

South Carolina's Story

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After 1800, the rapidly expanding South Carolina frontier meant trouble for the Catawba Indians. The cotton gin, invented in 1793, had revolutionized the Southern economy. A few years later, cotton was introduced into the piedmont region of the state and, soon, settlers came pouring in in search of new land.

In 1808, an act was passed by the South Carolina Legislature that allowed the Catawbas to lease their lands for terms not to exceed 99 years. By 1826, the Catawbas were leasing their land to whites in 300-acre sections, receiving \$15 to \$20 per year per section. In all, there were about 100 Catawbas living in two villages, New Town and Turkeyhead, both located on the Catawba River.

By 1830 the whites were applying pressure on the Catawbas to sell their land to the state. To increase this pressure, a commission was established in 1839 by South Carolina Gov. Patrick Noble. Members of the commission were David Hutchison, Edward Avery, John Springs, Allen Morrow and B.S. Massey. All of the commissioners had a vested interest in the negotiations, since they had leased land on the reservation.

The once formidable Catawba Nation had now dwindled to 88 people--12 men, 36 women, and 40 children--wandering like gypsies over the countryside, poverty stricken, without property, and owning few material possessions. In comparison to the Catawba Indian total, between 300 and 600 white families were living on the leased land.

The Nation Ford Treaty was signed on March 13, 1870. In return for ceding

their land to the state of South Carolina, the Catawbas were guaranteed that the state would give the Catawbas a tract of land worth \$5,000 to be located outside of South Carolina, most likely in Haywood County, N.C. If this could not be arranged, then the Catawbas would get \$5,000 in cash. Once removed, the Catawbas would get a sum of \$2,500 plus \$1,500 per year for the next nine years.

Following the agreement, the whites, who were leasing the land within the boundaries of the settlement, held a meeting at the Cross Roads for the purpose of considering the terms of the treaty and to petition the Legislature to sanction and adopt it. They sent a "memorial" to the state Legislature on July 30, 1840, in which they stated their agreement with the proposed treaty.

It was not all smooth sailing, though, and there was some opposition from legislators who felt that "the settlers on the Indian land had cheated the Indians and swindled them out of their possessions." But the treaty was finally confirmed. Joseph H. White of Fort Mill was appointed by the Legislature to make sure that the provisions of the treaty were carried out.

Those who drafted the treaty worked on the premise that North Carolina would take in the Catawbas: but when South Carolina asked for formal approval, North Carolina refused.

Commissioner David Hutchinson, in commenting on the response of the North Carolina governor, said that the governor's letter "consisted of only a few lines, as though the application was scarcely worth an answer." The governor's letter also

contained the blunt question: "What would you think, if we were to send our Indians to you?"

Many of the Catawbas became dissatisfied with the state of affairs and left South Carolina, moving to North Carolina to live with the Cherokees.

Meanwhile, South Carolina continued on its course. Lands were resurveyed and grants issued to the white settlers.

Eventually, the Catawbas moved back to the area that had been their home. South Carolina made an effort to help them. In 1872, 630 acres on the west bank of the Catawba River were set aside for the tribe. The tract is located near Leslie, nine miles below Rock Hill and just north of the Catawba junction. On July 29, 1878, Congress appointed \$5,000 to defray the expense of the move, thus assuming responsibility for directing the affairs of the Catawbas.

The Catawbas certainly got the worst of the agreement. As Douglas Summers Brown has written: "The Catawbas sold their birthright for a sum of money, the principle of which was never fully paid and on terms that were never fully carried out in the lifetime of the signers."

The Treaty of Nation Ford marked a turning point in the history of the Catawbas and of the upcountry. Both still feel the affect of the signing of that momentous document.

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