

ELEMENTS OF EARLY COMMUNITY IN SOUTHEAST GREENVILLE COUNTY, 1775-1830

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In taking a look at the early development of communities of this lower portion of the county, I plan to concentrate on those locales of population that arose in the vicinity of the Old Indian Boundary. It is an area that was early, as now, anchored by churches, but in the late 18th century the churches were widely scattered and isolated with little more than forests and fields existing between them. It is through a few of these isolated spots that I will attempt to generally development a picture of the formative stages of some early communities and their populations in this area of Greenville County.

In the eighteenth century those travelers who would come to people this portion of Greenville County followed along the popular north to south routes of migration heading to South Carolina. They primarily traveled from the Backcountry areas of all states between New York and South Carolina into the seemingly lush, fertile, and 'private' Piedmont. The largest numbers reached here from a previous stay in North Carolina, with a fair concentration of families moving out of Virginia, more specifically, from the south central area of Virginia. Within that area of the state, Lunenburg County was among the largest counties which contained energetic contingents of settlers intent on moving towards a less inhibited location after the Revolution. The place was full of families looking west and south for a better situation. The Simpsonville area would eventually be home for early Lunenburg area families such as Bramlett, Dacus, Stone, Burdette, Stokes, League, Locke, Thackston and Glenn. These

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families would intermarry and also connect with other families just lately arrived from North Carolina, like the Howard and Cook families, or those moving up from Union and Newberry Counties such as Goldsmith, and at least one branch of the Austin family. The degree of intermarriage here and all over the Piedmont was significant and necessary, given the lack of access to other populations. But that also meant that these unions were often of a character that is widely considered taboo today, in that first cousins married each other with an accepted regularity. Up to the time of the Civil War or a decade after, it would be somewhat rare to find a family of ten children, in which less than three of them eventually married a first cousin.

Within this southern "frontier," people could find large acreage to accommodate them, and yet even with the influx of settlers on either side of them, they could not only be out of sight but, if they chose, virtually unreachable, because of the common incidence of low mountains, gorges, and creeks. This was not the biggest draw for a lot of settlers, but it certainly sold the area for quite a few. Regardless of their geographic distribution, however, the overarching phenomenon that established continuity in any area before there was ever really community was the close knit, extended family unit. As this extended unit would embrace more and more neighboring families through intermarriage we find that often groups of families moved together as they filtered into the Backcountry spaces of lower Greenville County, former Cherokee land. With a small population it is easy to see how quickly these families could become interwoven in their frontier homesteading. People in the same small communities became first, second and third cousins fairly quickly. By the late 1770s the amalgam of families had become small communities usually located near a reliable water supply such as a spring or creek, not unlike the contemporary natives and all earlier human populations. This is principally the pattern in the formation of settlements in the lower Piedmont of Greenville County, where our focus lies. Also, like the native Americans, most of these settlements were centered around a structure to house ceremonial activities, which in the case of most white settlers arriving with families, would be the church. This is especially true after the waves of the "Second Great Awakening"

reached these communities in, or around, 1801 and 1802. This church building would eventually serve many functions as it provided the focus of community activities, religious or otherwise.

Our area, located in south central Greenville County, had all been part of Cherokee and Catawba hunting territory for quite some time before white men ever ventured into the area. Even after the second cession of land from the Cherokee in the 1760s, all of Greenville County was still in Cherokee hands. This hunting ground had been home to only a few select white settlers by this time, who for the most part gained access to the land by acting as trading partners with the Cherokee nation. This vast area, spreading from the Broad River in the east to the upper reaches of the Saluda River in the west, was off limits for settlements of the two native tribes and other than the acceptable trader was no man's land for white settlements as well.

Although traffic would hardly be brisk along the Catawba to the Cherokee path as it ran along both present-day Hwy. 418 and the Georgia Road, there would be enough to seek inroads to promising sites closer to the boundary, if for no other reason other than the trails were already there and, that the larger concentration of creek resources and the adjacent bottomland itself created quite a pull. There was also the cultural case of many who arrived here, the inherent pull, or the Celtic urge, to explore the frontier. In any case there is no distinct indication of settlers trying to filter into the area immediately before or after Richard Pearis' 1760s settlement at Greenville, and yet boundary trouble with the Indians continued spottily.

