

Bynum's bridges over troubled waters

CHATHAM'S HISTORICAL HERITAGE

by Fred J. Vatter



A tranquil scene unfolded before my eyes as I looked downstream from my perch on Bynum's bridge. The early morning sun illuminated the ripples and swirls formed by the rain swollen Haw River as it passed over the countless rocks in its bed. One rock held a Great Blue Heron, a silent sentinel watching over his fishing ground.

It was easy to understand why Luke Bynum purchased land and settled here at the confluence of the Haw and Pokeberry Creek in 1779.

The area was not only beautiful but the sometimes troubled waters of the river provided irrigation, fish and a potential to be harnessed for a mill

Luke eventually had eight children and the expanding family not only farmed much of the surrounding area but also operated a grist mill on the Haw River. The family also constructed a long covered bridge near the mill to improve access to it for the farmers who delivered corn and wheat by the wagonload.

The bridge had sturdy masonry piers and served the growing Bynum community for many years. In April 1883 severe flooding on the Haw River destroyed or badly damaged other bridges in Chatham, but



Weeds surround an abandoned store in Bynum.

PHOTO BY FRED VATTER

Bynum's bridge held firm. For some time afterward it was the only way to cross the river. Four years later, in 1887, Luke's grandson Carney Bynum

sold the covered bridge to Chatham County for five dollars.

The old bridge continued in service until 1922 when it was replaced by a reinforced concrete deck girder bridge. The new bridge was made necessary by the advent of the automobile age. By today's standards it would be considered only one and a half lanes wide, but then vehicles were lighter and narrower.

Back in 1872 Luther and Carney Bynum had founded a cotton mill in

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