

Excerpts from Bob Edmonds' books

With order restored, the Back Countrymen turned their attention to other pressing matters. They wanted schools and teachers, churches and ministers, courts and jails, and representation in the Assembly, new parishes created, and every free man accorded the right to vote. They wanted tighter control of the liquor traffic. They wanted stronger laws to protect orphans, strangers and the very poor. They wanted the laws digested into a code for the Province of South Carolina.

They complained that their land was taxed at one-twelfth of its worth, the same as the Low Country, but with few benefits.

A petition outlining the needs of the Back Country presented to the Commons House was virtually ignored. In concurrent legislation, the House appropriated £1,000 for a marble statue of William Pitt in Charles Town. Taxation for a statue of the British statesman brought a sour response from the Back Countrymen. In a hotly worded petition, they declared that Bibles and prayer books, distributed free among the poor, "will be of greater utility to the province than erecting a statue of Mr. Pitt."

Back Countrymen prepared a series of eighteen resolutions for the consideration of the House. They proclaimed the inalienable right of petition and denied the right of taxation without representation.

Back Countrymen wanted schools and churches and the other things requested, but most of all they wanted the security of a court of law, with court house, sheriff and judge.

Finally in April 1768, the Assembly passed an act establishing seven additional circuit courts. Governor Montagu signed the bill and forwarded it to London. King George III vetoed the establishment of courts outside of Charles Town.

The Back Country was infuriated. Back Countrymen renewed their demands. Patrick Calhoun took down to the capital a red-hot petition from residents of the Long Canes.

Then with seething resentment against Royal meddling, at election time in 1769, Calhoun and his Scots-Irish neighbors loaded their long rifles, marched down to the polls in Prince William Parish and cast their ballots. When the votes were tallied, his neighbors had elected stern Patrick Calhoun as an Assemblyman from the Back

Country.

By that time Governor Montagu had returned to England, carrying with him a second act establishing additional courts. On November 25, 1769, King George III gave his assent to the law, by which action he allowed circuit courts to be established in Beaufort, Camden, Cheraw, Georgetown, Orangeburg, and Ninety Six.

The new judicial District of Ninety Six was large and heavily populated, its coverage extending from the Savannah River below Augusta to the border of North Carolina. Within its boundaries it held the settlements of the Long Canes, New Bordeaux, Stevens Creek, and Londonborough, as well as Dutch Fork, Fair Forest, the settlements along the upper Saluda and Broad rivers, and around the village of Ninety Six.

Forthwith, the area that is now McCormick County ceased to be a part of Granville County, and in 1769 became a part of Ninety Six District.

Ninety Six District encompassed the northwest corner of South Carolina, from which fourteen present-day counties were formed: McCormick, Abbeville, Greenwood, Anderson, Oconee, Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg, Cherokee, Union, Laurens, Newberry, Saluda, and Edgefield.

Construction of the courthouses and jails went slowly. But, on November 16, 1772, the first Court of Common Pleas and General Sessions was held in the new courthouse at Ninety Six. John Savage was elected sheriff.

The Grand Jury registered several complaints about conditions in the Back Country, including a lack of churches and free schools in the district which had fifteen thousand inhabitants. They noted that Fort Charlotte on Savannah River (near Mt. Carmel) needed repair. Jacob Watson and William Kelly were cited for "keeping disorderly tippling houses," and John Francis Bryan was charged with "going about the country...preaching and marrying...without any authority for doing so."

The Grand Jury returned sixteen indictments for trial. The court found Hugh Wilson, John Price, and Robert Edwards guilty of horse stealing. Each received thirty-nine lashes and lost his right ear. Benjamin Nugent, who had been released on bail, was not present for trial on charges of counterfeiting Twenty-Pound Bills.

Having won the rights for representation and to maintain courts, Back Countrymen asserted their demand for schools. Education had been completely neglected in the Back Country. Parents normally used the Bible in teaching their children to read and write.

Interim Governor William Bull sent a message to the General Assembly, dated January 29, 1770, proposing a better school system: "I mean the establishing in this province of seminaries of liberal education whereby our youth, the future hope and support of the country, will be rendered more capable of serving themselves and the community of which they are members."

