

Sept 10, 1994

COMMENTARY

Nation Ford, Nation's Ford?

■ Some common spelling mistakes become the truth.

A commonly accepted truism is that once an error is put into print, it is impossible to remove it. The error seems bound to be repeated so often that it becomes accepted as the truth.

Local history has its share of truisms and misconceptions, especially in the spelling of place names.

A good example of the above is the frequency of errors that surround the Catawba River crossing Nation Ford. Nation Ford is often incorrectly written as Nations Ford or Nationsford. We see the error on street signs, both in Charlotte and Rock Hill, and in other written material. In fact, almost invariably, when this writer correctly uses Nation Ford in a column, the copy editor will change the spelling. Popular usage seems destined to overturn the historical usage.

There are three good reasons to use Nation Ford as the correct designation. First, it is used by the S.C. Department of Archives and History, and that department is the final authority on historical authenticity.

There was until several years ago an historical marker at the south side of U.S. 21's Spratt Bridge on the Catawba River. The marker, headed "Nation Ford," continued: "Two miles downstream prehistoric crossing of Ca-



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tawba Indians, site of legendary battle between Catawbans and Cherokees. Used by Virginia traders in 1652. Sumter, with 500 men, had a fortified camp here in July, 1780. Federal cavalry burned the railroad bridge in April 1865."

Not only the S.C. government supports the use of Nation Ford. There was a U.S. Post Office at the site from Feb. 7, 1840, until July 9, 1856. Archibald Whyte, an ARP minister, schoolmaster and innkeeper, was also the postmaster. There is still surviving an envelope with no stamp, but, in the postmaster's handwriting, the endorsement "Nation Ford, S.C., Jan. 11, 1843. Free. A. Whyte."

The third argument in favor of the use of Nation Ford is the Treaty of 1840, which was made between the Catawba Indians and the state of South Carolina. The official document was signed by representatives of the South Carolina government and the head men of the

tribe. The original manuscript is in the state archives, and the first sentence begins, "A treaty entered into at the Nation Ford, Catawba ..."

On the other hand, there is a second instance where the opposite "corruption" of a name has occurred, and the S.C. Department of Archives and History accepts the second usage rather than the original one.

Landsford is now the accepted version, rather than the original "Land's Ford." The historic marker is two-sided. One side is headed "Landsford in the Revolution." It states: "Thomas Sumter, William R. Davie and Andrew Jackson all camped or quartered near here during upcountry skirmishes after the fall of Charleston. The British General Cornwallis crossed here in Oct. 1780 on his way to Winnsborough after his plans to advance into N.C. were frustrated by Ferguson's defeat at King's Mountain."

The other side of the Landsford marker in Chester County does explain why it was originally called Land's Ford: "Located about 4 mi. E., this ford, an early Indian crossing, was probably named for Thomas Land who received a nearby land grant from the Crown

in 1755. Used by Patriot and British armies during the American Revolution. Later home of Wm. R. Davie, founder of University of N.C. The 1823 Landsford Canal bears witness to S.C.'s first great period of public works."

There was a Landsford post office from 1811 until the Civil War.

When referring to the battleground or King's Mountain Academy, the historic markers consistently use an apostrophe in "King's." However, there was a railroad completed in 1852 that was chartered as Kings Mountain Railroad. And Kings Mountain Furnace, minus the apostrophe, was a York County post office established in 1840.

We must say, however, that, while the S.C. Department of Archives and History has tried to be correct and consistent, the U.S. Post Office does not seem to have as good a record.

How else can you account for some York County post offices being named Clark's Fork, Hill's Ironworks, Meek's Hill, Smith's Turnout and Thompson's Tan Yard, while at the same time have others, with no apostrophe, named Crowders Creek, McElwees Store, Neelys Creek and Whites Store?