

PETTUS

ROBERT MILLS TOURS THIS AREA

Robert Mills, a Charleston native and America's first native architect, travelled through this area in the early 1820s. Mills was in charge of South Carolina's public works. As such, he designed court houses, jails, canals (he designed Landsford), published the first state atlas, and collected the information that led to the publication of Statistics of South Carolina in 1826.

In Statistics of South Carolina Mills had a section on each district that included descriptions of the towns, the general economic conditions, geographic features, minerals, plants and native animals along with a general history of the district.

The village of Chester seated on the dividing ridge between the Catawba and Broad rivers was described this way: "The town has a very romantic appearance as you approach it. A learned traveller has likened it to one those strong places used in the feudal times of Ireland, when tenants build around the tower of their lord to claim his protection; with this difference, that here was no moated tower, no tyranny, and no oppression. It is a little St. Marino, and on it dwell fit citizens for such a place, good and intelligent republicans--the houses crowded together, very neat, and some of them elegant."

Mills had returned from study abroad in 1820. It was high praise to compare an upcountry village favorably with a European attraction. Mills noted that the villed had about 25 homes along with a courthouse, jail, and a "male and female academy of respectable standing."

Chester District had over 14,000 people in the 1820 census. Mills believed that it would soon flourish. The Broad river was navigable and it was planned to build a canal around the Great Falls of the Catawba shortly. That would be a vain hope, however. Until this century the Great Falls defeated all attempts to make the Catawba river navigable.

The town of Lancasterville had 5 streets running each way at right angles. Mills counted 30 homes and stores and estimated 260 inhabitants. He reported a courthouse and jail (neglecting to say that he was the architect) and a "handsome academy." F

Mills noted that Twelve Mile creek was navigable to the mouth of Six Mile creek, as was Sugar Creek to the mouth of McAlpine, "both of which run through a rich country." Waxhaw creek was too crooked to serve as a part of the connected waterway that Mills wished to establish in order to float bales of cotton to Charleston.

Yorkville had 451 persons; 292 were white and 159 black. There were 52 mechanics, 8 lawyers, 2 physicians, 1 clergyman, 8 stores, 5 taverns, a male and a female academy, a post office, printing office and 2 weekly newspapers, one devoted to agriculture.

Mills described the courthouse in detail, (again neglecting to say he was the architect) as "...an elegant structure, built of stone and brick; the offices in the basement story are made fire-proof...the court room...is spacious, convenient and airy; amphitheatrical in its form, with a segment spherical ceiling. The jury rooms are so arranged that the space above them and the vestibule, serves the purpose of a roomy gallery for spectators."

York District's trees were mostly oak, poplar, hickory, chestnut and a few short leaf pine.. Along the Catawba river there were also sycamore, sassafras, dogwood, ironwood, hackberry, walnut, buckeye, horse chestnut, redbud, cucumber tree, magnolia, paupau, and some sugar trees. One sugar tree measured 10 feet around, or 3 feet through.

"It has been many times tapped and sugar formerly made from the juice." Mills noted a sycamore that measured 28 feet around and 9 feet in diameter.

In all three districts--York, Lancaster, and Chester--Mills found the Presbyterians most numerous, followed by Methodists and a few Baptists. Cotton was the dominant crop. There was no manufacturing except that done in the home for domestic consumption.