

NEARBY HISTORY:

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Odds and ends

Fort Mill mayor helped price whiskey out of town

In 1874, the intendant (19th century term for mayor) of Fort Mill was Dr. J.E. Massey, who was admired for his cleverness and new ideas about how to "put Fort Mill on the map."

Besides the mayor, Fort Mill had four aldermen to assist in running the town. The details are lost, but apparently a majority, if not all, of the aldermen favored raising money by requiring the owners of bars and speakeasies, of which there were many, to be licensed.

Massey suggested a method for settling on a specific sum to be charged for getting a license. He proposed that each member of the group put the price they thought should be charged for the privilege of selling "spirits" on a ticket and place it in a hat. Then they would average the proposed prices.

It sounded fair enough, and the aldermen agreed to Massey's proposal.

Massey was opposed to the sale of whiskey. He put down \$5,000 on his ticket. The other four tickets showed \$1,000, \$500, \$200 and \$100. The total was \$6,800. When divided by five, the amount to be charged came to \$1,360 for the local liquor license charge. The federal license at the time was \$25 for each retailer.

Massey had outwitted the opposition but in spite of the prohibitive price in terms of incomes in those days, one resident, Raymond Gibson, came up with the money and kept his bar open for one year.

Because he had the only bar in town, he had considerable trade

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but the price was too steep for him. At the end of the year, Gibson closed down and Fort Mill, thanks to Massey's cleverness, became the only town in South Carolina to vote out the barroom system of selling whiskey. By contrast, Rock Hill had barrooms until April 1901, when the town voted "dry" in opposition to Gov. Ben Tillman's plan for state-operated distillery and dispensary.

\$35.65 for coffins, outfits

On Nov. 11, 1886, A.E. Smith of Rock Hill submitted his financial report as Catawba Indian agent to the General Assembly. Smith reported that there were three deaths, all children, on the reservation the previous year. Two births brought the total reservation population to 91.

About the deaths, Smith wrote: "Those living on reservation bear medical and burial expense in common. Those off reservation, being scattered, such arrangements cannot be made for them; hence they draw more (wages) and employ and pay for their own medical attention." After this explanation, Smith submitted a bill of \$35.65 for coffins and burial "outfits."

Smith was paid \$16 yearly for his duties as Catawba agent for the only Indian tribe in the state of South Carolina that received funds. The state paid the tribe

\$1,600 a year, based on the settlement following the Nation Ford Treaty of 1840.

School differences

Before 1910, the state paid almost no attention to schools, leaving such to the counties. As a result, there was a great difference in educational practices from one county to the next.

In 1886, according to a list in Reports and Resolutions of the General Assembly, Vol. 1, York County had 179 schools, 98 of them log, eight frame and three brick. Sixty of the 179 were in good condition, but 47 of the schools were "bad." Lancaster County had 12 schools, all frame and all in good condition, but there were 64 schools that were "owned by other parties" with no hint of who the other parties were. Chester County had 56 log school buildings, 32 frame and one brick; 42 were in good condition and 27 were bad.

The major differences in the counties were the lengths of the school year. In York County, the average number of months was 4½; in Lancaster County, 3.13 months; and in Chester, 5.17 months. Chester was second highest in the state in length. Charleston schools were open 8.6 months.

Not until 1924 did the state pass a meaningful act that would fix minimum standards and provide all school districts with funding so they could operate at least six months of the year.

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