

Bridge brouhaha fueled feud between east, west

River crossing debate caused intracounty controversy in 1897

There is a long history of east/west rivalry in York County, dating back at least to the Revolutionary War. In the 1890s, the rivalry of the sections showed itself in the ranks of the county commissioners (today we would say the county council). Fort Mill citizens were determined that a bridge be built across the Catawba River. Western York residents insisted that they needed a bridge across the Broad River and would not pay taxes to build the Catawba bridge unless they could have one also.

In March 1897, a group of Fort Mill residents made their proposal for a bridge. The group was headed by Rev. Dr. James Henley Thornwell, pastor of Unity Presbyterian Church in Fort Mill.

Thornwell described Fort Mill as the "cut off. He said the residents were cut off from Lancaster, cut off from North Carolina and cut off from York County. The only way to get across the Catawba in high water (this is before a dam was built) was to walk across on a narrow plank on the railroad trestle. If the water was low, then there was only one "wire ferry" for many miles that could

cross the river.

Fort Mill residents who had business in York were often not able to take a buggy for one day and get home before nightfall. Rail took three days and cost around \$10 for the ticket, and often there would be hotel room and meals in addition. The train schedules meant that one got to York after everything had closed and couldn't get a train back until the morning of the third day.

Thornwell told how the Fort Mill group had hired an expert to project costs and where the bridge might be located. The three possibilities were at Harris ferry, Neely's ferry and Dinkins' ferry. The group thought a bridge at the site of the Harris ferry was best all-around, and the cost of that one would be \$9,000. Thornwell added that Fort Mill town-

ship every year paid about one-tenth of the county taxes and had never gotten anything back.

Western county representatives countered that Fort Mill people did not come to York to trade but only to deal with required court matters and that they would have to do that whether there was a river or no river.

The Rock Hill and Ebenezer commissioners, A.E. Smith and W.A. Fewell, requested that the bridge question be postponed until the next meeting. Thornwell politely stated there was no need for that and added, "We want that bridge for our descendants, of course; but we also wish to enjoy the pleasure of walking over it ourselves."

A Mr. Wilkerson (first name unknown) moved that the county build two bridges, one for each

river. He said the only difference is that the Broad River bridge would serve two counties with each paying one-half, and the Fort Mill bridge would have to be paid for by only York County.

The final decision was to postpone the question until the commissioners could present it to their constituents for, they said, the proposition would surely raise taxes.

Disappointed, the Fort Mill committee set out for home. It was not an easy trip. J.W. Ardrey wrote a letter to the Yorkville Enquirer telling what happened:

"The committee left Yorkville Tuesday evening and lodged with a friend (a former Fort Millian) Tuesday night. They resumed their journey next morning, and when near the river (at Dinkins' ferry) met a gentleman who in-

formed them that they could not cross the river, and while debating their new dilemma, a wild mule belonging to the gentleman they had met collided with their surrey and demolished one of the wheels. A part of the committee returned on foot to the "Magic City" of Rock Hill, while the rest, thoroughly disgusted with their experience, walked to the river, crossed over on the railroad bridge and then walked home. Those who returned to Rock Hill deposited their horses in the livery stable, placed the surrey in the shop and boarded the first train home, more certain than ever of the necessity of a bridge."

To be continued.

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