The Indian boundary line was established in 1766, some ten years prior to the Battle of the Cane Brake, in the southern part of the county. Later it was altered in places to satisfy the Cherokee, but the shift also was necessary to accommodate the governors of North and South Carolina as to the proper dividing line between the states.¹ When finally surveyed, this line established a western boundary that

¹ At one time, prior to resurveying the line in 1772, the future site of Simpsonville was actually in North Carolina; as the Reedy River was briefly, in 1769, the dividing line between North and South Carolina.

ran a course from a point on the Reedy River below Fork Shoals due north to a point near Tryon Mountain. This line would also constitute the original eastern border of Greenville County. From this same point on the Reedy River a southwestern course was run to a point where the Keowee Trail crosses the Little River, known as Dewee's or Dewitt's corner.

As a result, this boundary from the Reedy River to the north ran about two miles east of present-day Simpsonville, very close in frontier terms, and so would place many ancestors of the town's early settlers in what would become Laurens County. Regardless of the boundary, there was the ever likely threat that the natives would take issue with white settlement so close to their hunting grounds, even if trade was the primary purpose. Several settlers living near the Indian Boundary Line were paid to provide provisions for a string of forts that lined this boundary with the unpredictable Cherokee. There are a few historical suggestions of these forts existing in locations within the area of Fountain Inn and Simpsonville but we have little evidence as to an exact location for them. Just what year each fort was constructed is difficult to determine, although most would probably date from a time soon after the boundary was set in 1766. We can however, with some surety, assume that some were undergoing refurbishing in response to Loyalist and British threats on the eve of the Revolution well into the late 1770s. One thing is certain, by the time the War of Independence was a couple of years old, the feeling of security in our area of the Backcountry was rapidly dwindling. Within the next five or six years, the Jacob Hite family, east of Pearis, fell victim to Indian raids as did members of the Hampton family, just inside the line in what is now Spartanburg County. Also, it was likely at the time of these raids that a female member of the Nathaniel Austin family was reportedly captured and killed, although it is pure speculation as to the location of either the attack or the Austin residence at the time.

* While it is possible that the unfortunate Miss. Ausin was residing at a home over the Indian line at the time, near the present marked sites of the Austin home on Hwy. 14, it is also likely that her father was simply close enough with his property in Laurens County to provoke the attack.

Revolutionary Period

Nathaniel Austin, whose arrival in the area is often said to be as early as 1760 or 1761³ was perhaps the most liberal supplier of the boundary forts in our area. Austin appears much later in the audited accounts several times from 1779 to 1786 for supplying a range of goods that included hogs, steers, flour and wagons in such proportions that he is often reimbursed for as much as several hundred pounds sterling. Add to this, his pay for military duty as captain of the militia and his service record is proved extensive indeed. There seems to be no evidence however supporting his arrival so early as 1760. Actually, by 1784 when the lands in the former Cherokee territory were opened for grants, it is difficult, if not impossible to determine how many people, already claimed possession of a plot or two across the line. We know there were very few, and those we know of largely from the claims they made once the lands were opened for sale. None of these claims, however, represented land within the present town of Simpsonville. It is possible that the land the Austins eventually claimed was already inhabited, maybe by the Austins themselves, but there is no evidence to really indicate they were there.

The truth is, we probably never will know with absolute certainty, who was the earliest settler in our part of the county; but it will forever draw interest for further research and, indeed, speculation.⁴ But just how did any of these people lay claim to this land as theirs, and in what proportions? The land north of the old Indian Boundary was mostly ceded in the Treaty of 1777 and therefore was riper for squatters to move in, many who were avoiding

³ The 1760 date is mentioned in family accounts, but is based solely on tradition. As to supplies, *Accounts Audited of Claims Growing out of the Revolution in South Carolina* [Microfilm]. Nathaniel Austin received certificate from Col. James Williams for provisions of troops on the Indian Line

