

## **Scotch Fair** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Marilyn Wright, 2006

In the early 1800s, the Sandhills region of North Carolina faced considerable obstacles to economic prosperity. There was only one river of any consequence in the area, the [Cape Fear](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, which ran along the region's northern border and emptied directly into the Atlantic Ocean. The [Lumber River](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, which flowed through the middle of the Sandhills, was slow moving, encumbered with cypress trees, and flowed south into the Pee Dee River of South Carolina. There were no convenient waterways that made transportation of goods and people convenient or economical or connected the area with other parts of the state. Resourceful [Scottish](#) <sup>[4]</sup> settlers in the region, however, devised a solution to their dilemma.

In 1792 a Scotch Fair was chartered, to be held in May and October of each year. The site selected for this event was approximately half the distance between [Fayetteville](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, N.C., and Cheraw, S.C., placing the location one-quarter mile from Laurel Hill Church (the modern-day Old Laurel Hill Church). The fair appears to have been well advertised, since by the early 1800s it was attracting large crowds of people from as far away as the mountains. Merchants of Fayetteville, Cheraw, [Wilmington](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, and [Charlotte](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, along with peddlers of all sorts, sold or bartered their merchandise. Covered wagons from the mountains, loaded with apples, potatoes, and other produce, actually made the journey to this attraction. People brought their chickens, baked goods, handicrafts, and extra horses to sell during Scotch Fair week.

The excitement of athletic competition and horse races also attracted large crowds. Poker games and horse trading caused tempers to flare, but apparently only one man was killed during the history of the fair. Fighting events were popular, and those with overblown confidence fueled by whiskey consumption bet large sums of money on the outcomes. The winner of these savage fights walked away with a handsome purse, but he may also have left with an empty eye socket, an earlobe chewed in half, or the tip of his nose bitten off. One famous visitor to the Scotch Fair was a scruffy fighter known as "one-eyed Hector McNeill," who had had an eye gouged out during a previous match.

In the mid-1830s a number of Laurel Hill citizens were concerned about the drinking, fighting, and gambling that took place at the Scotch Fair. State statutes made efforts to regulate these unsavory activities but seemed to have little effect in controlling the raucous behavior. By the 1840s, members of the Laurel Hill community and Laurel Hill Church were petitioning the state legislature to abolish the Scotch Fair.

The [Civil War](#) <sup>[8]</sup> put fair activity into a period of dormancy for several years. The Scotch Fair apparently was revived after the war, because complaints about it reappeared in the late 1860s. Finally, in 1873 Senator Richard Long presented a petition to the [General Assembly](#) <sup>[9]</sup> on behalf of the citizens of [Richmond County](#) <sup>[10]</sup>. The petition was granted and the Scotch Fair officially came to an end.

### **References:**

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Ruth Jane Trivette, *Legacy of the Committed* (1982).

Marilyn Wright, *A Sense of Place* (1991).

### **Subjects:**

[Antebellum \(1820-1861\)](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

[Civil War \(1861-1865\)](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

[Culture](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

[Early Statehood \(1789-1820\)](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

[Events](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

[Reconstruction \(1865-1876\)](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

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### **Origin - location:**

[Cumberland County](#) <sup>[18]</sup>

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#)<sup>[19]</sup>

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