

Land of the Cherokees

The Oolenoy River winds down between steeply rolling hills, on its way from the Gauley and Beasley Mountains to the Saluda River. Its course lies almost in the shadow of Table Rock and Caesar's Head, prominent peaks of the Blue Ridge Range. The soil of this river valley is very rich and productive and the bordering hills are completely forested in oak, hickory, poplar, maple, pine, and so many other species of both trees and herbs that a more abundant and varied plant life could hardly be found in North America. Botanists come to this area from far and near to study rare plants that may be of interest because of their blossoms, foliage or use in medicine or horticulture. Some that are of interest because of the beauty of their blossoms are azalea, rhododendron, laurel, dogwood, red bud, grandsir greybeard, and service berry.

The native inhabitants of this valley, as well as of the surrounding territory, were the Cherokee Indians. This valley, designated by Chief Woolenoy, as the "Land of grain and clear water" was literally a paradise for them. At the time of colonization no warring tribes were near to disturb their peace. There was an abundance of game -- deer, bear, raccoons, opossums, squirrels, and rabbits. The streams abounded in fish. On the rich lands of the valley they grew their corn and other food products. Herbs for medicine were bountiful and the Indians classified them as to usage, i. e., horse mint for epecac, may apple for calomel, slippery elm bark for poultices; black berry, yellow poplar, and red oak bark for ulcers. Then, there were also the dye plants which the Indians prized. They used maple bark to obtain a blue dye, walnut hulls for brown, maple combined with walnut for a very dark brown, oak balls, growths caused by a type of insect, for black, and yellow root for yellow. Red mud was used for brick red.

The Indian village of our Oolenoy Community was located on the broad top of what is now called Uwharrie Mountain, high above the valley and facing Table Rock Mountain. Woolenoy was the tribal chief of this tribe of Cherokees and his name, with the revised English spelling, was used by the white settlers in naming Oolenoy River, Oolenoy Church, Oolenoy School, and by more recent residents in naming Oolenoy Community Center. Hugh Warrie, Anglicised spelling of the Indian name Uwharrie, was a contemporary of Chief Woolenoy and was the warrior chief of the tribe.

From Uwharrie Mountain, Woolenoy and the tribe could have oversight of the entire valley and might have seen the legendary "Old Man of the Mountain" as he devoured his feast from a table of rock called Table

Rock while seated on a nearby pinnacle called the Stool. This giant was said to have drunk his water from a leaf of hunter's cup growing today near the cold spring on the top of the mountain.

I cannot but share the suffering of these people when they driven from their native haunts to the west and finally to land that was aside for them by the United States Government in and near what is the Great Smokey Mountain National Park.

It was to this Cherokee land at Oolenoy that the first white settler Cornelius Keith, came in 1743.

Cornelius Keith Arrives in Cherokee Land

Cornelius Keith was born in 1715 in Loch Lomond, Scotland. When he was still a child, he came with his parents to Virginia and settled on the Roanoke River, Brunswick County. He married Juda Thompson.

In 1743, like many other new settlers, he was anxious to move on and explore new lands. With his wife and small child, he started southward along the Blue Ridge mountains in a narrow-gage covered wagon pulled by a pony with two other ponies hitched to the back of the wagon.

We can only imagine the load of that wagon. There must have been clothing, bedding, dishes, dried vegetables and fruits, and breadstuffs enough to last for months until more could be made. Then, there must have been grain and other seeds for planting. A wheel also had to be included for spinning. Tools such as axe, frow, adze were included. Mauls for driving wedges were made of wood.

As was the custom in early days, the iron pots, kettles, ovens, and buckets were tied to dangle from the side of the wagon and beneath it.

Being Scotch highlanders, they naturally followed the Indian trails and blazed the way close to the hills of the Blue Ridge Range. They came down into the Carolinas and finally stopped in what is now the Oolenoy Community in Pickens County, South Carolina.