⁴ To add to the settler controversy, there are locations of numerous tracts shown on the Union County Historical Society Land Grants maps, that indicate some mismatched dates and locations, but at the same time give a decent general depiction of early land distribution in parts of the Simpsonville area.

service in the Army. But these newly acquired state lands were not opened for development until the state created the machinery for taking advantage of the addition.⁵ A land office was established in 1784 for each circuit court district for their purpose of selling this land as well as any lands confiscated from those loyalists supporting the British cause during the Revolution. In the Ninety-Six District, which included all of what would later be Greenville, Laurens, Union, Spartanburg, York, and Cherokee Counties, the activity at the land office was immediately brisk. Many of those buying property were making use of the payment received for state militia service in the recent conflict. South Carolina was depleted of money from the Revolutionary War and so, not having the means to pay soldiers for their services, the state issued Treasury indents that could be used to purchase the property at 10 pounds sterling per 100 acres.

There is a 100-acre tract issued in July, 1784, to William Austin (evidently Nathaniel's son, Colonel William Austin) but there are no other Gilder Creek properties that indicate Austins as adjacent landholders until 1789. But more confusing is that the one grant description attributed to an Austin lies further east along Gilder Creek than the traditional location of the family plantation and more toward its mouth at the Enoree. It is very difficult through the existing record to exactly time the whereabouts of all of our landed antecedents, but we must ask the questions, especially when the contributions of those individuals so influenced the area's progress.⁶

Nathaniel Austin and his offspring, nephews, and nieces, are often reported to be the first of all settlers in the Mauldin and Simpsonville area, a tribute that is reflected in name of Austin Township in which Simpsonville lies. The members of the Austin family have through the generations provided the area with leadership, agricultural progress, means of defense, and health care. These contributions have run through several generations, from at

⁵ These operations are more fully explained in Huff pp.36-40.

⁶ *Ninety-Six District Deeds and Plots, North of the Saluda 1781-1799*. Microfilm. GCL. SC; also Anne McCuen. Unpublished notes and papers. Deed Provenance ref. *Reedy River Horsepen Creek watershed*

least the late 18th century, as the Austins established an early presence in the northern reaches of our area along Gilder Creek. It is however more difficult to assert that this vigorous Virginia family was the very first in our area, as quite a few others appear still earlier in the public records. One major question surrounds the origin of the name of the creek and Austin settlement known as Gilder.

Gilder Creek

The naming of this creek supplies a somewhat long-running conundrum that continually perplexes investigators. How could its name be connected with no known local family, individual, place name, hero, poetic verse, etc.?

Gilder Creek provides the geographic frame for the early settlements in this area in its northeastern reaches at least. The creek rises in two major tributaries east of Mauldin and north of Simpsonville, and although winding away to a distance of six miles at its mouth on the Enoree its watershed provides a bridge for joining settlements all the way into Simpsonville.

It remains to be explained as to why some of the first land grants of 1784 already made reference to locations as being near, or on the waters of, Gilder Creek, north of the Indian Boundary. This could hardly have been so had there not been some established connection with the name, or family of Gilder. Interestingly there is no record of any Gilder name ever occurring in any record during this time of Greenville County, be it land record, jury list, tax record, slave record, or court record. This is highly unusual for any family that may have recently played a major role in the patriot effort during the Revolution. But there is some possible explanation in the geography and records of Newberry County where a Gilder family member buys and sells land, as well as enjoys the naming of a creek and Church there after the Gilder family. Gilbert Gilder(Guilder) appears as early as 1749 when a certain William Hay petitions for help with his grist mill located in what would later be Richland County, and receives certification by the appropriate number of area landowners including

Gilbert Gilder.⁷ Nathaniel Austin does not show in the State Memorial land titles in the area of Greenville County prior to 1784, nor does he appear in land transactions near the location of the Gilders in Newberry.⁸

It has often been reasoned that the Austins were neighbors to Gilder either in Newberry or Union county and that it was very likely that the relationship between the two families was engendered there. From speculation on this relationship it follows that the Messrs. Austin that settled somewhat later in Greenville County at the present Gilder location may have brought the Gilder name with them and bestowed it upon the principal waterway at their residence. However there is no sign that Austins and Gilders were formerly neighbors in Newberry or Union Counties, nor members of the same church, nor any connection that is known of. So how did the name Gilder find its way to Greenville County prior to the selling of land grants in 1784? Just like any of the natural features in former Cherokee territory that bear the name of a family or individual, there must be an association between the name and feature for some appreciable period of time for the application to stick. A more plausible explanation behind east Simpsonville's Gilder Creek may actually involve the Reed family.

