

# FORT MILL TIMES

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**William Pettus declared ineligible to serve since he was not a freeholder**

**By Louise Pettus Fort Mill Times**

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In November 1808 William Pettus was elected to serve as a York County representative in the S.C. House of Representatives. When he reported to the swearing-in ceremonies on Nov. 30, he was declared ineligible to serve since he was not a freeholder.

David Hutchison, like Pettus, a resident of the Catawba Indian Land, wrote that the Indian Land settlers: "...were called upon for tax, which they paid on all their taxable property. They were called upon to do military duty; to serve as Jurors, and to perform all the duties of citizens; but denied the privilege of representation; we could not sit on a jury for the trial of a slave. The District elected a Lease-holder to go to the Legislature. He was sent home, and the District deprived of a representative that session."

John Springs III, a neighbor of Pettus, was serving as foreman of the York District Grand Jury in 1824. Springs authored a petition to the state Legislature to permit the people of Indian Land to have a representative on the same basis as the rest of York District.

Springs described the 15-mile-square Catawba Indian Land as "fertile, Populous, Wealthy and respectable." And he added that perhaps the area was "not inferior in point of intelligence and respectability," to any part of the state "exclusive of towns and cities none of which there are on the Indian Land."

Springs' petition noted that the refusal of the legislature to seat Pettus "gave rise to the passage of an Act authorizing the Catawba Indians to grant and make leases for life or lives or term of years not exceeding Ninety Nine and, that they should be a qualification equal to a freehold, in all cases where a freehold is not required by the constitution."

Pettus bought a life lease to serve in the legislature. He was elected in 1810 and served until his death in 1818.

In 1824 Springs wrote that in the previous 39 years only one other representative from York District's Catawba Indian Land had been elected to the state legislature. Springs did not identify the second representative but merely stated that he had bought 500 acres of poor land outside the Indian Land boundaries to qualify to serve – a condition that not many men were able to afford. And, as Springs pointed out, few men would be willing to buy a lease for life when they themselves were likely to “expire in ten or twenty years and possibly in one or two.”

Four years after the petition was presented to the S.C. General Assembly, John Springs was elected as a representative from York District. Why, in 1828, did Springs contradict what he had written in 1824 about men of virtue? It may have been the rumor that some wealthy Lowcountry men were attempting to buy leases that had been negotiated before the 99-year rule in 1808. The purpose was to hold the leases until they expired and then take possession of the land.

*Louise Pettus is a renowned local historian. “Fort Mill History” is sponsored each month by the Fort Mill Downtown Association. Check them out on the Web at [www.fortmilledowntown.com](http://www.fortmilledowntown.com).*