

EARLY HISTORY OF FAIRFIELD COUNTY

SOUTH CAROLINA

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By

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#### SOME EARLY HISTORY OF FAIRFIELD COUNTY

"What fair fields!" Lord Cornwallis is said to have exclaimed when he was making "Wynnesborough" his headquarters from October 1780 to January 1781. Hence, the origin of the name of Fairfield County. His lordship, speaking to Walter Robertson, of that day, added: "I can conceive no finer region, taking into consideration its fertile soil, its mild climate, its long drawn, beautiful valleys and glorious highlands."

Thirty-five years before Cornwallis was there, the first white settlers came to this land, then a part of Craven County, of the royal province of South Carolina. The first settlers found this territory occupied by the Catawbas, Waterees, and other small tribes of the Sioux. After the Revolution, it was a part of Camden District, and was made into Fairfield County in 1798. Its lines have remained unchanged to this day except for a small portion ceded to Richland in 1913.

Mill's Statistics says that buffaloes, elks, bears, panthers and wolves abounded in the county. James Newton, living in 1824, is said to have killed the last elk. Its antlers were shipped to England. Jesse Gladden, father of General Gladden, is quoted as saying that he had seen droves of wild horses in the county.

#### WINNSBOROUGH IN 1826

Winnsborough is the seat of justice of this district, and

is one of the most pleasant and flourishing villages in the state. There are few, if any, more healthy places in the state. The lands around are fertile, gently undulating, and highly improved. The houses are built mostly on one street, though other streets are laid out and have been considerably improved. It has a handsome court-house and jail, an academy (formerly a college) which is richly endowed and very flourishing; three churches, a Masonic hall, and a market-house. The number of private houses (some of which are handsome) is about fifty; there are two houses of entertainment and eight or ten stores. Two considerable saw gin factories are carried on here.

Winnsborough is remarkable for having been the headquarters of Lord Cornwallis in the Revolutionary War, after the defeat of Ferguson at Kings Mountain, when he retreated from Charlotte.

Mount Zion was established in this place before the Revolutionary War, and received an act of incorporation in 1777. It was formerly in high repute, and conferred degrees.

There are two other villages in the district: Monticello, which contains the Jefferson Academy, to the founding of which institution the venerable patriot, in honor of whom it received its name; liberally contributed. Monticello is situated between the waters of Little River and Wilkinson's Creek. It contains a few houses, besides the academy, and is in a healthy, rich and populous neighborhood.

#### MOBERLEY MEETING HOUSE

Edward Moberley, with his six sons and their families, came to Fairfield County from Point Tobacco, Maryland, about 1758, and settled on what is known as Poplar Ridge, on the East side of Beaver Creek. For a long time they were fretted by the Hamptons

about their lands, and moved a few miles from the place of their first location further to the East, and built a fort, and near it erected later the Moberley Meeting House.

The Moberleys built the Meeting House as an Episcopal Church. They permitted other denominations to use it. It also became a meeting place for Whigs and Royalists in the days of the Revolution. A battle, or skirmish, took place here, and the name of the battle was that of Moberley Meeting House. Col. William Bratton, of York, and Col. McClure, of Chester, were commanders of this body of Whigs who defeated and dispersed the Tories.

It is said that the whole family of Moberley suffered from the fact of this battle through false reports, some uninformed people having stated that the Moberleys were Tories in the Revolution. This is not true. They were wealthy, self-sustaining people. The people of the up country as a whole were reluctant to enter the contest against the Royal Government. They had little cause for complaint. Indeed, they had fared well at the hands of the king. Also, they were so far away from the seat of turmoil as to be little affected by it. Therefore, they were slow in their anger against the British troops, and the English ministry. However, when Tarleton invaded the up-country, the people could not stand the brutalities of his soldiery and camp followers. So when Cornwallis gave the order to them to take up arms for the British ministry, they refused and joined the bands of partisans like Marion, Sumter and Pickens, who showed in the darkest hour that "though the soil of South Carolina might be over run, the spirit of her people was invincible." And the South Carolina Historical Commission, in Columbia, has record of service of Edward Moberley, Sr., and ten other Moberleys and their connections. (See "The Moberleys and Their Connections.")

FORT WAGNER

When the Moberleys came from Maryland, between the years 1758 and 1760, on the route, on the banks of the Yadkin River in North Carolina, they admitted into the caravan of travelers a Hollander, Jans Wagner. Jans Wagner's family at that time consisted of himself and a number of daughters. He joined the Moberleys to immigrate to South Carolina for the better security of his family of daughters.

Soon after their arrival, Jans Wagner and the Moberleys participated in the troubles and war with the Cherokee Indians. The Indians went on the war path, scalped some white settlers, burned their homes, and took Fort Loudon. Wagner and the Moberleys with the riflemen and British troops, went on long marches, engaged the Indians in battle, and put them to flight to a large Indian town.

The first settlers built their log cabins near the margins of creeks or rivers. The Moberleys, as stated above, settled on Poplar Ridge, on the East side of Beaver Creek. Jans Wagner and his family of girls settled near Reedy Branch. Past the meridian of life, he was so solicitous of their welfare that he constructed a strong fort of white oak logs, hewn twelve inches square, for their protection, and when there was danger from the Indians, the neighbors would gather at this neighborhood blockhouse to defend themselves with Jans Wagner and his girls. Jans Wagner stood his ground against whatever potent influence the Hamptons had brought to bear on the Moberleys, and with his girls held the fort until he got his grant confirmed.

Tradition says that Jans Wagner furnished two bales of that historic shipment of six bales of cotton to England, where the authorities questioned whether the colonies could produce that much. MILL'S STATISTICS SAY:

Fort Wagner was built in the Cherokee War (1760).

The first settlers on the headwaters of Beaver Creek were under the necessity of confining themselves to Fort Wagner for protection from the Indians. A young man by the name of James Phillips went out with a hunting party, and on his return, near the fort, he shot a rattlesnake, which, on examination, was found to have a fawn in its stomach. This circumstance (observed D. R. Coleman, Esq.) has been related to me by Phillips himself, and by a member of others who saw the snake when brought into the fort and the fawn taken out of it. From the good character these men had among their neighbors as men of veracity, and my own long acquaintance with Phillips, I have no doubt but that he killed the snake and that it had the fawn in its stomach. (Albert Beam, witness) (page 554).

Fort Waggoner was erected on Beaver Creek, 6 miles above its mouth, and into this the poor scattered inhabitants flocked and received its protection until the end of the Cherokee War, and their meat was obtained by hunting, and their bread was brought on pack mules from the Congaree.