By 1763 Joseph Reed was a neighbor to both Jacob and Gilbert G(u)ilder on land that straddled Newberry and Union Counties. Gilder's Creek, in Union County, ran nearly the entire length of Reed's property. There is another early location given for a Nathaniel and Joseph Reed, possibly a brother and cousin, in Edgefield rather than Newberry County around 1774, but which also locates a number of the family in Greenville County by sometime in the 1780s.⁹

Whenever Joseph Reed acquired property in the newly opened area north of the Indian Boundary, he gained land not only at the later Simpsonville crossroads but also to the northeast along Gilder Creek. Just how soon Joseph Reed or his brothers, Nathaniel and John, moved into the area which is now Greenville County cannot be

⁷ Edwin Green, *History of Richland County*, p. 44. Also Council Journal

⁸ *Memorials of 17th and 18th Century South Carolina Land Titles*. SCDAH. [Microfilm] GCL. *Passim*.

⁹ *Reed, Robbins and other Family Histories* GCL?

proved much more clearly than can Nathaniel Austin's appearance, but they do receive these land grants soon after the lands are available here in 1784. It is possible, but not likely, that Austin had settled earlier along what is now Hwy. 14. I think it is more likely that Nathaniel Austin was the quintessential transitional settler. That is, one of those frontiersmen who advanced his own settlement with a gradual movement farther into the wilderness as opportunity and richer lands were available. In this way Austin moved from the east in Laurens County to the western Piedmont where his militia activities and homesteading ambitions led him. This would mean that perhaps the massacre of the young Miss. Austin actually took place in another county, most likely Laurens, where her father was listed as owning land near the boundary.¹⁰ There is evidence of a few scattered settlers north of the boundary line sometime before the issuing of land grants, but there is no reference to Austin improvements among the many grants surveyed along the course of Gilder Creek.

Between 1785 and 1792, members of the Reed family of Newberry and Edgefield Counties were granted several tracts of land, totaling about 900 acres. Most of this acreage included land on which later would rest the city of Simpsonville, and extends on both sides of the West Georgia Road for nearly a mile. Joseph Reed received a tract of over 300 acres near the crossing of the Georgia Road and the Old Stage Road, just west of Simpsonville's Main Street. But Joseph also during this time received property on the waters of Gilder Creek, and it is this connection that deserves our attention. With Joseph Reed and his family enjoying such a long association in Newberry County with the Gilder family, Gilder Church, and Gilder Creek on their property, it seems plausible that our Gilder Creek derives from the same association. It also raises the question as to how Gilder Creek is referenced on the first 1784 plats before Reed purchases his property there. Like several he could have actually settled on his property for some time before the land office opened, and christened the stream in those few intervening years.

¹⁰ At least a portion of this property was located in the area of Laurens that would be ceded to Greenville County in 1793.

Joseph Reed was one of four brothers, the others being John, Nathaniel and Joshua. All were sons of William Reed of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, and all remained for a short time in the upstate after having received some compensation for military duty. Another local purchaser, Isaac Reed, was a cousin. Joseph, in the meantime, also increased his portion of land by purchasing tracts from original grants to James Harrison (ca. 1786), and a tract representing a subsequent grant from South Carolina Governor Moultrie to William Lacey (ca. 1791). These parcels of property overlapped somewhat, and positioned his property almost perfectly straddling the dry ridge that ranged from northwest Laurens County through most of southern and central Greenville County.

