

## *Catawba River Crossing Flows with History of Travels, War*

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On Aug. 22, 1960, Robert W. Hemphill of Chester, then representing the Fifth Congressional District, had placed in the Congressional Record an account of a ceremony establishing Nation Ford Historical Park.

Earlier, Hemphill had been present at the dedication of the park on Red River Road east of Rock Hill. The park was between the tracks of the Southern Railroad and a cotton mill long known as Carhartt Mill, No. 2. A road that ran alongside the old cotton mill was part of what was "one of the most historic spots in York County, S.C."

The park came about through the efforts of the York County Historical Commission and the York County Historical Society (now known as the York County Genealogical and Historical Society). Following greetings from Congressman Hemphill and R.H. Snyder, the superintendent of the Southern Railway system, society president Samuel B. Mendenhall, delivered the main address. Mendenhall spoke of the significance of the Nation Ford, a natural crossing of the Catawba river. The "Nation" was the Catawba Indian tribe who were first encountered by the Spanish explorer Juan Pardo in 1566.

The Nation Ford Road came down from Virginia through Salisbury, NC., and Charlotte, and within walking distance of the newly established park, the road forked. If one took the right-hand trail, one would go through present-day Rock Hill on to York and cross the Broad River into Cherokee territory, then to Augusta, Ga., and on westward to the Mississippi River.

If travelers took the left-hand fork, they would travel in a southwesterly direction through present-day Chester County and Saluda, home of another Indian tribe by that name, and on into south Georgia.

There were many other paths with their own names that fed into the famed Nation Ford Road that later would be paved and become the network of state roads of today. Mendenhall recounted the history of the crossing where many historical events occurred. The Battle of Liberty Hill between the Cherokees and Catawbas resulted in each side losing about 1,000 warriors. The result was an understanding that all the land between the Catawba and Broad rivers would be hunting ground for both tribes: a "No-Man's Land" where warfare was forbidden.

During the American Revolution, armies of both the colonists and the British crossed the river at the Nation Ford. With the Catawba in flood stage, Lord Cornwallis camped with his troops on Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt's plantation until they had consumed all of the Spratt family

provisions they could find. Then they moved south to cross at Landsford. Gen. Thomas "the Gamecock" Sumter crossed the Catawba with troops several times.

Later, there was a ferry not far from the ford. In 1840, it was Herron's Ferry that brought various white settlers to the Crossroads. By this time, there was a cleared area on the west side at the fork of the Nation Ford road where a field school was operated. Here in the schoolyard, according to tradition, the Nation Ford Treaty was signed by state appointed commissioners and the Head Men of the Catawba tribe.

In 1852, the Charlotte and Augusta (C&A) Railroad built a trestle over the ford and the first locomotive passed over the 1,127-foot-long and 50-foot-high structure. The railroad depots created the towns of Rock Hill and For Mill. The trestle was burned by Union troops near the end of the Civil War.

On April 27, 1865, Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet were escorted across the ford by a military detail. It was said that at this site, Davis reviewed the troops and dismissed them.

A day or so later, Gen. Wade Hampton swam his horse across the ford in an attempt to catch up with Davis and persuade him to keep up the fight.

The last big event mentioned was the destruction of the trestle by the Great Flood of 1916. There was once a historical marker near the railroad crossing.

Sadly, today there is no sign that the Nation Ford Historical Park ever existed.