

# Passed-Along Errors Magnify Myths

June 31990

History students are taught that the best way to avoid repeating errors is to examine primary sources of information. Examples of primary sources are court records, eyewitness accounts, newspapers, contracts, etc.

Unfortunately, once an error has been printed it is almost impossible to keep it from being repeated and, worse than that, being enlarged upon so that after a while the story is so embellished that the truth appears dull in comparison.

Over the years, several myths have been generated about early Catawba Indian leaders, especially King Haigler, General New River (or Newriver) and his wife, Sally New River.

For example, there was an article in the State newspaper in 1963 that said about King Haigler, "He was also their last King, coming to an untimely death in 1762." There are two errors in that one sentence. Haigler was not the last king. King Frow, or Prow, followed Haigler and was king for more than 30 years. Frow's name is mentioned frequently in the South Carolina Council Journal as the king of the Catawbas.

The second error is the date. Haigler was killed, not in 1762, but on Aug. 31, 1763. The specific date is given in the S.C. Council Journal and also was reported by the Rev. William Richardson, minister of the Waxhaw Presbyterian Church, who wrote a contemporary account.

The Sally New River article continued: "King Haigler died childless. His sole survivor was a sister who married a white man, General Newriver. Soon after the King's death, New River and his Indian wife died, leaving a daughter, Sally, an orphan of five years."

There are at least two errors here and in this case we know the source of the original errors. The errors originate in Maurice Moore's "Reminiscences of York," a book written in the doctor's old age in which he recalled incidents and stories, some of which he observed and others were told to him. Maurice Moore was born in 1795 and Haigler died in 1763. Moore as not a contemporary of Haigler. Moore's account is hearsay.



Nearby  
History

**Louise  
Pettus**

Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt, one of the early settlers of the Indian Land who personally knew New River and possibly knew Haigler (although that is debatable), was the subject of a family history written by his grandson, Thomas Dryden Spratt. Thomas D. Spratt's account, quite different from Moore's, said that Sally New River's mother was the daughter of King Haigler and her father was Matthew Toole, a white trader. While Spratt's history has some inaccuracies and speculations, it is far more likely to be accurate on this subject than Maurice Moore's account.

Neither Moore nor Spratt wrote that General New River was a white man. In fact, there are countless sources that prove New River to be an Indian, though he may not have been a Catawba. One of the proofs is that New River is listed as a Catawba on the paybill and roster of Capt. Thomas Drennan, commander of a company of 41 Catawba Indians who served with Gen. Thomas Sumter in the Revolution.

Also, New River did not follow King Haigler as head of the tribe in 1763. King Frow ruled until about July 1794 at which time New River became chief.

The newspaper article continued with the statement that Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt took Sally, a 5-year-old orphan, into his home. There is no evidence for this. Sally was probably grown by the time Spratt arrived in the Fort Mill area. Spratt did adopt a 3-year-old Indian boy, Peter Harris. However, Sally New River did spend a part of her old age in the Spratt home, which might account for the confusion.

Recently there appeared the statement that Sally New River received a silver medal from George Washington. We cannot find a shred of evidence that this ever occurred.

*Louise Pettus is a retired history professor at Winthrop College. Her column appears Sundays.*