

## HISTORICAL SKETCH York County, South Carolina

York County has experienced a great deal of significant history in the more than two hundred years since its first settlement by Scotch Irish Presbyterians. These people, who came in the 1750's into the Catawba Cherokee Indian hunting land that was later to become York County were from Pennsylvania and Virginia. They named the County and the "County Town" after their home town in Pennsylvania.

The people of York County were not greatly interested in the Revolution until 1779 and 1780 when the British pushed into this area and began to burn and pillage. There had been no armed resistance in the State since the fall of Charleston and Sir Henry Clinton, the British commander, sailed from Charleston to New York thinking that the war in the South was over. He left orders to stamp out any last signs of rebellion. His captains moved out over the State and they met no resistance until they came up Fishing Creek into what is now York County (then called the New Acquisition). That same area had been described as the point where British occupation of South Carolina stopped.

In York County there was immediate resistance. A number of skirmishes were fought in the area. The first armed resistance after the fall of Charleston was the Battle of Williamson's Plantation or the Battle of Huck's (pronounced Hook in York County) Defeat near Brattonsville Plantation. The battle was fought around James Williamson's house. It was a complete victory for the Patriots. Colonel William Bratton, whose home still stands today, led the Whig Patriots in the battle. His wife, Martha, proved herself a heroine during the battle events when she resisted the British commander's threats upon her life and nursed the wounded after the battle.

The home of Col. Bratton, built about 1776, with later additions and renovations, as well as the ante-bellum home of his son, Dr. John S. Bratton, built 1823-26, has been acquired by the county. With the aid of state and federal grants these are being restored for use as an educational complex and tourist attraction.

General Thomas Sumter, "The Gamecock", had his headquarters south of York, and he and General Daniel Morgan, as well as Lord Cornwallis and the dashing Banastre Tarleton, British cavalry expert, all used the old colonial roads that passed through York in their maneuvering about the section.

The Battle of Kings Mountain, "the turning point of the Revolution", was also fought in York County. Societies in Yorkville, owned the battlefield until the Kings Mountain Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, located in York succeeded in having the battle site made a National Military Park, at which time they deeded it to the Federal Government. At Kings Mountain, now beautifully kept and well marked, the visitor can catch a glimpse of the battle movements and follow them through to the conclusion. A museum contains relics and maps of the Revolution. (There is also a State Park in the Kings Mountain Battleground area providing recreational facilities.)

Yorkville was the only town in the county for almost a hundred years, and the town retains many of the buildings dating back to Ante-Bellum days. Prior to the War Between the States, it became one of the most prominent towns in the upper part of the state. Handsome homes lined the streets; the per capita income was among the highest in the state; and two colleges and several private schools made York a center of education.

The other older towns in the county include Fort Mill, Ebenezer (annexed to Rock Hill in 1960), and Rock Hill. Several large plantations in the Fort Mill area made that community a hamlet settlement in the middle 1800's for planter interests, Ebenezer dates back to the latter part of the 1700's as an early farming, educational, and religious center. Many ante-bellum homes still stand in Ebenezer, a silent reminder of the days when Cotton was King. On the grounds of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church stands one of the last of the early academies which were numerous in the days before the War Between the States. Rock Hill was founded in 1852 when the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad established a depot in that section near a flint rock covered hill,

thus giving the town its name. This was on the white Plantation stretched over considerable area during those days and the Hiram White residence (at the corner of White Street and Elizabeth Lane) is referred to as one of the first homes in this area which became Rock Hill.

No major battle of the Confederate period was fought in York County. In the final hours of the Confederacy, a skirmish took place on the Catawba River in defense of the railroad bridge crossing the river a few miles north of Rock Hill near the community of Red River.

Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, and his cabinet stopped in Fort Mill on their flight after the fall of Richmond. They stayed at the Springs plantation, and held their final cabinet meeting at the William E. White home in Fort Mill, later the home of the late Colonel Elliott White Springs. Next, President Davis and his escort of two thousand cavalymen went to Yorkville. Enroute to Yorkville, Davis reviewed his cavalry troops for the last time at a point a short distance west of the famous "Nation Ford" on the Catawba River. In Yorkville, Davis stayed at the home of Dr. J. Rufus Bratton on South Congress Street. The townspeople gathered around Dr. Bratton's home to express their respect and sympathy to the President. They were addressed by Secretary of State, Judah P. Benjamin, who spoke from the second floor gallery of the Rose Hotel nearby.

During the Reconstruction era, York County was declared in a state of rebellion by Congress and martial law was imposed. Troops were stationed in York throughout the period and several who died during the occupation are buried there in Rose Hill Cemetery. The town was the scene of several mass raids by the Ku Klux Klan. The first Klan in South Carolina was organized in York in 1868.

During the final years of the 19th century, as the New South was emerging, cotton mills were built in the county. Large plants were erected in Rock Hill, Fort Mill and Clover and these towns became bustling industrial centers. Fort Mill became the seat of the Springs textile empire of mid-twentieth century fame.

During this expansion, in 1895, Winthrop College, the state college for women, was moved from Columbia to Rock Hill

York did not participate in the industrialization to any great degree. The town has retained a remarkable number of its century-old buildings. There are more ante-bellum homes and other structures in York than in any other town in the Piedmont Carolinas.

On the eastern side of the county the state's only Indian tribe remains. The once powerful Catawbas, longtime friend of the white settlers, live on a few acres, part of a reservation that once stretched over many miles along the river that bears their name. Some of the Catawbas continue to apply the ancient skill of their tribe in pottery making and sell their product as giftware and as souvenirs for tourists.

#### YORK COUNTY FACTS

Location:	In north central part of South Carolina, center of Carolinas Piedmont, bordering on North Carolina.
Area:	Approximately 685 square miles.
Climate:	Mean annual temperature 61 degrees; mean January temperature 43 degrees; mean July temperature 80 degrees; average annual rainfall 47 inches.
Altitude:	Estimated average 730 feet above sea level. Elevation ranges from 500 feet above sea level along Catawba River to about 1200 feet at Henry's Knob.

Agriculture: Good soil types support a diversified, balanced agriculture. Major products include cotton, peaches, poultry, turkeys, dairy, beef, and pulpwood. The value of farm crops in 1974 was almost \$9 million.

Industry: Cotton and rayon textiles, rayon acetate and cotton yarn, hosiery, textile chemicals, paper tubes, commercial truck bodies, wood pulp and hardboard. Annual value of industrial products for fiscal year 1975 was \$510.2 million, ranking the county seventh in the state in this respect.

PREPARED BY YORK COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION