

Notes on Why and How I Wrote the Book
"Leasing Away A Nation
The Legacy of Catawba Indian Land Leases"
By Louise Pettus, 2005

Why?

No one had ever written an entire book on the leasing system. There have been at least four books written about the Catawba Indians that are quite good. Douglas Summers Brown wrote the first one (The Catawba Indians—The People of the River). James Merrill wrote with the longest title: The Indians' New World; The Catawbas and Their Neighbors From European Contact Through the Era of Removal; Charles Hudson's Catawba Nation; Tom Blumer's Bibliography of the Catawba was very helpful. Chapman J. Milling has a section on the Catawbas in his book Red Carolinians. There is the work of Frank Speck, monographs done by the Smithsonian and I could go on and on. There were mentions of the leasing system but most of them only say that after the American Revolution the Catawbas began leasing out their land that had been given to them by the English government as a reward for fighting against Indian enemies of the English (Cherokees) during the French and Indian Wars which ended in 1763. The Catawbas were allowed to choose whether they wanted the land grant to be located in North Carolina or in South Carolina.

The Indians chose South Carolina—no doubt because they had a long relationship with the royal governor in Charles Town. They got title to an area of 15 square miles or 144,000 acres. Period. There were no restrictions on what the Catawbas could do with this land. It was theirs. Forever, if they could keep it. They didn't.

Impetus to learn more on the topic: Reading in Mrs. Brown's book about the election of William Pettus to the SC General Assembly, something I had not heard of before.

Getting a microfilm reader= Winthrop Dean, Ross Webb's grant for an Oral History project. Success in that caused me to ask for the reader & for him to come up with it.

Taught methods courses to future teachers One of the topics was teaching local history....applied for a reader... I started buying reels from the SC Department of Archives and History.Estate Records, court cases...source materials...one of the things discovered was a court case ."Sutton vs. Jackson." Among many papers submitted to the court was on Alexander Sutton, whose wife was Mary Candlish. She had inherited 1500 acres from her grandfather when she was only 4 years old. My William Pettus's wife was Mary Knox, the daughter of

Samuel. Knox's . There were three daughters, Mary, Jane who married Capt. George Pettus and Sarah who married William Candlish, Candlish was a merchant and in court testimony someone said that Knox didn't leave the land to his daughter and son-in-law because Candlish was a merchant, therefore subject to suit. But Candlish did sell some of the land to John Jackson in 1811 when his daughter Mary was 17 years old but not yet married. The case comes into court 20 years after Candlish sold his child's land. In 1831 Candlish is dead and daughter Mary's husband is Alexander Sutton. He sues Jackson. One of the people who testified in the case was Hugh White. He keeps the book for both sides of the Catawba river, from 1810 to 1840. He testified that the previous keeper of the book was Charles Miller who was now dead and the first book no longer exists.

The first lease recorded was that of Samuel Knox. And, a copy of that lease was put into the court minutes. It came from the papers of William Pettus who has been dead 13 years. That is the only copy of the first lease that exists and Hugh White swore that it was the first lease ever recorded between Catawbas and a white man. That lease is dated March 1785. But there were white settlers in the Catawba Indian Land before 1785—Thomas Kanawah Spratt was one of the earlier settlers.

Thomas Dryden Spratt wrote an account of his grandfather Spratt's life and tells of his having a fist fight over the boundary line where his land joined that of Knox... I put that in the book but not all the details about Sutton vs. Jackson that I just gave you.

Congressman Spratt asked me how long it took to write the book. My answer was that in the 1970s I began collecting information on the people and families of the Catawba Indian Land. It became a hobby. Sometimes I found things accidentally that helped explain the leasing system and the history around it. Especially, the Sally New River lease and Kings Bottoms, the richest land adjoining the Catawba River. In over 20 years I found evidence of more than 1300 leases. I made a chart, a data base, on which I placed the basic information of the date, the name of the person who got the lease, the person who sold the lease to him, the location, perhaps the price if known and the acreage involved. 128 leases are in the State Archives along with any records that touch on the role of the state government as it touched the Catawbas—especially petitions made by both Catawbas and white settlers.

I drove to the Archives from March to November, Almost every week I spent the day there taking notes. That chart is included in the book. I have a lot more information that never made it to the book because of space and costs of printing. I was disappointed that the publisher did not print the index I had prepared.

I couldn't have done the book without access to the one surviving book kept by Hugh White, now deceased. I do not know what happened to the White book which was a record of survey plats and ownership of the land which measured 144,000 acres in both York and Lancaster Counties with a very small point falling into Chester County.

Before the Nation Ford Treaty of 1840 the Catawbas leased away almost every acre. Sally New River, granddaughter of King Hagler, When the treaty was made there were five white men and five Catawba Indians who met near the Nation Ford at the school house of Rev. Archibald Whyte. Billy White showed Paul Gettys and me the exact spot. But even before I saw the place I knew that I had another ancestor involved. One of the 5 whites who signed the final treaty was Allen Morrow, my gr-gr-grandfather, not on the Pettus side of my family but on my maternal line. So, there was the personal angle to this venture that helped make it intriguing to me personally.