

Civil War ends shortly after Stoneman's raid

May 9 1993

On April 19, 1865, at the Nation Ford crossing between Rock Hill and Fort Mill, the only railway bridge over the Catawba River was burned by Union soldiers under Maj. E.C. Moderill, who was serving under Maj. Gen. George Stoneman. After a brief skirmish with the Confederate guards, Moderill and his men headed for Dallas, N.C.

Stoneman's raid, as it came to be called, was the only official military action in York County during the Civil War.

Yorkville was in Moderill's path. Yorkville was filled with numerous refugees from Charleston who brought their most precious possessions with them. Just as Yorkville, one of the loveliest villages of the upcountry, was about to be burned, a Union trooper arrived with the news that Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston had surrendered to Union Gen. William T. Sherman. Yorkville escaped the torch.

The day after the skirmish at Nation Ford, Confederate President Jefferson Davis, forced to flee Richmond, was in Charlotte. Davis found no artillery and wired Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard in Greensboro that there was no communication with the south side of the Catawba River.

Davis sent another dispatch to Brig. Gen. S.W. Ferguson at Catawba Bridge that he was sending Ferguson an engineering officer with instructions to prepare a pontoon bridge or, if enough boats could be found, to build a ferry across the river.

The following day, April 21, Johnston was pleading for assistance in getting his troops paid, fed and on their way home. He reported that paroled Confederates and stragglers were commandeering the trains in a desperate effort to return to their homes. Johnson ordered the Catawba River route be prepared so the army's supplies stored in the Chesterville could be sent to him in Greensboro.



Nearby history

LOUISE PETTUS

Stoneman's raid, as it came to be called, was the only official military action in York County during the Civil War.

On April 23, John C. Breckenridge, the Confederate secretary of war, wired Johnston that he had started two trains out of Chester-ville that were filled with supplies, but that the trains were pillaged by paroled soldiers seeking rations. He was preparing a third train.

In the meantime, a pontoon bridge was being placed at Nation Ford so that the stores in Chester-ville could be sent to the starving soldiers around Greensboro and Salisbury. Gen. Braxton Bragg was sent to Chesterville to try to make order out of chaos. Jefferson Davis promised to join Bragg in a few days.

Davis spent the night of April 26 at the White Homestead just outside Fort Mill. The fine Georgian-style home was built in 1831 by William Elliott White. Davis and part of his cabinet spent the night at the nearby home of Andrew Baxter Springs. The next morning, the last meeting of the full Confederate cabinet was held in the front yard of the White Homestead.

The afternoon of April 27, 1865, the Davis party crossed over the Catawba River at Nation Ford. Davis and his staff were taken across in boats; the accompanying cavalry and wagons forded the

river. At the Old Crossroads, Davis and his party took the westerly route, traveling down a wagon road now known as Eden Terrace in Rock Hill and from there to Yorkville, where Davis spent the night at the home of Dr. Rufus Bratton.

On the 28th, Gen. Joe Wheeler was instructed to come south, but to not go through Charlotte. He was to take the Tuckaseegee Ford across the Catawba and to go to Yorkville, where he was more likely to find food for his soldiers and forage for his horses. At the same time, Gen. Wade Hampton ordered Brig. Gen. E.M. Law to Yorkville. The war may have been over, but the fate of Jefferson Davis was not yet known. His generals were trying to protect him and his party as much as possible.

It was not until May 8 that the last of the Confederate Army passed through York County. On that day, Maj. J.W. Green of the army engineers reported to Johnston that he was leaving Nation Ford for Hughey's Ferry on the Broad River.

□□□

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Sundays.