

North Carolina Catawba Company ^[1]

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by Alan D. Watson, 2006

The Catawba River ^[2] rises in McDowell County ^[3] and flows through several western counties for approximately 150 miles before entering South Carolina west of Charlotte ^[4]. Along with the Wateree River, it was set to be cleared from the South Carolina line as far as might be feasible by North Carolina's first toll navigation company, incorporated by the General Assembly ^[5] in 1788 but abandoned in 1796. The following year the legislature chartered the Catawba Company, which would be funded by private subscriptions and use local labor; the company was authorized to appoint overseers for the river and call upon men living within four miles to work on the watercourse. Replacing the Catawba Company in 1801 was the North Carolina Catawba Company, capitalized at \$15,000, which was similarly permitted to clear the river from the South Carolina line as far as navigation might be "practicable."

The North Carolina Catawba Company experienced a lackluster existence for three decades, although by 1808 it had complied with its act of incorporation by making progress in rendering the river navigable. In 1809 the General Assembly authorized the company to conduct a lottery to obtain an additional \$5,000 and in 1816 agreed that the state would subscribe to \$6,000 worth of stock, grant the company control over all tributaries, and permit it to erect toll bridges across the river.

Notwithstanding the generosity of the state, attempts to collect installments on stock subscriptions and to undertake improvements proceeded slowly; one excuse was that the most formidable obstructions to navigation lay in South Carolina and thus prosecution of the work in North Carolina was inexpedient until its neighbor to the south finished its improvements. In 1824 the assistant state civil engineer completed a survey of the river that proved to be of little advantage. Legislative amendments to the company charter in 1821 and 1825 created confusion and additional headaches when the statutes referred to the Catawba Navigation Company ^[6] and the North Carolina Catawba Navigation Company, respectively, rather than the North Carolina Catawba Company. Although the firm held a stockholders' meeting in 1830, interest had dissipated. In 1834 the Board of Internal Improvements, which had assumed responsibility for supervising the work on the river, reported that it had been so long since it had heard from the company that it despaired of receiving any communication. The board then recommended that the public would be best served if the company surrendered its charter.

Reference:

Charles C. Weaver, *Internal Improvements in North Carolina Previous to 1860* (1903).

Additional Resources:

North Carolina Digital Collections ^[7] search results for North Carolina Catawba Company

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From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. ^[13]

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