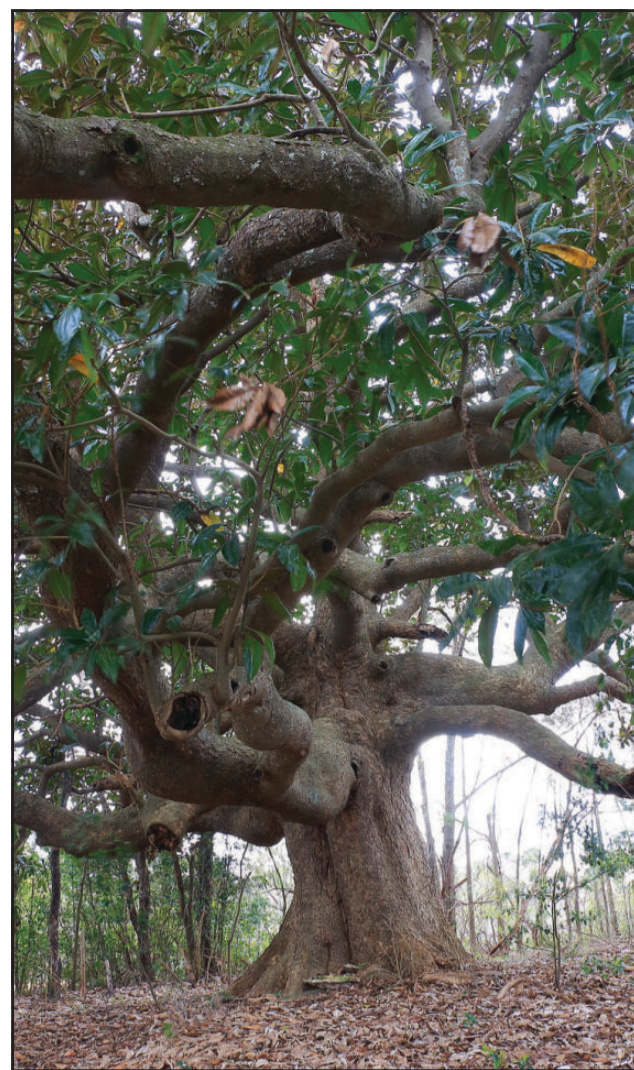
Governor Bull recommended the founding of free schools throughout the Back Country, schools for the Cherokees, and the creation of four academies, including one in each, New Bordeaux and Ninety Six. The recommendations died in committee.

Times were unfavorable to education in the Back Country South Carolina.

From *The Making of McCormick County*.



Bob Edmonds



- Tom Poland photo

Across the Savannah

An old tree, an old academy A magnolia and a school of consequence

By Tom Poland
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As you top the Edgefield County rise, that fine word "copse" comes to mind. Copse, a small group of trees, that's what you see. Look closer, however, and the magnificent crown of a magnificent magnolia tops all. What your eyes cannot see is the old academy that stood here long before this latter-day copse sprung from the earth. Nor can you readily make out the magnificent magnolia lesser trees conceal.

It's as if the trees huddle around the great magnolia and ask, "O great one, what's your secret for living some 170 years?"

Its secret is good fortune and the protective acts of men. On August 10, 1853, some 1,200 people gathered at Sweetwater Springs, a picnic spot, to choose a site and to raise money for a permanent academy. Joel Curry, Robert Meriwether, George Boswell, Samuel Getzen, Dr. Hugh A. Shaw, A.P. Butler, and Andrew J. Hammond would found the academy.

The name "Curryton" complimented Joel Curry for his gift of 100 acres and his enthusiasm for the school. Two academies would go up, each within two miles of Sweetwater and Hardy's Churches. An article in the *Edgefield Advertiser* from 1848 stated, "The place is admirable for a school. It is high and healthy and near the line that separates the oak and pine region.... Perennial springs and a beautiful stream of water near at hand and fishing and boating can be easily had in the mill pond and Stevens Creek." In time a thriving small community formed in the vicinity of the academies.

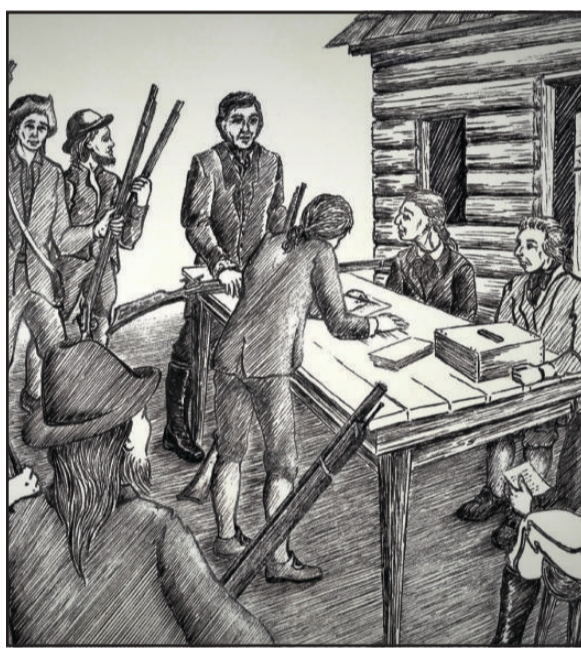
The academy, which was opened in 1854 and continued until 1892 when fire destroyed it, consisted of a female academy and a male academy. During their run, students came from Georgia, Alabama, Florida, and South Carolina. One of the academies sat at the present-day site of Old McDonald's Fish Camp. The other sat where the old magnolia stands today.

It's believed the people who founded Curryton Academy in February 1854 planted the magnolia. That could mean the tree is 168 years old. Most magnolias live 80 to 100 years. That makes this one an exception. Might it be the state record magnolia? Read on.

