

HUGH WHITE, INDIAN AGENT

From 1811 to 1828 Hugh White of Fort Mill made entries into an oversized blank paged book he titled "Recording Book." In more recent years the 200-page book has been retitled *Surveyor's Plat Book and Indian Commissioners' Rent Book*.

Hugh White was one of 5 state-appointed commissioners whose duty it was to oversee the lease transactions made between Catawba Indians and the white settlers they rented to. No agreement was legal without the signatures of 3 of the 5 agents.

The old book is still in the hands of the White family. On the inside there is the note "Property of Hugh E. White. Old book sent to Scribners & Sons in New York in 1900 and rebound." In the 1950s the book was photocopied by the State Archives and a bound copy of the photostats was placed in the York County Library. In 2001 Hugh M. White of Fort Mill, a direct descendant of the commissioner who kept the original book, allowed the South Carolina Department of Archives and History to make digitized copies and microfilm of the original.

The plats, usually one to a page but sometimes two on a page, stretch from Isaac Weathers' odd shaped 412 acres on page 2 to a 1009 acre plat of James Webb's estate lands on page 99. From the plats one can usually determine the location of the land.

Isaac Weathers (or Withers) was on the west bank of Sugar Creek. James Webb bordered the west bank of the Catawba River with Blackberry Branch his southern line.

The second half of the book is filled with the recording of rent payments. In his plain handwriting, Hugh White recorded the names of each Indian and each white who leased along with the number of acres and the amount of money paid. It is believed that the Catawba Indians were the only United States

tribe to designate individual Indians to receive rent. Some other tribes leased land but the money went into a tribal fund.

Hugh White, the keeper of the book, was born in the year 1763 in the Waxhaws of Lancaster County. He was the son of Joseph White and Elizabeth Russell. Joseph White and five brothers had come down from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in the early 1750s. Joseph married Elizabeth Russell in southern Virginia before coming to South Carolina. Her parents were from County Derry, Ireland.

Hugh White grew up in the Waxhaws and apprenticed as a saddler. One of his fellow apprentices was Andrew Jackson. The two boys are said to have formed a lifelong friendship and kept up a correspondence when Jackson was in the White House. Hugh White's grandson, Algernon Sidney White, once wrote that his father, Joseph F. White, son of Hugh, loaned the letters to the historian James Parton and never got them back.

Sometime in the late 1780s Hugh White married Elizabeth Spratt, daughter of Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt, and moved to the area now called Fort Mill but then called "The Fork." They had a large family.

Early in 1811 Hugh White sold his land to Zebulon Jackson and loaded everything he could haul in wagons and set out for Jackson County in west Tennessee, 600 miles away. When he got there he is said to have looked around and decided that he had left better land at home and without unloading the wagons the family turned around and came back to Fort Mill.

A. S. White wrote of his grandfather: "In disposition he was good-natured, easy-going, and rather inclined to be indolent, loved to read books, all he could get. . . He loved to walk up and down the old piazza and sing and watch the hands in the bottoms and the hills on the other side of the Catawba - "the beautiful river" - through an old long telescope. In person he was fair, of a slight build, medium height, and not very strong constitution."

Written by Louise Pettus