

Droughts, floods, earthquakes and tunes rock region in 1800s

1881 dry spell created shortage of food in time of no government aid

In 1881, this area was in a drought as bad as the one in 1845. An old-timer from the Kings Mountain area thought it worse. He wrote that in 1844, weather had been good and farmers were able to live on the previous year's harvest. This was not the case in 1881.

No one had corn or wheat for sale. There were thousands of acres on which the farmer would harvest less than two bushels of corn per acre. The only land likely to produce half a crop was in the river bottoms.

There was no rain between the April 27 and Aug. 7, 1881. By August, it was too late to plant cotton or corn. Many had to dig new wells. And the worst was yet to come.

Heavy rains in the third week of September raised the water level of the Catawba River 15 feet at Curretton's Ferry. All the crops in the river bottoms were washed away.

NEARBY HISTORY

Louise Pettus



Those who had no money, no credit and no property were bound to suffer. Stores were not able to advance money because it was a credit society. The farmer borrowed to start his crop and paid the storekeeper when he harvested.

There were no government programs to provide assistance to destitute farmers. That would have to wait for over a half century when the New Deal would come up with several programs.

American Tune Book

When Dr. Lowell Mason of Boston died in 1872, one of his many song books, "American Tune Book," had sold more than 600,000 copies. Many of those copies were sold in the Carolinas. In 1919, singers formed the York County Tune Book Association.

There was a similar organization in Gaston County, N.C., and another in Mecklenburg County.

Members of any one county group were likely to show up in the neighboring counties. The singers came from all over - Columbia and Charlotte always had good representation at the annual events. E. Meek Dickson directed York County's singing for many years.

The York County Tune Book Association singers met at different churches each year. In 1925, the designated church was Bethany Presbyterian. Some North Carolinians brought more than 1,000 singers to Bethany for the all-day singing. As always, there was a picnic on the grounds. It was another very hot, dry year but still there was an abundance of food.

An observer wrote there was "no skimping or shortness of rations anywhere." Farmers accepted "bad years" and still could sing songs of praise.

Missouri Quake Rattles Area

John Springs III, kept a "plantation book" from 1811 to 1847. His house was called Springfield and still stands north of Fort Mill on U.S. 21 Business.

The entries in his plantation book are generally about crop

plantings and harvests, the sale of cattle and illnesses in his family.

However, an entry made Feb. 8, 1812, reports an unusual event: "This Night we felt sensibly another severe shock of an Earthquake (there being as many as two or three experienced shortly before this). The fowls in the Fowl house came off their roosts and made a considerable Noise, so much so, that I thought something had got in among them.

"It took place as near as I could guess in the latter part of the Night I being fast asleep when wakened I felt my bed rock very considerably, as I thought in the direction from E to W."

The quake felt by Springs was one of three earthquakes that centered around New Madrid, Mo., in 1811-12. Each of the three on the Richter scale was 8.0 in intensity.

Five towns in three states vanished completely. The Mississippi River cut new channels. They were the most violent earthquakes ever recorded in North America.

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