

The Catawbas and Samuel Wyly

From 1752 to 1768 the Catawba Indians' best friend and protector was a Quaker storekeeper by the name of Samuel Wyly. Few white people had settled in this area and, in fact, the S.C. royal governor forbade any whites to settle within 30 miles of the Catawba Indian towns.



Nearby history

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The N.C. governor, however, paid no regard to the restriction and freely granted traditional Catawba lands to white settlers. This was to remain a source of friction for many years.

Samuel Wyly's trading post at Pine Tree Hill (now Camden) met the governor's geographic restrictions and Wyly's reputation as an intelligent and wise mediator served the governor's purposes. In spite of their religious differences,

Wyly was designated the colony's agent to represent the Indians.

Wyly left Ireland with a small colony of Quakers in 1751, some of whom accompanied him to South Carolina. The Quakers, or Friends, carried no weapons except when hunting. They sought religious freedom, for others as well as themselves.

Wyly's tolerance and genuine interest in the Catawbas soon won him the fast friendship of the greatest of all Catawba kings — King Haiglar. In many ways the Indian chief and the gentle Quaker held the same beliefs. The Catawbas allowed women to speak out in council meetings; women participated in the

■ Quaker helped tribe get reservation in 1760s.

Quaker meetings. Haiglar opposed consumption of alcohol; so did Wyly. Both were men of honor whose word was their bond.

Wyly was a justice of the peace and Indian Agent. As such he toured the area and settled disputes. He sought aid for the Catawbas after they were devastated by the great smallpox epidemic of 1759.

When the Catawbas lost half of their population to smallpox and additional warriors to military action in the southern phase of the French and Indian War, it became evident that the Catawbas were losing their independence. Wyly was sympathetic to King Haiglar's plea that a definite territory be set aside and guaranteed for Catawba use only. In addition, Haiglar wished to guarantee Catawba hunting rights over the entire S.C. colony.

In 1762, Samuel Wyly accompanied the Catawba headmen to Augusta, Ga., to a general meeting of Indian tribes and English government officials. There, Wyly became the spokesman for a Catawba reservation.

On April 29, 1763, the Board of Trade petitioned the Crown to guarantee that both North Carolina and South Carolina would respect the Catawba lands. While the negotiations were going on, King Haiglar was killed by a raiding band of Shawnee Indians.

The Treaty of Augusta provided the Catawbas with an area of land 15 miles square. The Catawba request to be inside the territory of South Carolina was later honored by the

Crown. Samuel Wyly finished the survey map in 1764 and placed the name of King Haiglar on the map in order to do him honor.

Wyly's map was presented to Gov. Thomas Boone on Feb. 22, 1764. The 15 miles square or 144,000 acres, was mostly in present day York County with a smaller portion, perhaps one-fifth of the area, in Lancaster County and small corner in Chester County.

On Wyly's map, the Catawba River is unlabeled but is evident from its size. There are 1 creeks shown but only Allison Creek, Steel Creek, Sugar Creek, King Creek and Back Creek are labeled.

Steel Creek is incorrectly shown flowing into the Catawba River instead of into Sugar Creek. King Creek in Lancaster County has since lost its identity by becoming a series of private lakes. Back Creek was soon changed to Six Mile Creek. Two Catawba settlements are shown both in Lancaster County.

Wyly's map showed a network of Indian paths — many of them forerunners of present day highways. The one larger road, now roughly U.S. 521, was labeled "Road from Charleston to Salisbury."

Douglas Summers Brown, historian of the Catawbas, once paid Wyly this tribute: "Pennsylvania has its William Penn and South Carolina has its Samuel Wyly . . . Samuel Wyly lacks the glamour of Penn's great wealth and high social position, but his influence and prestige in colonial South Carolina was hardly less potent than Penn's in the northern colony."

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