

Life on the S.C. frontier was anything but dull

At the age of 71 years, Thomas Dryden Spratt of Fort Mill in 1875 wrote an account of his family's history in Fort Mill township.

After writing of his grandfather Thomas "Kana-wha" Spratt and his legendary exploits, he turned to his father, James Spratt.

James Spratt had been born in 1770 and was 10 years old when the British general Lord Cornwallis camped at his father's place. Cornwallis had been rebuffed at Charlotte and headed down the Nation Ford Road on his way to Winnsboro. When he got to the Catawba he found it in flood stage and impossible to cross.

The British troops killed 19 of Spratt's calves but did not find the cows hidden away at the "Cabin branch place." The troops and their horses consumed all the corn on the place and burned all the fences. They also hanged one of their men, a deserter, from a cherry tree and buried him under a locust tree in the Spratt yard.

James Spratt said that he and his cousin Thomas McNeill in their youth were fond of hunting raccoon and opossum at night. We can only wonder that the two hadn't set the woods afire, for there would have been no flashlights or lanterns. They only had a flaming pine knot to light their way.

As James Spratt described it, there was a great deal of game. "Wildcats were numerous, many deer, occasionally a bear, and wild turkeys at liberty."

On one occasion his dog treed a wildcat. Spratt climbed the tree and shook out the cat, which was then tackled by the dog. The dog and wildcat fought so hard that they wore each other out. Spratt killed the cat but lost the dog to its wounds.

Spratt bemoaned losing another fine dog that was killed by a wild hog. He kept a number of wild hogs in the woods (roaming wild and feeding on acorns).

When winter came, it was great sport to catch the wild hogs and kill them. The meat was either salted or smoked for family enjoyment

over the winter.

Capturing wild hogs could be a dangerous occupation. In one of James Spratt's chases of the wild hogs he "lost the first joint of his forefinger of the left hand" while attempting to tie the mouth of a barrow (adult male hog). However, by feeding the hogs regularly, Spratt got them tame enough to come at his call.

Frequently Spratt's companion on hunting expeditions was the local schoolteacher, Hiram Hutchison. Hutchison boarded at the Spratt home. One day the two men got among some 4-year-old barrows. This time James Spratt lost part of his thumb. Still, they caught three of the hogs and brought them home. Spratt, Hutchison and a man named Carlyle each tied a hog on his horse.

T.D. Spratt wrote that his father was very mad when interlopers caught a number of the hogs and built a pen for them almost in sight of Spratt's house. He forced the men to turn over the hogs and leave the property.

By 1822 all of the wild hogs were killed off. James Spratt recollected that the largest they ever got, an old white barrow, weighed 177 pounds.

One of James Spratt's many misadventures occurred close to home. He was cleaning out a corncrib when he spotted a rattlesnake.

Spratt tried to pin the snake with a scythe, but the snake coiled its head around a pole and struck. T.D. Spratt said that his father was "struck obliquely" and consequently only one fang of the snake punctured his great toe. Spratt said that the first place he felt the snake's venom was in his tongue.

The Indian chief General New River sucked Spratt's wound and said it made him "mighty sick."

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