

The Catawba Indian Agent, 1840-1943*

In 1763 the Catawbas signed the Treaty of Augusta. Their numbers reduced greatly by disease and warfare, they ceded the majority of their lands and moved to a 15 square mile reservation. This reservation was on both sides of the Catawba River and encompassed territory in Lancaster and York Counties. Modern day Rock Hill, Fort Mill, Tega Cay and Indian Land were all part of the Catawba Indian Nation.

As time progressed the Catawbas leased much of their tribal lands to white settlers. Their numbers continued to decline and eventually the settlers coerced them into ceding the reservation. In 1840, the Treaty of Nation Ford dissolved the Catawba Reservation and nullified the 1763 Treaty of Augusta. The Catawbas were promised a home in North Carolina but North Carolina's governor refused them. They wandered homeless until South Carolina purchased a one square mile reservation. This "old reservation" is still part of today's lands.

From 1840 to 1943 South Carolina appointed a Catawba Indian Agent who was responsible for tribal related expenses on the very small 632 acre Catawba Reservation. The agent disbursed a yearly allotment to tribal members and also handled burials and medical expenses. Every year he submitted a report to the comptroller general. Indian Agent related correspondence and reports, are often the only sources of historical information available for the Catawba Indians, especially during the era of Reconstruction.

The Catawba Indian Agent was appointed by the governor. If the Indians were unhappy with the agent, their only recourse was to write the governor. If their complaint was investigated, this led to further correspondence with Catawba tribal members, the agent, and other individuals investigating the charges. Agent selection was also an interesting process that generated letters from individuals seeking the office, and individuals supporting various candidates.

Agent reports and correspondence provide important information in a time of scarce historical documentation. When the Catawbas were federally recognized in 1943, the office of Catawba Indian Agent was no longer necessary after 103 years.

It should be noted that much remains to be added to this initial set of documentation. Agent reports and other Catawba primary source documents have yet to be input. Searches through governor's correspondence at the SC Department of Archives and History have thus far covered a period from 1865-1892.

** For more information on the Catawba Indian agent, please see "The Catawba Indian Agent (1840-1943)" <http://nativeamericanstudiesarchive.blogspot.com/2015/>*