

The Fairfield County Witch Persecution and some other odd events in Backcountry Areas of SC

The accompanying photo shows an early Dawkins area log home which no longer exists in Fairfield County. I believe that it may have been the home of Mary and Lawrence Free. It was also the home for my great great great Morris ancestors. My friend Will Kale wrote, "On the side of the chimney was a rune which are commonly found on many traditional buildings in Northern Europe. One of the reasons runes are placed on houses is for protection. The rune on Mary Ingelman's chimney was a diamond shaped rune which is the Germanic traditional version of the rune Ingwaz. This is the rune of fertility, good fortune and creative power. Inguz is the name of a Fertility God and God of fire and is the guardian of the hearth fire. Also the word "inglenook", which is Scottish in origin, means chimney corner."

Witches and other Backwoods Wierdos

Everyone has heard of the Salem, Massachusetts witch mania of 1692 which resulted in the deaths and persecutions of innocent people victimized by the malicious antics of bored teenagers and the ensuing mass hysteria. Just 100 years later in 1792, a similar fate befell three old persons over 80 years of age who had aroused the suspicions of neighbors in the backwoods area southwest of the small village of Winnsboro. Yes, Virginia, there were witches here... according to the beliefs then of some early Fairfield settlers!

Thirty years earlier, in 1760 there were many strange things happening to the people that lived in the frontier areas of the Carolinas. In the Dutch Fork area between Saluda River and the Broad, a group called the Gifted Brethren was broken up for practicing hypnosis and mis teaching the trinity of the Christian church. In the neighborhood of what is now called Younginer's Ferry, there originated a sect among the Swiss and German settlers, who were called 'Weberites'... Their leader Jacob Weber became a self-appointed exhorter who advanced himself still farther. He had come

to South Carolina at the age of 14 with a brother and prospered early in life as a local planter. But the death of his brother caused him to brood about religion and the state of his own soul. In May 1756, inner excitement reached a climax in his soul-searching experiences. Weber shared his religious enthusiasm with his neighbors by inviting them in for Sunday hymn and singings and readings from sermon books. He was encouraged by the response he received and those meetings seemed to be beneficial. Gradually the participants began to admire the reader, which in turn caused him to admire himself. The more recognition he received, the more esteem he had for his own talents.”

After a season of depression and the ending of the Cherokee War, Jacob Weber became obsessed with the idea that he was the Deity. He began to put aside the teachings of the Bible and preach out of his own spirit. Jacob Weber won over two co-workers who desired to be no less important in the meetings of the cult. They too professed most extraordinary revelations and helped to promote the sect. Meanwhile the three leaders adjusted their differences by agreeing that Jacob Weber should represent and act as God the Father, Schmidt Peter the Son, and a third person, Mr. Dauber, the Holy Spirit. I believe that Dauber was a misspelling of the name Dubard. The Dubard family ancestor came from the Palatinate area located along the Rhine River. These three leaders of the sect claimed to be the Holy Trinity...Jacob Weber's wife, Hannah, was declared the Virgin Mary. 'The aforesaid sect had so far obtained the supremacy that several families united with it for fear of their lives; numbers of both sexes went about uncovered and naked, and practiced the most unusual wantonness.

“Finally the leaders began to quarrel among themselves. Jacob Weber and Schmidt Peter had a disagreement with the third man, Mr. Dauber, who represented himself as the Holy Spirit. Jacob Weber and Schmidt Peter agreed that Dauber was not properly exercising the office of the Spirit, and that he was neither hot or cold, but only lukewarm. They placed a mattress on the bottom of a pit, threw Dauber in and piled more mattress and pillows on him. Members of the sect leaped in upon Dauber and trampled him until he suffocated. The corpse was taken out of bed and thrown into a burning pile of wood, to be consumed to ashes.”

Soon afterwards, Weber quarreled with Schmidt Peter, 'the Son.' He declared Schmidt Peter to be Satan in disguise and ordered him to be chained to a tree. The band surrounded Schmidt Peter, struck him with

their fists, and beat him until he fell to the ground. Finally, they danced around him and trampled upon his throat until he was dead. A report of these circumstances having reached the authorities in Charleston, the militia were ordered to arrest the pretended deity...He was tried, condemned and executed upon the gallows.

It became evident that the Cherokee Wars leading up to 1760 had made deep impressions and caused strain among the followers of Jacob Weber. The area did not escape Indian raids. Cherokee parties penetrated their forests and emerged to scalp, murder and burn...by spring of **1760**...the spiritual condition of the settlers was most deplorable as the self-appointed ministers usually wandered into the settlements every four to twelve weeks. A pastor visited the isolated community hardly twice a year..."

The people in the country, in general, grew up without schools and instruction. Occasionally a self-taught...minister may labor for awhile amongst them, yet it continues only a short time. The people are wild, and continue to grow wilder..."

I guess Damascus Road experiences are a not so uncommon response to the bewilderment of solitude and environmental dangers of living in the wilderness. The early settlers brought their tapestries of religious backgrounds with them in their own experiences of dealing with the religious persecutions of the mother countries. Cults and self-appointed morality police, thriving in the deep woods brought out accusation of locals that certain people were witches.

Mary Ingleman was Fairfield's famous tortured lady of German extraction.

On the 10th of November 1792, the South Carolina Gazette published an account of the grim court case being heard on behalf of Mary Ingleman. Mary Ingleman was seeking legal redress for the barbarous injuries inflicted on her by a number of Fairfield County neighbors in the Monticello area, now known as Dawkins. She and two others had been served by a lynch mob trial, convicted of practicing witchcraft, and tortured by flogging and having the soles of their feet burned off.

