

Half of state's population moved on

EVENING HERALD - Nov. 18, 1980

In the fall of 1824, a caravan of wagons carrying 47 members of the Harper and Hutchison families left Lancaster District, S.C., for "the West."

They were small farmers looking for "fresh" land on which to grow cotton and grain. It was part of a pattern of "out-migration" to be repeated for years to come.

The small farmers were leaving because of lack of capital and know-how in use of fertilizer and crop rotation as well as the expansion of the large plantation system.

The tide of out-migration generally flowed into Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. The Harpers and Hutchisons pushed all the way into northwestern Tennessee.

They forded the small streams. If ferries were available on the rivers, they used them; if not, according to a newspaper account given by one of the party years later, they "took their bed-cords, lashed timbers together, made a pontoon or raft, and crossed their wagons and teams on it."

It took three months of hard travel. The party arrived in the dead of winter to a territory still largely unsettled by white man.

The first two weeks the men scouted about for the best lands to "enter" (establish legal claim to).

The women, in addition to the usual camp chores, busily spun wool which they got "on shares" from the few surrounding farmers.

Rosanna Harper, a widow with teen-aged sons and 12-year-old Polly, entered a large tract of land with a fine spring of water on the crest of a hill.

Polly, when in her 80's, recalled how her family camped on the spot

South Carolina's

Story



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all spring and summer. They slept in the wagon and fought great clouds of mosquitoes.

The boys brought in a crop using the horses which had not a grain of corn but ate cane and peavine instead. Bear, deer, turkey and squirrels supplied plenty of meat.

As soon as the corn crop was harvested, the pioneers began building permanent homes.

The first to die of the 47 who made the trip was a young daughter of William and Jane Hutchison who fell into a fire and "expired in great agony." The last was Polly, then Polly Hogue, who was 87. They buried her on the site where she camped in the wagon in the year 1825.

The out-migration of people like the Harpers and Hutchisons has been estimated to be nearly half of all white South Carolinians born after 1800.

The Camden Journal in 1854 expressed concern about the loss of some of the state's best talents. The newspaper pointed out that of the 12 graduates of S.C. College who had become governors, five were governors of other states. Of the 21 who had become judges, 10 were judges in other states.

Until the census of 1850, there was no data collected to show the origin

of birth. It is estimated that in 1850 the number of out-migrants was equal to two-thirds of all free persons still living in the state.

By 1850 the average size of a S.C. farm was the largest in the nation. The U.S. average farm was 114 acres; the S.C. average was 541 acres.

Many historians believe that there is a strong connection between S.C.'s plantation size and her leadership role in events leading to secession from the Union in 1861. The out-migration, over the years, of the small dependent farmers like the Harpers and Hutchisons, along with a high slave population growth, caused more conservative social and political policies to emerge.

Nevertheless, when S.C. seceded, the "kin folk" across the South and Southwest and into Missouri and Arkansas, responded to the old ties. After all, they had corresponded regularly and when the railways came they had visited back and forth continuously.

This closeness of family ties survived the Civil War. It was a York County Hutchison family that received and preserved the newspaper account of the burial of Polly Harper Hogue, pioneer to Obion County, Tenn., who had left S.C. in a wagon 75 years earlier.

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