When he came to the point where he could see the grandeur of Table Rock Mountain, he looked up as if unto the Cliffs of Scotland and said, "This is our home."

For protection from weather and wild animals, he quickly built a brush harbor on a flat-top hill overlooking the Oolenoy River Valley and the surrounding mountains. It is a satisfaction that Miracle Hill Mission School now has this hill and has erected their high school and Tots' buildings on the same ground with a plaque memorializing the original settler.

Before they were settled, the Indian warriors from their village on Uwharrie Mountain sighted them and immediately bristled for action -- for this was the first white settler that had ventured into their territory. Led by their war chief Uwharrie they went to investigate. But when they came near, they were amazed at Keith's ponies and began to scheme to get them. However, Cornelius Keith knew how to deal with the Indians since he had dealt with them in Virginia. Indian Chief Woolenoy bantered Keith to trade Indian trinkets for the ponies but Keith knew he would need his ponies. He also knew that he must have land to cultivate and that he must be able to fish and hunt game for food. He told Woolenoy he would trade one pony for land and asked how much land he would give. The chief showed that he would give all the land Keith wanted. So, Keith

traded the pony for a big wedge of what is now Pickens County consisting of the entire lower half of the Oolenoy River Valley and for the privilege of hunting and fishing.

This trade was clinched according to the Indian custom of binding a treaty -- by the ceremony of smoking the peace pipe.

This was the beginning of the Oolenoy Settlement.

The first Map of Pendleton District, published in 1820, has the word Keith on the spot where Keith built his first hut.

When the bargaining for land was concluded, Keith began to prepare logs for building a hut. At first, he built one room with a dirt floor and stick and dirt chimney. The cracks were chinked with mud to keep out the cold. Long boards were rived from choice trees of the virgin forest for the roof, door, and window shutters. Later, a puncheon floor was added and an ample shed room.

But now, he must clear some land on which to grow food for the family and ponies. He planted grains the first fall. The soil was so new and fertile that the grain had a luxuriant growth by winter. Deer slipped in at night and ate the grain down pulling most of it up. This was a sad blow for this was their dependence for bread to tide them through their first year in the Cherokee land. Keith learned that if he grew grain, he must enclose his grainfields with a high fence. Legend has it that this was the origin of the rail fence in this part of South Carolina.

Two brothers, one a minister, came soon after Cornelius but they became discouraged and went back to Virginia.

When his family increased and he felt the need of better living arrangements, he built a large log house which was considered a mansion in this new country. There were two large rooms with open hall between. Steps went from this hall to two upstairs bedrooms. There were also two shed rooms at the back. The chimneys were of field rock with mud mortar.

In this house were reared twelve children, each a leader in his time -- three of whom served in the Revolutionary War although the Cherokees were in sympathy with the British.

Cornelius Keith died in 1808 and was buried in Oolenoy Church Cemetery. His monument was patterned after that of an Indian chief -- a mound of field rock with a small soap stone head rock. The inscription was simply, Cornelius Keith, Born 1715, Died 1808.

In 1956, his descendants erected a monument which contained a bronze plaque with the Keith Coat of Arms and the following inscription:

CORNELIUS KEITH

Born in Loch Lomond Scotland of Royal Lineage

1715 Died 1808

Original pioneer of Oolenoy Settlement started about 1743 - married Juda Thompson - Reared twelve children; one son was Colonel Cornelius Keith, Revolutionary War hero whose wife was Mary LaFoone.

As the veil was lifted from the monument, a host of descendants sang:

"Faith of our Fathers! living still
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword;

O how our hearts beat high with joy
When e'er we hear that glorious word!
Faith of our Fathers! Holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death!

Head of the Keiths assembled here
Father of all the Keiths hold dear.
O how our hearts beat high with joy
Keith, pioneer of old Oolenoy.
Cornelius Keith thy strength, thy faith
We will revere thy name till death.

