

NEARBY HISTORY: Thorn's Ferry

In 1796, the crossing near today's Buster Boyd Bridge cost 4 cents for a foot passenger

Old maps of York County show "Thorn's Ferry Road," the predecessor of S.C. 49 between York and Charlotte that crosses the Catawba River by way of today's Buster Boyd Bridge.

From 1670 on, the state has regulated ferries by awarding franchises and closely spelling out the privileges and restrictions to the franchise owners. In 1796, Hezekiah Thorn and John Drennan received a 14-year permit to exclusively operate what became known as Thorn's Ferry.

Thorn and Drennan were to "take and receive the following rates, and no other: for every foot passenger, four cents; for each led horse, four cents; for a man and horse, seven cents; for a wagon and team, or other four wheel carriage, seventy-five cents; for a chair or cart, with one horse, twenty-five cents; for each head of black cattle, two cents; for each head of hogs, sheep or goats, one cent."

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Louise Pettus



It has been reckoned that 1 cent in the 1790s would generally equal 14 cents in purchasing power today, according to Consumer Price Index calculator on a Federal Reserve Web site. That means, in today's terms, it would cost a person on foot about 50 cents and a man with a wagon and team around \$10 to cross the river by ferry. Although the 1796 franchise was issued for 14 years, it was not renewed until 1813, and then, by Thorn alone for seven years. In 1813, the franchise stated "for every man and horse, ten cents; for every foot passenger, six and a quarter cents, and in all other cases, the same ferriage as has been heretofore fixed by law."

Thorn was born circa 1765, making him about 48 in 1813. According to his tombstone in Flint Hill Baptist church cemetery, he was in his 80th year when he died Sept. 21, 1845. Thorn was married twice.

His first wife is believed to have been Mary Elizabeth Crowley and his second, who is buried beside him, was Ellenor "Nelly" Waddell. Various records show Hezekiah had seven sons and eight daughters.

Two of the sons remained in York District, one son died young and the others scattered to Mississippi, Georgia and Kentucky. Three of the daughters migrated with husbands to Arkansas, Georgia and Pickens District, S.C. There are no records on the others except for one who died young.

Records of Flint Hill Baptist Church show that son Jesse Thorn was excommunicated in 1837 (it didn't take much to ex-

communicate someone - dancing, playing cards or a swear word on Sunday might do it). Jesse had a son, Jesse Jr., who became a "prominent and prosperous farmer" of Craighead County, Ark. A Goodspeed book, "Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas," published in 1890, contains a biography of Jesse Thorn Jr. and refers to his grandfather, Hezekiah Thorn of South Carolina, only as a farmer with no mention of his being a ferry operator.

Of Jesse Sr., who was excommunicated from Flint Hill, the Goodspeed book states that he went to Calloway County, Ky., about 1838 and then to Craighead County, Ark. for 12 years. Next, he went to a place in Arkansas called East Bottom, "where he settled in the woods, building a little log cabin with clapboard roof and door, and puncheon floor" (made of heavy,

poorly dressed planks). Jesse combined farm work with teaching school.

The first teacher in the county, he would make his crop and then teach a subscription school for the remainder of the year.

One of Jesse's sons, Dawson, was elected sheriff of Craighead County in 1874. He became one of the largest landowners in the county with a 2,000-acre farm that had at least 500 acres in cultivation and another large stock farm known as Miller Mounds.

The Thorn family pattern of first generation in this area, second generation in Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky and third generation in Arkansas (and Texas) is very much typical of what happened in many of the pioneer families of this area.

Louise Pettus is a retired Winthrop University history professor. Her column appears Sundays.