Mary and old man Hending (probably Harding or Harden) and his wife Sally Smith had been accused of laying evil hands on Rosy Henley and her sister and having caused damage to the livestock in the outlying farming settlements in the county. In another incident, Joe Fairs was said to have levitated the daughters of Drury Walker to the ceiling of the house. A bench of so-called witch doctors had called for an illegal mob trial at Thomas Hill's barn 5 miles from the county courthouse town.

Adam Free, a grown son of Lawrence Free, testified against his widowed mother Mary Ingleman who had remarried local miller Jacob Ingleman. Mary Ingelman was also accused by him for causing one of his cows to spring up into the air and fall down and break its neck. Adam Free's son Jacob also testified that his grandmother had turned him into a horse. Isaac Collins also accused her of turning him into a horse and riding him to a "grand convention of witches" where the devil complimented Mary Ingelman on her horse. She replied "Ah,...This is that rascal Collins!"

Martha Holly Willinghaw [Willingham?] testified that Mrs. Ingleman had greatly afflicted her by levitating her into the air, and causing her to spit up balls of hair with pins sticking out

In addition to Mary, four accused individuals were taken from their homes to Mr. Thomas Hill's farm. Mr. Hill was chosen as the "judge" in this illegal trial. The "sheriff" and "executioner" was a poor man by the name of Mr. John Crossland. The only evidence presented were the depositions of the people who claimed they were afflicted. The accused offered no defense. They were found guilty and tied to the building's joists and were flogged severely. Then their feet were held "to a bark fire and confined there until the soles popped off." After this hideous torture they were let go. But Mary Ingelman did not get far from the Hill's farm before she was assaulted yet again by a man who threw her down and put a pine log across her neck. She was saved the next day by a kind person who came across her on the path.

Philip Edward Pearson, the son of Revolutionary General John Pearson, wrote about this incident and trial in 1837 in a letter to Dr. Thomas Cooper at the SC College (now USC). As a neighbor, he wrote about

Mrs. Ingleman's high Christian character. He remembered in his boyhood seeing the marks of the cow skin whip on her bare arms. Mr. Pearson practiced law in South Carolina and had served for many years as the Solicitor of the South Carolina Middle Circuit which included Fairfield County. He later moved to Metagorda Texas, but not before selling his manuscript, History of Fairfield County, South Carolina to Dr. John H. Logan. The manuscript ended up in Mr. Lyman C. Draper's historical source-material collections which is now in the library of the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin.

From the manuscript Mr. Pearson described Mary Ingelman as a "neat, tidy and decent old lady." She was born in Germany and was knowledgeable in pharmacy, and "her application of simples in the cure of country complaints was the result of much observation and gratuitous practice...."

Mary Ingelman was the only one to get a judge, Rev. William Yongue, to issue a warrant for the arrest of Mr. John Crossland who was tried and found guilty of aggravated assault and fined five pounds. He never paid the fine and left the county after his trial. I have recently met a descendant of Crossland who told me that the family has lived in the Dutch Fork area of Lexington County for many generations since he left Fairfield.

She also prosecuted Joshua Durham who was found not guilty. The court records on this case are recorded in a collected index of Fairfield County Courthouse records by historian Brent Holcombe.

Many of the families in the Free-Ingleman neighborhood of southwestern Fairfield were of Swiss German origins and active in the German Seventh-Day Baptist Brethren religious movement. They were called Tunkers (in German) or Dunkers because they preached baptism by complete immersion. A common practice of hands-on faith healing may have attributed to the attitudes of other non-German neighbors that there were elements of "magic" being practiced by those backwoods settlers. Mary may have also had a German accent considered "foreign" by the standards of a largely English-Welsh and Scots Irish community. Perhaps she had a wart on her nose and cultivated healing herbs too! Anything out of the ordinary, and considered "different" from the community's accepted life

ways and practices could have contributed to the neighbors' suspicions. Others accused of witchcraft were John Erric, Benjamin Owens, Hezekiah Hunt, and his wife Mourning. Mr. Pearson said that tales of witchcraft pretty well died off in Fairfield after the incident at Mr. Hill's.

According to Dutch Fork traditionalist Lee Gandee, a native of the Dutch Fork area of Lexington County who documented the life ways and beliefs of the Swiss and German communities just across the river from lower western Fairfield. Gandee wrote" after the "scare" of 1792, "...a wise Baptist minister of Fairfield, Rev. William Woodward, is said to have preached a sermon on witchcraft which was supposed to have attracted a large audience. The crowd was keyed to a high pitch of expectancy and the preacher began by admitting that sorcery and magic did exist. However, he declared with mock seriousness, people should not imagine that old or ugly women were witches. What woman with supernatural powers would use them to make herself ugly or old? Rather, he said, suspect beautiful young girls of witchcraft, since with a look and a few words murmured in a certain way, they can draw boys away from their families, turn them first into lackeys and at last into lifelong toilers..."

"The tension broke. The crowd laughed, and the Fairfield witch hunt was over... Witchcraft and laughter cannot coexist."

When we consider our impressions of our hometown and county history, we must remember the diverse cultural traits that have been handed down from early times. Fairfield County would have been characterized as the wilds of the dense unsettled backwoods during the mid- to last decades of the eighteenth century. Many settlers would not have seen churches or other civilizing community establishments in their geographic environs until the later part of the century.

Perhaps the light of reason accompanied the eventual growth of communities, and collective belief in the existence of the "Old Ways" withered away...or is there an element that still exists in our present milieu? Indeed, conspiracy theories and xenophobia are not new concepts we, as representatives of the best of humanitarian evolution must examine.