The dedication prayer was given by Dr. John L. Plyer, a descendant of William LaFoone Keith's daughter, Eliza Ann Keith Earle.

Oolenoy Baptist Church

In giving the history of the church, I first want to mention some of the families living in the Oolenoy River Valley at the time Oolenoy Church was organized.

Cornelius Keith was the first of the Keiths to come and with his wife, Juda Thompson, and baby was the first white man to settle in this Cherokee Indian land. He came in 1743.

The Sutherlands were of Scotch nobility. They came down from Virginia and settled in the cove then moved down to Pumpkintown and continued to own it until 1946.

The Chastains were French Huguenots who moved down from Virginia. Rev. John Chastain organized Oolenoy Church in 1795.

Alexander Edens was the first of that family to come. The first delegate from Oolenoy Church to the Bethel Association in 1797 was William Edens.

The family of William LaFoone moved down from Virginia and received a grant of land in the Peters Creek area. His daughter Mary LaFoone married Cornelius Keith II.

John Roper was here in 1790. Among his descendants were Aaron, Ira and Tyre who was an early pastor of Oolenoy Church.

Jesse Adams for whom Adams Creek was named,

Capt. William Lynch, a Revolutionary War soldier who organized a law to deal with criminals in absence of a court. This took the name of the Lynch law. It is not the same as our lynching.

Abraham Hester a Revolutionary War soldier from whom Hester bottom derived its name.

Daniel Weaver for whom Weavers Creek was named, first owned land along its banks.

Joel Jones forbears of Dr. Samuel Honey Jones and the Jones family.

The Reids - Joseph B. Reid was teacher of the first school.

Other names of early settlers best of whom we have no stated record are Capt. Benjamin Clark, Burgesses, Trotters, Masters, Andersons, Rigdons, Hendricks, Massengills and Bates.

We must know that these devout people who came to America from European countries seeking religious freedom held prayer services in homes until 1795 when they decided to organize a church.

Rev. John Chastain organized the church and became its first pastor. He was an eloquent speaker with a clear ringing voice that carried so well he could be heard for a distance of a mile or more. He became known as "Ten Shilling Bell" Chastain. The ten shilling bell was the

clearest and could be heard the greatest distance of any bell of that time. Rev. Chastain was very strict in his application of religion to the conduct of church members.

The church practiced foot washing as a symbol of humility. The two pewter basins used for this ceremony are still in possession of Keith descendants.

Baptismal services were first held in the Oolenoy River at the first Oolenoy River bridge. The road to this bridge led straight up the hill from the site of our parsonage. The timbers of this bridge were all hewn of chestnut and held together with large wooden pins (pegs). My mother told us about going to a baptismal service in an ox wagon and snow on the ground. When a saw mill was brought to the community a baptismal pool of plank was built which was used until 1946 when the present church was constructed which has a baptistry.

The first Communion table and the first pulpit stand can be seen in a Sunday School room of the church.

Four Keith brothers whose lands corners joined where the parsonage now stands gave the land for church and cemetery.

The first church building was made of hewn logs with puncheon (hewn) floor, seats and door. The roof was of wide boards split from white oak. There was no heat. There is no record of how many years this building was used but an up and down saw was brought to the community about 1840 and a church building of plank was soon constructed.

Mr. Jesse Simmons was church clerk from 1856-1867. During that time his house burned and the church records were lost by the fire.

The first church of sawed lumber was 40 feet long with large windows with wooden shutters. Two 20 foot hewn girders were morticed and pinned to 10 inch square hewn posts which formed the frame of the door. The corner posts were also hewn 10 inch posts. The floor and seats were also of sawed plank. There was no heat.

In 1870 Matthew Hendricks and James B. Hester heard of a mill with circular saw for sale at Augusta. They went for it. With this better saw the church decided to remodel the building. Matthew Hendricks was appointed foreman and the members gave free labor.