Jim Oliver of the Edgefield County Planning Commission wrote Stephen Pohlman Jr., Clemson Extension Area Forestry Agent, as to whether the magnolia might be a state record. The SC Champion Tree Program is a statewide list of the state's largest trees that are native to and/or naturalized to the continental United States. The state's largest trees compete against the National Registry to earn distinction as the nation's largest of its kind. The Curryton Magnolia, I'll call it, is more probably the state's second-largest magnolia. At this writing, the tree is to be re-measured and checked again for its status.

What cannot be omitted is the threat the historical site and giant magnolia faced. A developer purchased the tract the tree lives on with plans to build housing here. Taking the grand tree down was a real possibility. Edgefield's Bettis Rainsford and others consulted with the developer. The developer has agreed to give a two-thirds acre parcel upon which the tree is located to the Edgefield County Historical Society so it can develop a historical park around the magnolia, a park that will commemorate the old school and this arboreal survivor, *Magnolia grandiflora*, commonly known as the southern magnolia. Thanks to these actions, the tree will live on, just as the history beneath its spacious crown will live on.

On a windy, cloudy afternoon leather-like leaves crackled beneath my feet as I approached the shade of the great tree. Close to its massive trunk I looked up and beheld gargantuan limbs and the sockets of lesser limbs long perished. I saw what could be an elephant and it seemed as well an octopus in this grand tree. You'll see, too, the scars of this survivor. You could let your imagination run free and see a bit of gargoyle in this old tree as well. I say you could, but not me. I see a survivor, one that faced another peril – the saws and bulldozers of men. Now thanks to generosity, it will live on, a reminder of men's desire to equip those who follow with good sense.



Patrick Calhoun organized his hot-tempered Scots-Irish neighbors, loaded their long rifles, and marched down to the polls in Prince William Parish, and cast their ballots.

Another view of

Openness and transparency in county government –water and sewer dilemma II

By Chuck Cook

Those who reviewed Part I of this essay on our county's water and sewer systems, and who also attended the very short county council meeting on Tuesday, March 15, will recognize that I anticipated a proposal from the Town's Commission of Public Works suggesting a joint assessment of these systems. As the deadline for submission of articles to last Thursday's issue of *Messenger* preceded the council's meeting on Tuesday, I obviously had some advance information on what was likely to occur. This was information that I had already shared with other council members and county administrative staff the week before at the SC Rural Summit meeting in Rock Hill, so it wasn't as much of a surprise as it may have seemed to some attendees at the council proceedings.

What was a surprise to most of us was that the incident which had precipitated this recommendation involved a sudden leak in a county-maintained water line a few weeks earlier that drained CPW's available water supply to a least a portion of the county. The incident itself was not the surprise, at least at the meeting. The surprise was that it involved the loss of probably a million gallons of fresh water that had poured through the meter between the boundary line between the town and the county, i.e., the county was responsible for the cost of the lost million gallons. The problem became so serious to CPW – which supplies much of the county's total monthly water supply – that it reduced their reserve in one of their water towers to about a foot. Had the water in this tower been emptied completely,

which came very close to occurring, it would have resulted in contamination within the tower itself that would have required a complete disinfection of the tower and likely serious disruption to the water supplies of both the town and county. Luckily, CPW became aware of the problem in time to close the valve at the town/county boundary meter and preclude any further drainage. The county's W&S Department followed up quickly and repaired the leakage in the line so that normal operations could resume.

What was also surprising was that the cost to the county of the lost million gallons was relatively small. A little math will illustrate. If an individual county water user had – for whatever reason – accidentally used a million gallons of fresh water at a cost of \$4.10 per 1000 gallons plus a \$17.00 minimum (not including the corresponding cost of sewer usage, which runs a hefty \$7.50 per gallon of water used), the total cost would have been \$4,117.00 (\$4.10 X 1000 + \$17.00). Although this is not an inconsiderable sum, it's probably not as high as most of us would assume. Even so, the total cost to the county will be even less, as the cost of water that CPW charges the county per 1000 gallons is somewhat less than \$4.10 a gallon – the same rate that CPW charges its residential customers within the town boundaries. Deduct the \$17.00 minimum that the county charges its customers, and then consider that the county must buy a million gallons of water from CPW on a monthly basis under their existing long-term contract anyway – whether they use it or not – and the total cost to the county for this potentially disastrous miscue was probably less than \$4,000.00. In short, we got off easy this time around.

We may not be so lucky in the future. The fact that we came within a foot of contaminating an entire water tower and incurring the cost of an extensive cleanup simply illustrates that the town's CPW and the county's W&S Department are inextricably linked and substantially co-dependent. The county is CPW's largest W&S customer, even though it has no representatives on its governing commission. CPW, in turn, represents its entire water supply from Lake Thurmond and must transport it by pipeline to its

Dilemma, see page 5

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