There were varied intentions among these early land grant holders such as Harrison, Reed, Austin, and Lacy who chose land so close to the new Indian Boundary. Some never intended to settle on the land but rather optioned to use the same for speculation toward an inevitable increase in land value, along with the obvious added value of securing a "buffer" zone of some size between themselves and the remaining Cherokee in the frontier. Others in settling, would or could, only develop a portion of what they held and might choose to farm the rest in cycling plots not to put less wear on the land but less wear on the game population. It is certain that both James Harrison and William Lacey remained for some time within the area of Simpsonville and its surrounding plantations, and the Harrison family remains through several generations right up to the present.

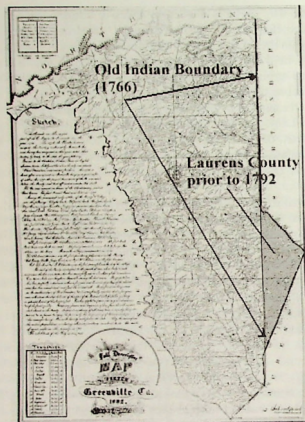
This is also true of the Howard family, whose grants lie on the eastern side of Simpsonville, and who resolutely remained in the area well past the ratification of the United States Constitution in 1789, and continue to reside within the city limits today. As Howard Drive attests today, the Howards very early maintained a fairly large spread of land to the east of town along both sides of Durbin Creek from the middle of Powderhorn subdivision all the way to what would become Howard Drive and a little beyond. It is very likely that John, Samuel or Stephen Howard, or perhaps all of them, occupied this land prior to the issuing of patent grants in 1784, as a fair portion of it lay east of the boundary line. Samuel Howard was a colonel in the Revolutionary War and saw a good bit of action in the Indian wars of

1774-75. His grave is marked by a newly furbished stone in the family cemetery on the east side of the city. Adjacent to the Howard's property on the southeast of what is now the city limits. Captain John Redmon, held over 600 acres for a short while, also on both sides of the main Durbin Creek. Redmon's own regiment was the beneficiary of provisions dealt by Nathaniel Austin in 1781-82.¹¹

Soon a number of grant recipients in addition to James Harrison, William Lacy, and the Reed brothers, began buying and selling all, or portions, of their holdings in such a regular fashion that it, in effect, initiated the first real estate boom in this part of the upstate and in particular around Simpsonville. One of the most productive sources for this activity was found five to six miles east of Simpsonville in the newly blossoming Clear Spring community. As mentioned earlier this church settlement was built by farmers and millers in the 1780s and '90s, some of whom received grants there, but most of these settlers had moved north and west from Union and Laurens County into the area in the 1790s. These people settled in, some staying on their purchased land rather than selling, while a number of permanent fixtures showed up in close proximity to the spring, such as grist mills, a blacksmith shop, and a store. All of this activity further encouraged the landowners to remain and take advantage of the amenities. As this occurred, of course, a concentration of farms began to emerge in the nature of a physical community even before the church meeting house was erected, and as the community grew the necessities and responsibilities grew. This would have a much greater bearing on the county than was ever expected, for the entire area of Clear Spring in addition to land that stretched to within a couple of miles of the crossroads was, at the time, all in Laurens County, rather than Greenville County as it is today.

As an illustration of this area's affinity to the Old Indian Boundary, and of the significance of the shift made by changing the county line, try to imagine a straight line running north that would pass just east of Bethlehem Baptist Church below Simpsonville on

¹¹ *Accounts Audited of Claims Growing out of the Revolution in South Carolina*. [Microfilm].



Hwy 14 at Harrison Bridge Road, further on through the intersection of Hunter Road and East Georgia Road, then nearly through the intersection of McKinney and Jonesville Roads, on north just a few hundred feet west of the Clear Spring Fire Department building on Woodruff Road (old Pliny School). Everything east of that line was at one time Laurens County. If you continued the imaginary line it would eventually run right through Pelham and on to its intersection with the Enoree River at Greer from which point this Old Indian

Boundary remains the current county line all the way to North Carolina.