The church was enlarged to 50 feet in length. New weather-boarding and flooring were used and large glass windows were added.

In 1881 the house was ceiled and louve shutters added to the windows. In 1902 a large room was added to the front of building with belfry and bell. This building gave way to our present brick structure in 1952.

In the early church seats were reserved in back of building for negroes until their churches were built. They were received into the church as members and baptized.

The church was organized in 1795 and in 1797 Oolenoy Church entered Bethel Association under Rev. John Chastain. William Edens was messenger and reported a membership of 60.

In 1837 the church ordained Tyre L. Roper for the ministry. This was its first ordination service. They then elected him pastor and he served 38 years without pay. When he retired the members gave him a contribution of money and produce. A two horse wagon would not hold the corn, wheat, bacon and hams contributed.

Early Pastors to 1903

John Chastain	1795-1826	D. C. Freeman	1885
Gary Barker	1826-1837	W. G. Mauldin	1894
<u>Tyre Roper</u>	<u>1837-1875</u>	J. V. Vermillion	1896
G. W. Mace	1876-1880	T. E. Holtzelaw	1897
J. M. Stewart	1881	A. W. Beck	1899
M. L. Jones	1882	W. C. Seaborn	1903

Early Clerks to 1903

<u>Aaron Roper</u>	<u>1845-1855</u>
T. Griffin	1856
A. J. Simmons	1856-1867
Matthew Hendricks	1868-1895
A. L. Edens	1896-1903

OOLENOY CHURCH CEMETERY

The beginning of this cemetery was a Cherokee Indian burying ground. The tomb of the first white man to settle in this Cherokee land, Cornelius Keith, bears a bronze plaque with the Keith "Coat of Arms" and the following inscription:

"Cornelius Keith
Born in Loch Lomand, Scotland
of Royal Lineage
1715-----1808

Original pioneer of Oolenoy settlement started about 1743 married Juda Thompson. Reared twelve children one son was Colonel Cornelius Keith, Revolutionary War hero, whose wife was Mary LaFoone."

There are buried here soldiers of 5 wars: Revolution, Mexican, Civil War, World War I and World War II.

William LaFoone Keith with his family is buried just back of the church. He served in the Mexican War along with Jefferson Davis who later became President of the Confederacy. Keith was elected from Pumpkintown area as first Clerk of Court of Pickens District. He served 28 years and died in office.

George Keith, who was employed during the Civil War to secure and report men in hiding to keep out of war, was martyred. His grave is directly back of the church and the inscription on the tomb gives this advice:

"Remember friends as you pass by
As you are now so once was I
As I am now so you must be
Prepare for death and follow me."

Slaves of the settlers are buried here also.

The Oolenoy Development Club erected a monument of native stone with a marble inset bearing the inscription:

"In grateful memory of faithful slaves who rest here."

Many of the old markers are soapstone mined near SoapStone Negro Church.

Pumpkintown

A bit of historical lore is the colorful story of the naming of Pumpkintown. The stranger flashes a smile when he hears the name "Pumpkintown," for the first time and he asks, "How did it get its name?"

The bottom lands along the Oolenoy River were originally covered in cane, but when the early settlers cleared them, they found them to be fertile and very productive. Corn was the principal crop planted and a hill of pumpkins was planted after every three or four hills of corn. In the fall, the field was yellow with pumpkins. They hauled them out by the wagonloads and fed them to the cattle. People used them for food, also, and dried them for winter food. This land was granted to the Sutherlands in late 1700. Mr. William Sutherland built a large log house and he entertained travelers who needed lodging for the night and tourists from the low country who came to enjoy the climate and scenery.

