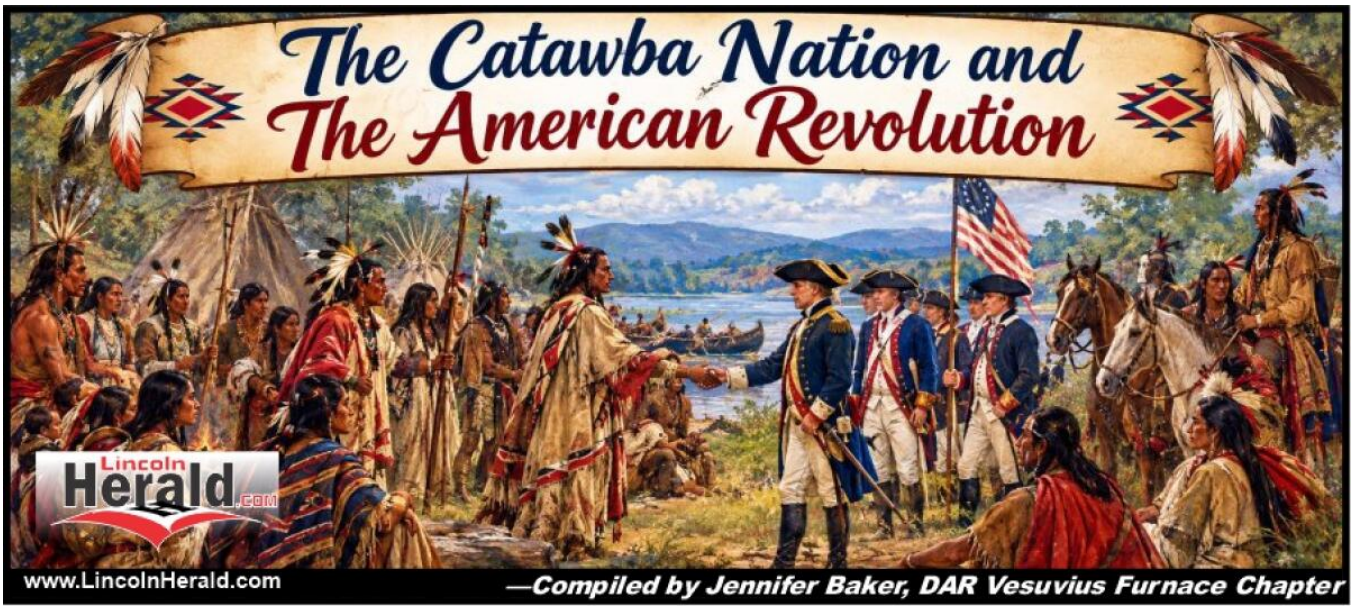


The Catawba Nation and The American Revolution

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The Catawba people lived in the Carolina Piedmont that would later become Tryon County in North Carolina. Though often bundled in with the Cherokee, they are not related. They spoke a completely different language called Siouan. The Catawba language was the most aberrant of all known Siouan languages, though closer to Woccon than any other of which vocabulary has been recorded. The Catawba tribe usually got along well with their white neighbors. They were important trading partners. However, they suffered from the same diseases which ravaged other tribes. They survived as a tribe only by taking in other smaller tribes which had also lost many of their people.

There were also tribal disputes which injured and killed members of the Catawba. Tribal disputes sometimes lasted for generations. Peace between the Catawba and Iroquois was established at Albany in 1759 through mediation, but other tribes kept attacking, and in 1763 Shawnee killed Catawba King Haigler. The Catawba had moved from North Carolina to a reserved area in South Carolina in

1758, after which their influence declined. They supported the colonists during the Revolution, briefly relocated to Virginia when British troops advanced, and returned following the battle of Guilford Court House.

The Catawba tribe faced increasing pressure from settlers to give up their land as their population declined. while the American Revolution, a fifteen-square-mile reservation was created for them near present-day Rock Hill, South Carolina, with most members living there while some remained in North Carolina. The reservation provided both protection and income through land rental to white farmers. The Catawba supported colonial revolutionaries, believing they would better safeguard their rights, and assisted them during the war by returning escapees, tracking loyalists, and acting as scouts.

On July 25, 1775, at the home of Joseph Kershaw (an immigrant from England) in Camden, South Carolina, a delegation from the Catawba Indians responded to the letter from South Carolina Councilman William Henty Drayton asking for their help against “the Redcoats” should there be war. The Catawba pledged their support for the American’s cause. Kershaw correctly predicted that 40 or 50 Catawba warriors would enlist. That was a significant percentage of their men at that time since the Catawba people had been decimated by smallpox and wars. The exact number of Catawba members who fought on behalf of the patriots is unknown. But we do know who most of them were. This list comes from a historical compilation of Catawba soldiers who pledged support in 1775 and served in Patriot militia units in South Carolina and North Carolina.