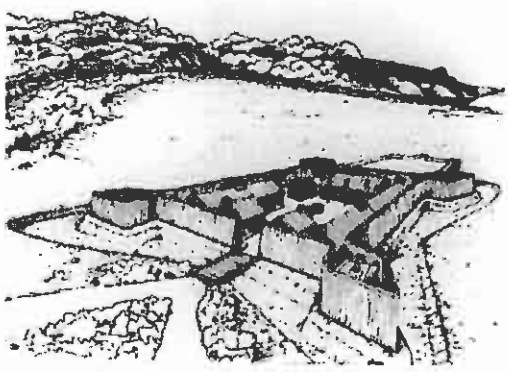
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Bringing history back to life: Fort Prince George could be resurrected

by Sandy Foster
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PICKENS — A local group led by the Pickens County Historical Society hopes to bring back to life one of the great landmarks of this area's history.

A renewed effort to rebuild historic Fort Prince George is now underway, and the hope is that once completed, the fort will attract a lot of tourists to the area, according to Wayne Kelley, who is helping head up the project.

Royal Governor James Glen constructed the fort in the Keowee Valley in 1753 in what is now Pickens County. He built the fort at the request of members of the Cherokee Nation, who were trading partners with the South Carolina colonists, according to Kelley.

The fort, named for the Prince of Wales, played an important role in the state's trading history, and it was a key military site during the French and Indian War.

Preston Bruce, a member of the historical society's special projects group, called the reconstruction effort a "living history project that will be educational from inception throughout its duration."

"Fort Prince George has national, even international, significance," he said. "It will be a tremendous asset that will enhance our county's future and increase much needed Upcountry tourism."

During the fort's 15-year existence, it served as a vital link between Charleston, Ninety Six and the Upper Cherokee lands, and during the war, it was a staging point for assaults.

It was abandoned in 1768, 100 years before the present-day town of Pickens was established.

According to Kelley, the Pickens County Historical Society is partnering with individuals and other interested groups in the region to make the reconstruction project a reality, and the group expects to rebuild the fort in its entirety based on period drawings and the documented archeological footprint.

"The plan, true to the original, includes a period Cherokee village outside the walls," he said.

The group is scouting for potential locations for the fort and hope to find one as close to the original site as possible, which was flooded when the Keowee River was dammed to create the lake, Kelley added.

Prior to the flooding in 1971, the fort site was excavated, and relics including three presumed Cherokee skeletons, musket and cannon balls, rum bottles, pieces of cooking utensils and wine glass fragments were found.

Kelley said the group expects the funding for the reconstruction project to come largely from two private sources outside the state with whom they are talking, but he said they do not have a cost yet.

The total cost is unknown because the land acquisition is dependent upon a number of factors that can come into play when we know which site is most suitable and available, he said.

He noted that the same colonists who built Fort Prince George also built its sister – Fort Loudoun – three years later in what is now known as Tennessee, and that fort also met a similar fate when the Tennessee Valley Authority flooded the Little Tennessee River basin.

But in 1980, Fort Loudoun was reconstructed on the banks of the TVA's Tellico Reservoir for about $140,000, according to Kelley.

That fort is maintained by a private foundation and the State of Tennessee, he said. And the Ninety Six Historic Site, location of a second sister fort, is a property of the National Park Service.

"Both are successful attractions for tourism," Kelley said. "The missing historic link is Fort Prince George."

Bruce instigated the latest effort to provide that missing link, but Kelley said Dot Jackson, retired journalist, novelist and founder of the Birchwood Center; and local nature writer Dennis Chastain both were involved in previous efforts to rebuild the fort.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our heritage and show it to the world," Jackson said.

Historical society member Marge Schaefer said everyone's thrilled with the project. "Who, after all, wouldn't want to build a fort?" she asked.

And in this case, the plan is to reconstruct a fort where the "Big Four" Revolutionary War generals of South Carolina – Andrew Pickens, Thomas Sumter, Francis Marion and William Moultrie all spent time as young soldiers.

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