

# S.C. Story

## *Land Was Catawba Worry In 1791*

The Lancaster News

Wednesday, March 31, 1982

Almost from the beginning of his presidency, George Washington was determined to visit every part of the United States during his terms of office so long as his health and circumstances permitted it.

Soon after he had completed his tour of the New England states in 1789, Washington received an invitation from Charles Pinckney, governor of South Carolina, to tour the southern states. Washington replied that nothing would give him more pleasure.

During the summer of 1790, the South became excited as rumors abounded that the president would visit in the fall. The excitement was premature, because Washington was planning his trip for 1791.

Although Congress adjourned in March 1791, the poor conditions of the roads delayed Washington's departure. But the need to tour the South before the "warm and sickly months" prompted Washington to set out on March 21, 1791.

Moving east, Washington went through Richmond and Petersburg, Va., and then New Bern and Wilmington, N.C., until he came to South Carolina. Here he went from Georgetown to Charleston and began his trip back to Philadelphia by what he called "an upper road" — through Savannah and Augusta, Ga., Columbia and Camden, S.C., and Charlotte, N.C.

Washington kept a detailed diary in which he kept a record of the dates, places and mileage. The southern tour took three months, with Washington logging an estimated 1,816 miles.

Washington's trip through South Carolina began on April 27. An entry in his diary for that date reads, "Breakfasted at William Gause's a little out of the direct road 14 miles — crossed the boundary line between North and South Carolina after half after 12 o'clock which is ten miles from the Gauses."

As he had done in his New England tour, Washington planned to stay only in public houses, refusing all private offers of lodging. He would thus keep his schedule as flexible as possible and would avoid the possible embarrassment of having to turn down invitations. Because of the lack of suitable lodging along the route through South Carolina, he had to make exceptions more than once.

Washington was given the royal treatment everywhere he went. Soon after beginning his trip through the state, he was rowed across the Waccamaw River to Georgetown. Seven lavishly dressed captains met him, and he was given a 15-gun salute and honored at a public dinner and ball.

During the early part of this trip through South Carolina's low country, he met many of the men who played an important part in the Revolutionary War and who were destined to play a vital part in South Carolina's future development: for example, William Moultrie, hero of the defense of Charleston in 1776, Edward Rutledge, member of the Continental Congress and future governor, and Charles Pinckney, then governor of South Carolina.

Washington was escorted to Charleston by one of his kinsmen, William Washington, a war hero from Virginia who had married a South Carolinian in 1782 and settled in an impressive Charleston townhouse.

Most of the entries in his diary for his southern trip were tersely worded, and we have to look at personal letters and memoirs housed in the nation's archives, as well as newspaper accounts of the day, to find out the details of his visit.

Many entries in his diary contain descriptions of the countryside and places he visited. He described Columbia as "an unlevelled wood, with very few houses in it, and these all wooden." He described the road from Columbia to Camden as being, with a few exceptions, "the most miserable pine barron I ever saw, being quite a white sand and very hilly."

In Lancaster County, at Major Robert Crawford's home, he was met by a Catawba delegation that was apprehensive that "some attempts were being made or would be made to deprive them of part of the 40,000 acres which was secured to them by treaty." Washington did not take kindly this unexpected visit and later wrote that he would like to avoid such meetings in the future.

By May 28, 1791, George Washington was in Charlotte and on his way to Philadelphia. In all, he had spent 21 days in the Palmetto State.