

# Quick-thinking Catawba queen

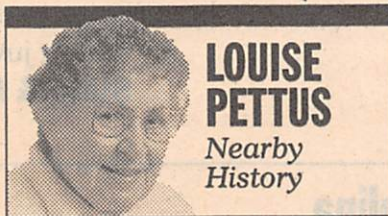
## enlivened Revolutionary era

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This column originally ran March 10, 1985. It appears now as part of Women's History Month.

Witty and shrewd, she had the ability to gain the admiration of an assortment of people including her fellow Indians, an eminent architect, a college professor and the Scotch-Irish settlers of her neighborhood.

Known as Sally, or "Aunt Sally" in her old age, she was born near the Horseshoe Bend of Sugar Creek, a tributary of the Catawba River, sometime around the year 1745.

Her mother was most likely the daughter of the famed King Haigler, best known of all the Catawba chiefs. Her father was Matthew Toole, a white man of considerable skills who was a representative of



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Nearby  
History

the South Carolina Council, trader, soldier and interpreter. Tools Fork, a York County stream, was named for him.

Not much is known of Sally's youth. She managed to survive the severe smallpox epidemic of 1759, probably unscathed, since she was described as "beautiful" in youth. She was a spectator in 1760 when the British redcoats built the N.C. fort at present-day Fort Mill. She learned to speak English "pretty well."

In 1763, with the Treaty of Au-

gusta, the Catawbas signed a treaty guaranteeing them 144,000 acres, an area 15 miles square, in what is now portions of York, Lancaster and Chester counties.

Sally married Gen. New River, who refused to divulge his real name, preferring to be called "New River" for a West Virginia battle in which he gained distinction by killing the chief of the Shawnee tribe.

In the American Revolution, New River, recently made chief of the Catawbas and already an old man, served with 40 other Catawba warriors under Gen. William R. Davie of Thomas Sumter's forces.

In 1780 the feared British Gen. Lord Cornwallis' forces threatened the Catawba reservation after the colonists' defeat at Camden. New River led the Catawba women and children, a group that undoubtedly included Sally, to Virginia to stay

with a friendly tribe.

When the Catawbas returned from their exile, they found their villages destroyed and livestock vanished. New towns were built farther up the river. Apparently New River and Sally lived at one called Turkey Head, in Lancaster County.

Sally New River, as queen, was entitled to wear a distinctive silver eagle ornament around her neck. Like most Catawbas, she probably also wore a silver nose ring.

A favorite frontier story involved Sally and a newly arrived Irishman who feared snakes above all else. According to the story, on a cold snowy night in a frontier tavern, Sally shared an Indian "secret" for subduing snakes. She advised that a long limber pole be cut and carried and, if a snake should pop out, he would be so frightened he would pop back in his hole. One

can imagine the glee with which the frontier people circulated the story about the Irishman, at the instigation of Sally New River, carrying a long pole through the blizzard.

Sally New River's shrewdness is evidenced in several ways. As Professor Blackburn of South Carolina College told the story, Sally, with other Catawbas, was shown a magnetic compass. The professor played a trick on the Indians by also having a small penknife in his hand, thus moving the needle. When the professor challenged his audience to do the same, Sally first attempted to move the needle with a stick and then, spying the professor's knife, brought out her flint and showed the professor she could not be easily misled.

More significant than the incident with the compass was Sally's foresight in reserving an area of

about 550 acres of prime river land in Lancaster County known as King's Bottoms. She reserved the area for "Sally New River her with other women of the Nation themselves their heirs successors, or assigns forever. . . ." She had the document signed by Gen. New River, other head men of the tribe, and by four of the state-appointed land commissioners in the year 1796. The deed was recorded in the Lancaster Court House in 1808, four years after the death of Gen. New River.

A child of two very different cultures, this "remarkable personage," as Robert Mills described her, died in the winter of 1818-19 in her primitive cabin at Turkey Head on the banks of the Catawba River.

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