The settlers in this area resided in an angle formed by the Enoree River and the old Indian Boundary Line which formed the eastern boundary of Greenville County. By the early 1790s there were sufficient numbers in this triangular area who had grown increasingly tired of traveling the twenty to thirty miles distance to the Court House at Laurens for everything from settling small claims or jury duty, to even casting a vote. This was especially aggravating considering that the majority of their close neighbors just over the county line made a much shorter trip to the Greenville Court House for their concerns, and by way of much better roads. Exercising their constitutional rights, a group of 58 residents signed a petition that was presented in the state House of Representatives on Dec. 21, 1792, which suggested a new county line that would effectively place them in Greenville rather than Laurens:

*"Your Petitioners therefore Prayeth to be placed to the County of Greenville...which will much relieve Your Petitioners in the distance of Riding to the County and District Courts."*¹²

The current county line was agreed to as a compromise to one suggested by the petitioners that would have effectively included three more miles of Laurens County.

As commissioners appointed to determine the new line, Greenville county resident James Harrison and Laurens County State Representative, Daniel Wright, faithfully executed the survey on August 26, 1793*. An immediate net effect of the change would shift both the farm of Representative Wright and his House seat from Laurens to Greenville. Greenville thus forever gained the additional appropriations of representation, and the communities west of the boundary in turn gained the redirected traffic now headed towards Greenville Court House.

¹² *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1792-1794. State Records of South Carolina.* 1988. Columbia:University of South Carolina Press. p36.

* They were paid 10 pounds, eleven shillings for their efforts.

The additional traffic of course spurred more growth in these communities but they would remain widespread to the point that it would be at least 30 years before a post office is established in the eastern corner at Stonesville, and at the southern end at both Cripple Creek and Fairview, the latter positioned nearly on top of the boundary line.

From Church to Town and Back

There were essentially two main routes to the courthouse for these new Greenville County citizens that prevailed at least through the first half of the nineteenth century. One lay along the Scuffletown Road through Five Forks closely along the bed of the current Woodruff Road, which even at the time bore a lot of traffic to Spartanburg and was known as the Spartanburg (as opposed to Old Spartanburg)^{**} Road as well. The other way to Greenville brought the petitioners and their "east side" neighbors into the crossroads by way of East Georgia Road, where they then turned north along the road that had evolved from trail to road to Old Stage Road and then on into Greenville twelve miles away. Even though the distance was somewhat longer than the Spartanburg Road route, the Stage Road was often preferred for the same reasons that it was designated for stage travel. It traversed a more level course, where there were fewer fords to negotiate and also because, as a route designated for stage travel, the general conditions of the road were given more attention in terms of maintenance. It would be the people in the triangle, most of whom, physically if not spiritually, members of the Clear Spring community, who would continue to provide most of the traffic as their numbers increased there in the wedge of the Enoree and the Indian Boundary.

There were hardly the makings yet of a commercial community at Simpsonville or Fountain Inn, in this largely pre-cotton period when corn and wheat were the dominant staple crop. However, placed in context with the neighboring geography, perhaps more was going

^{**} This designation was reserved for what is now more or less, the route of East North Street and Brushy Creek Road.

on than met the eye. A few short years after 1800 saw the formation of church communities at Clear Spring, and further west at Bethel, and Hopewell. As 1820 approached it brought together communities at Standing Springs on the west side of Simpsonville and Stonesville (later Huntersville) on the east side down the road from Clear Spring, and within a mile and a half up the road from Crymes' muster ground.

By the late 1830s, when the signs of commerce finally arrive in Simpsonville and Fountain Inn, part of the population in the east-lying communities is already beginning a migration to these centers. From this influx the towns evolved into rural hubs, establishing the farm-to-market exchanges that will eventually position the area for the move to a market economy in later years. This development is a subject perhaps for further study, and something beyond the scope of this paper, as well as something that might address the level of detail required to more closely analyze the elements and character peculiar to each of the rural communities. Nevertheless it is through that kind of investigation that one might reveal how convergence of the earlier scattered communities in the rural hubs will determine the type of progress realized there at least until the appearance of the railroad, and the gradual dependence on local industry at the turn of the 19th century.