

Great Catawba chief proved firm friend of S.C. whites

An official historical marker on S.C. 5 in Lancaster County reads: "On the Catawba path near here, King Hagler, Chief of the Catawba Nation (1750-1763), was slain on August 30, 1763, by a raiding band of northern Indian braves as he journeyed from the Waxhaws Settlement on Cane Creek to a Catawba town on Twelve Mile Creek."

Louise Pettus



King Hagler (also spelled Haggler, Haglar, Hegler, Heiglar, etc.) has often been called the greatest of Catawba leaders.

At least this is the viewpoint of whites who benefited from Hagler's unwavering friendship and loyalty to the S.C. royal governor upon whom Hagler depended to keep peace among white settlers, enemy tribes and the Catawbas.

Hagler believed his tribe was destitute until the white man raised the standard of living.

This is a generous assessment considering the white man also brought the plagues of alcohol and smallpox, both of which in less than 100 years helped reduce the Catawba population from about 6,000 to around 1,200.

Royal Gov. James Glen found the Catawbas "as brave fellows as any on the continent of America and our firm friends."

Hagler's name frequently crops up on the pages of the S.C. Council Journal. The Council not only paid Catawbas for tracking runaway slaves, but also gave them bounties for Cherokee scalps and paid for

the services of doctors, gunsmiths, and tavern keepers.

In addition Hagler regularly petitioned the governor for gifts.

The raiding Indians who slew Hagler were seven Shawnees out of Virginia who were longtime enemies of the Catawbas. Six bullets were fired, and Hagler was killed instantly. His only companion, a slave, escaped to spread the word. Catawba drums made of deerskin stretched over clay pots spread the message quickly.

There was immediate panic on the frontier. Many of the Scotch-Irish settlers had come to the Waxhaws to escape the French and Indian War rampages. They had thought themselves safe among the Catawbas. The loss of Hagler was a severe blow.

No one knows where Hagler was buried. Interred with his body were his silver-mounted rifle, powder flask, gold and silver money, pipes and tobacco.

For one month there was a guard of 16 warriors. Then a band of Virginia gamblers got the guards drunk and rifled the grave.

The Camden militia investigated the murder of Hagler, and the N.C. government sent a lieutenant with 30 men on an unsuccessful pursuit of the Shawnees.

King Hagler was killed four months before the Treaty of Augusta awarded the Catawbas 15 miles square as a reservation. It had been a dream of Hagler and something for which he had long worked. His Quaker friend, Samuel Wyly, who surveyed the reservation, put Hagler's name on the map to do him honor.