

Area Named For Ruined Jan 13 1991 Buildings

Fort Mill Comes From British-Built Fort For Indians, Grist Mill

The area of York County that falls between Sugar Creek and the Catawba River has been called Fort Mill at least since 1832, when a post office given that name was established.

Why Fort Mill? Probably because the ruins of a fort and a grist mill, which lay several miles apart, were the oldest known landmarks in the area.

The fort was started in 1756 under the direction of Lt. Hugh Waddell of the British army after a commission appointed by the royal governor of North Carolina, Hugh Dobbs, selected the spot.

The French and Indian War had been going on for more than two years. The war not only pitted the French army against the British army in a struggle for control of North America, but had set Indian tribes against each other. By a rather large majority the Indian tribes chose to fight on the side of the French, who posed the least threat to the Indian way of life. The Catawba and the Cherokee Indians, however, chose to fight with the English.

In May 1756 a contingent of Catawba warriors headed by King Haigler marched to Salisbury, N.C., to meet with the colony's chief justice. The Catawbas pledged their allegiance to the English in case of attack by the French or by other Indians. The English promised to build the fort for the protection of the Catawba women and children while the men were away at war.

North Carolina lay between the Catawba Nation and their enemies, the Shawnees (their traditional enemy) and the Delaware Indians.

Soon after a site was chosen in December 1756, Gov. Dobbs wrote, "We are now building a fort in the midst of their (Catawba) towns at their own request." Four thousand pounds sterling was appropriated for the building of the fort but the building went slowly and after about a thousand pounds had been spent, the



Nearby
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Catawbas decided that the N.C. effort was not enough. They turned to the S.C. royal government in Charles Town for assistance.

The fort, which was about 1 mile south of the present town of Fort Mill, was never completed. The site was pretty much forgotten until the 1870s, when the historian Lyman Draper began research in preparation for the centennial of the Revolutionary War. Draper wrote the sons and grandsons of Revolutionary War veterans of this area.

One of Draper's contacts was Thomas Dryden Spratt, a grandson of the famed pioneer Thomas "Kanasha" Spratt, who lived at the site of the old fort. Spratt wrote, "It is situated about 100 yards southwest of my house adjoining my barn & machine lot. It is 2¾ miles north of Old Nation Ford & about a mile southwest of Fort Mill Depot. There is no branch or stream of water near it. It is on the summit of a gradually elevated ridge but little higher than the land adjacent."

A.S. White, also of Fort Mill, sent Draper a drawing of the fort showing two entrances and a well in the center. White said that the area was 200 feet square. He had been told that each of the four corners was to have a cannon, but he did not believe any cannon were ever installed.

White wrote, "Only tradition I ever heard in relation to this fort was from old Sally New River (Catawba Indian queen). She said she remembered when the redcoats, as she called the workmen, built the fort. It was when she was a little girl."

The fort location was undisturbed until about 1901, when the field was put into cultivation. Today there is a marker to indicate the location of the fort.

Isaac Garrison and Theodorick Webb, two of the earliest settlers, erected a grist mill on Steel Creek where the Nation Ford road crossed the creek. Later, it was called "Webb's Mill." The date of construction is not known but it was pre-Revolutionary, perhaps in the late 1760s.

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