In that day, cattle and produce for sale were taken to Hamburg, a trading station across the river from Augusta, Georgia. A trader from the North Carolina Hills was driving cattle to Hamburg. He stopped for the night with Mr. Sutherland and put his cattle in Mr. Sutherland's cattle pen. Early the next morning, he was on his way. By night, he had reached a point below Greenville and stopped at a wayside inn. The innkeeper asked where he spent the night before. The trader replied, "I don't know if it has a name, but if I'm allowed to name it, I'll call it Pumpkintown. I have never seen so many pumpkins nor such big ones. The ground is yellow with them." The next day he travelled on to Hamburg and sold his cattle. On his return trip home, he stopped for the night again with Mr. Sutherland. He told Mr. Sutherland he had named his place.

"What's the name?" asked Mr. Sutherland.

"Pumpkintown," answered the trader.

Mr. Sutherland was pleased and accepted the name.

We have no way of knowing the exact date of this incident, but we do know the first map of Pendleton District published for Mill's Atlas in 1820, has Pumpkintown, Pendleton, and Pickensville on it, and Pumpkintown is located on the wrong side of Oolenoy River (named Oolenoy Creek on the map).

On this map, the word "Keith" is located correctly east of Pumpkintown and "Lynch" on the west side. These pioneer settlers built their first log huts at these points.

The Sutherlands kept a general merchandise store through the years and the Pumpkintown post office, established in _____, was located in the

store. The Knob post office was located in Lynch's store and Table Mountain post office in Hester-Hendricks store - later the James Hendricks place and now J. T. Edens place.

In early years, there was a blacksmith shop at Pumpkintown operated by Alexander Edens.

A cannon for practice at mustering ground was kept here prior to the Civil War with Col. John O. Hendricks in charge.

Through the years, the Pumpkintown land was handed down from one family of Sutherlands to another and they kept store through the years. The last family of Sutherlands to own Pumpkintown was Mr. Amos C. Sutherland and wife, Mrs. Nettie Chastain Sutherland. This family, like their ancestors, were public spirited in community upbuilding and became prominent leaders in State and educational affairs.

Pumpkintown now has two stores and a garage. It continues to be the center of our famed Oolenoy Community.

The Anderson Independent under date of May 21, 1963 published one of the best early sketches of Pumpkintown and Table Rock that can be found today. This sketch was published from a journal entitled, The Neglected Thread written for the Calhoun Community 1836-1840 by May E. Morague. Excerpts taken from her diary dated August 6, 1840 reads as follows:

"Before sunrise we were several miles from Pickensville which was located some 15 miles from Pumpkintown. Though we had only 15 miles to travel in order to reach Pumpkintown, we found it exceedingly tiresome from the dullness of the road and eagerness of expectation at length - Oh, mighty to behold the Table Rock Mountain stood up with its huge broad top apparently right in our path. In five miles more we were at Pumpkintown. We crossed a stream which we crossed on a rude bridge then we ascended to a project - the oldest, rudest, dreariest stopping place that ever greeted the eyes of a wayward traveler." This was known as the Keith-Sutherland Hotel after it reopened in 1848.

"Nestled in the Oolenoy Valley near Table Rock Mountain was Pumpkintown a flourishing trading center in the early 1800. Merchants from as far as Charleston, Hamburg and Augusta sponsored wagon trains to this mountain stock yard.

The merchandise from the cities was bartered for livestock and farm products here at Pumpkintown. The traders on their return trip stopped near Fair Deal Post Office located near Belton. Here the stock was watered and made ready for the long trek ahead to the cities."

The diary goes on in the quaint lyric form describing the climb of the traders to the top of Table Rock Mountain in 1843.

On June 6, 1843 Richards wrote,

"Our perigrinations dear Brother have brought us to this delectable town - the anteroom so to speak of the noted Table Rock Mountain. We headed toward Keith and Sutherland Hotel which we were told was the only house where we could find shelter for the night. Understanding the term house, little did we dream the one hotel building was the only building the town could boast."

"We grew wise however, when upon passing a dingy delapidated

tenement house on a rising knoll to our right - we inquired of some travelers how far we were from Pumpkintown?" and we received the response, "You are here, this is the place, Gentlemen."