

[December 1924]

THE OLD STATE CANAL 1820-1823.

In the early days of the 19th century somebody dreamed a dream and saw a vision. He could see in the near future thousands of bales of cotton in Chester, York, and Lancaster Counties and very limited means of transportation to market. He could see boatloads of cotton in Catawba River, but no way to get by the Falls; then came the vision of the canal as the only remedy.

The plan was agitated and soon met with favor. The state passed an Act and the Canal was dug. The work was commenced in 1820, a man by the name of Leckie, or Lecklie, was the engineer. It was dug by white men, who didn't mind work in that day, and the few negro slaves who lived in that part of the state at that time.

The best stone-cutters that could be found were employed to get out and dress the stones to be used in building the locks. The Canal was dug only where there were falls in the river, and a lock had to be built at each fall so as to raise or lower the boat, as the case might be. The locks were similar to those in the Panama Canal, only on a smaller scale.

The stone used at Landsford was not, as many suppose, quarried there. It came from the plantation then owned by William Walker, which was not far from the river. The stones were dressed where they were quarried and then were hauled four miles on wagons.

The work on the locks was so perfect that it stands today as plumb and solid as the day it was built, more than 100 years ago.

Not only the locks were built of these stones, but where small streams entered the river culverts with masonry to support them were constructed with the same care.

The Chester and Lancaster public road was in the way at Landsford and a bridge was built over the Canal, near the locks. It stands to day as solid ~~as solid~~ as the stone of which it was built, except

where people from time to time have taken off some of the splendidly dressed capstones. This desecration should not go on since it causes the work to decay and will weaken the bridge. The work should be left as a monument to the care and faithfulness of the craftsmen who built it so many years ago.

During the unprecedented freshet of 1916, when the river washed away practically everything on its banks from the mountains to the seaboard, the water was over the bridge and its walls, but when the waters subsided it was found standing as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar. There has never been a dollar's worth of repair on this work, so it stands a monument to worthwhile, permanent work.

A house for the lock-keeper was built nearby, also of stone. There is some dispute about this house. It has been said that it was built before the American Revolution and used by the people as a fort in which they protected themselves from the Indians. This can scarcely be believed since there is not, and never was, a port-hole in it. There are no openings except windows and doors, not even a crack through which to shoot. There may have been a fort thereabouts during the Revolution, but not this house.

The one from whom this information came said this house was built for the lock-keeper and, since he was twenty-five years old at the time, saw the work going on and one of his brothers helped with the work. *It must be authentic.* The house has not been cared for; for many years there has been no roof on it and people treat it as they do the approaches to the bridge. It is tumbling down and in a few more years it will be no more.

The Southern Power Company built its first Power House on the old Canal, at Great Falls, which had been commenced in 1820 and completed in 1823. Leckley, the engineer, died about the time of

the completion and is buried at Old Waxhaw Church, in Lancaster County.

With all the Canal finished, the time had come to try out the experiment of carrying the cotton to Charleston and bringing back goods needed in the homes and on the farms.

The cotton was loaded on the boats which were pulled very easily, but expensively, by mules on the banks, until the boats were caught by the current and borne down the stream. All went merrily as a wedding bell on the down trip, but there was a different tale to tell when the homeward journey was begun. There was no equipment aboard the boat to propel it against the current and they could not afford to build a new boat every time there was a cargo for market. The whole project was abandoned almost in its beginning altho it is said that the construction had cost the State over one million dollars. The only people benefitted were those who were paid for their labor on the construction, other than that it was a help to the people at large to have that much money put into circulation. Perhaps the boat equipment would have been improved had not another vision arisen in the mind of some one. This vision took the form of a rail locomotive bearing its train of cars. This latter dream was realized while the former failed, yet "without a vision the people perish."

Nearly all of the canal in what is now known as Landsford Township was on Gen. Davie's plantation. Soon after the abandonment of the canal project, Henry J. Culp, son of John Culp, who was the son of Ben Culp, built a corn and wheat mill where the canal went out into the river above Landsford Falls. About the same time Gen. Davie's sons built a mill right over the locks at Landsford, which had an old time water wheel that was about as large as the river was wide. Some years later Mr. Jones built a gin on the canal a short distance above the mill. These were both good mills and the ginnery was one of the best of the county in its day.

These industries made this a lively place in the summer and

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early Fall. People would come from far and near, either ~~to~~ to gin,
to mill or ^{to} seine in the river, making Landsford # lively both night
and day.

There is no trace of this business now; nothing remains
except the locks, bridge and wall of the old rock house. They stand
like sentinels and will stand unless destroyed by man. The venture
seemed to be a direct loss, but who knows but that to have seen
this work has meant better bridges and better homes in this section
of the state, and perhaps others.

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