

1876 township map of Fairfield County showing the ford and homes nearby.

During these December holidays, I led my brother and his wife from New Mexico on a long hike into the remote area along the Broad River once known as Lyles Ford. Our ancestors, three brothers, in the late 1740s settled on both sides of the river in what would become Newberry and Fairfield Counties by 1785. Brothers John and Williamson Lyles obtained lands on the west side of the river, while our 5th great grandfather Ephraim Lyles settled on the east. In 1761 or 62, Ephraim was scalped at his farmstead near the mouth of Beaver Creek which empties into the Broad just south of the flat rock crossing of the main river at the southern tip of Henderson Island. Although some accounts attribute the act to bandits disguising their murderous deed as an Indian transgression, most accounts point to the Cherokee raids that were going on at that time when the colonial governments were pushing them off their lands.

As the wide river here is not usually deep, the rocky bottom provided a good crossing between the two shores for the necessary crossings of settlers, armies, and westward migratory movements. The Lyles Ford road was one of many branches of the Pennsylvania Wagon Road which led our early frontier settlers westward into Georgia and the expansion of our developing country. During one period, John Lyles operated an adjacent ferry across the deeper expanse of the river. By 1855, the Union & Spartanburg railroad (now Norfolk-Southern RR) was built on the hillsides that parallel the Broad River, Lylesford being a major rail stop between Spartanburg in the northwest part of the state and the new capitol of Columbia.

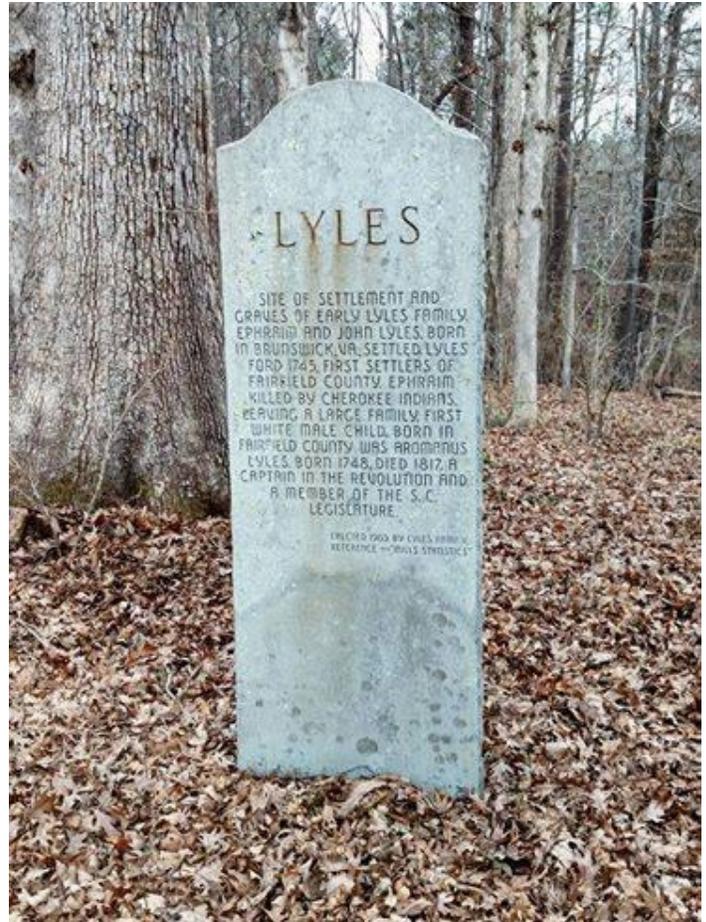
Remaining segment of Lyles Ford approach road, part of Penn. Wagon Rd.



The old family cemetery is located on a wooded hilltop just east of the ford, and adjacent to the railroad bed. Around 1960 our grandfather, Senator J. M. Lyles, erected a Fairfield Blue Granite historical marker on the edge of the field beside the woods. Ephraim Lyles and his son Arromanus are both said to be buried there, but there are no inscribed stones to mark where they lie. There appear to be nearly a hundred burials there all marked with vertical upright

fieldstones and rows of leaf-mulch filled sunken burial spots. Apparently the little town grew in size as the fortunes of the early settling families along the river expanded.

Arromanus Lyles was Ephraim's first child born there in 1748, and local tradition says that he was the first European child born in the frontier area that by 1785 would officially become Fairfield County/District. He expanded on the Lyles land holdings, and by the 1790s, when Eli Whitney's cotton gin had made its debut, the Lyles cotton plantation properties spread eastward of the river to higher grounds. Within a generation the nearby settlements of Buckhead, Feasterville, Salem Crossroads, Shelton, Clayton, Strother, and Alston began dotting the map. Two of the early Lyles houses in Buckhead from that period (1790s and 1821) are still standing, one having been restored in the 1970s by a family member and is now lived in by renowned artist Dru Blair. Dru's family gave the Blair name to the Buckhead community in later decades of the 1800s.



Granite marker at edge of woods where cemetery is located



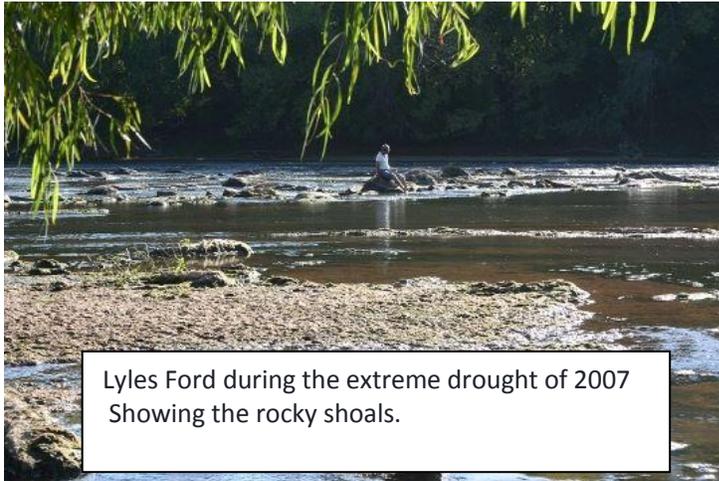
Segment of diversion canal wall.

