farmers left the area for better land elsewhere, especially in Arkansas. After 1848, Texas saw a large migration of Carolinas farmers.

The Civil War disrupted agriculture tremendously and the Reconstruction Era legislation of the federal government favored the Western states.

The Patrons of Husbandry, or Grange, was organized in 1867 in Minnesota. In many ways it resembled Masonry with its secret signs and passwords but differed in that husbands and wives attended meetings together with their children. It quickly caught on in the Midwest but was initially rejected by the South.

The York County Agricultural Society, a pre-Civil War institution, was revived in November 1870 under the leadership of A.A.

McKenzie of Bethel, a Rock Hill lawyer. A map of the county was drawn with 10 townships. Three men were appointed in each township to use the old model that sought to share knowledge of new agricultural techniques and to develop marketing strategies.

Few farmers responded. Col. W.B. Wilson, a lawyer, took over the leadership and thought that joining the National Grange was the solution. It was the first time the S.C. Upcountry had an organization other than churches that enrolled both men and women. Wilson intended that the York County Grange be nonpolitical but that stance lasted only a year.

The York County Grange peaked in membership in 1876 when it backed Gen. Wade Hampton for governor. Hampton's victory resulted in the removal of federal troops from the state. Gradually, interest in the Grange declined. The last major effort of the York County Grange was lobbying the state legislature in the early 1900s to provide state money for educating women, specifically Winthrop College, the S.C. College for Women.

The legislature turned a deaf ear. D.B. Johnson, founder of Winthrop and its president for 42 years, had to turn elsewhere for expansion money.

It has been written that before 1928, Johnson got more money to erect buildings from Northern philanthropists (namely Morgan, Carnegie, Rockefeller and Peabody) than he ever got from the S.C. legislature.

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