On the wet bottom land beside the river are the visible remains of Arromanus's diversion canal which supplied water from the river to his hillside mill. The rock lined channel also served as a navigable canal to help pass supply laden flat boats around the seasonally treacherous rocky shoals of the Broad River. In 1787 he was appointed to a state rivers commission to effect improved transportation on the rocky sections of

the Broad and Saluda Rivers, and the remains of the diversion canal walls are easily seen in the oft flooded flatland between the river and the railroad. Until recently, when railroad maintenance offloaded a large pile of dirt, foundation stones and scattered artifacts could be seen marking the site of the Lyles mill store which would have also served as the passenger/freight depot for the railroad.

In addition to obvious remnants of the old road beds outlining the configurations of the settlement, a small rise marks the location of a Mississippian Indian mound which was destroyed in the mid 20th century by farming practices. Its remains have been excavated and documented by state archaeologists. It has always seemed interesting to me that the early settlers would have set up their frontier homes adjacent to the sacred mound of the earlier native inhabitants.

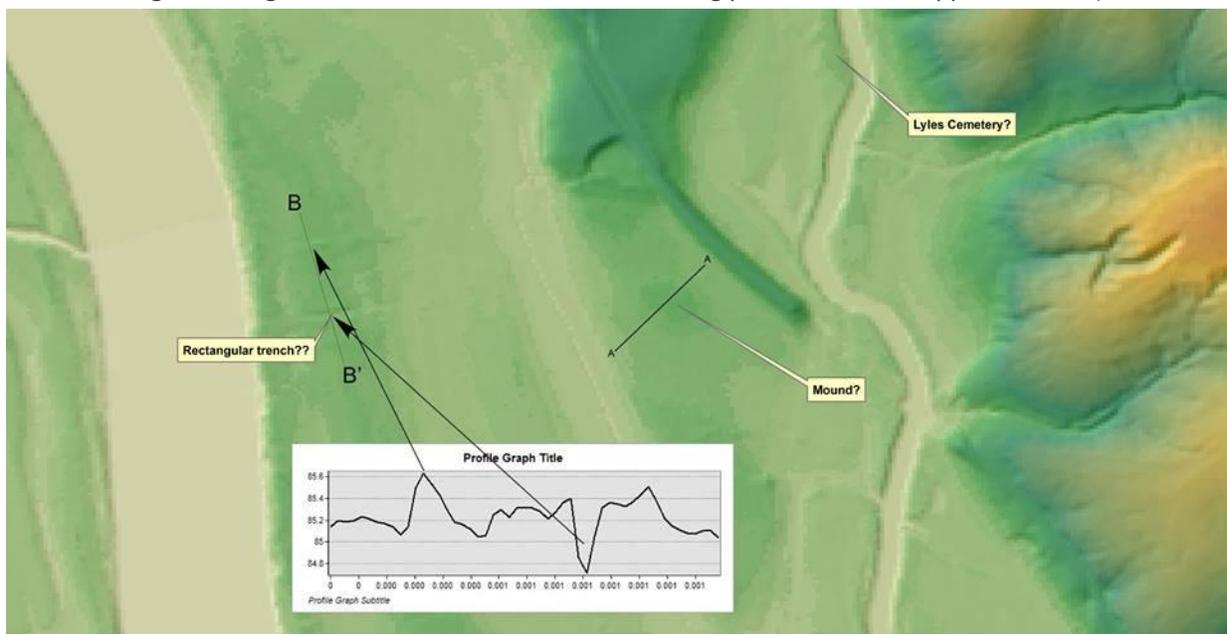
In my quest to stories of ancestors, I historic plats river and along the edge evidence of cabin where scalped. show that in John applied for provisions



understand the these early have studied the of land along the walked the hills hoping to find some the original Lyles Ephraim was Colonial records 1762, his brother to the government to fortify and stock

the Lyles house as a neighborhood safe house from future Indian raids. Although 1762 was the end period of the Cherokee hostilities and no further problems arose on the frontier, our family stories told of a trench that was constructed around the house as part of the fortifying palisade where a canoe was kept hidden in it for future escapes into the nearby river stream. In recent times, an archaeologist has provided me with a satellite lidar image map of the bluff between the inlet of Beaver Creek and the River. Amazingly, the faint remains of a square encircling ditch shows in the image. My friend Bryan Greer once led us to the site where a portion of the trench is still visible.

Lidar image showing faint outline of trench walls, remaining portion of Mississippian mound (dates from



about 1250), and cemetery. Dark green linear object is the raised railroad bed and the abrupt break is where the rails go onto a trestle bridge over Beaver Creek. Lidar laser beams bounce from the ground surface under the trestle.

The community name Blair now covers a large quadrant of the county map from the Broad River east to Salem Crossroads and north on US Highway #215 to the areas of old Feasterville and Shelton. The Lyles Ford site is not reachable by vehicle and access crosses private gated lands. The Sumter National Forestry lands enclose the area and the bottom lands along the river are part of SC Electric & Gas right-of-way property.