

Catawba County Social Services Timeline

1842	Catawba County is created, breaking away from Lincoln County. The legal agreement separating the two says Catawba County will be responsible for all paupers living in the new county.
1843	The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, the county government of the time, appoints the first "Keepers of the Poor." These officials were responsible for taking care of paupers in their area of the county.
1845	The Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions appoints a committee to sell the Poor House land and select a more suitable location for the County Poor House (County Home).
1847	The Poor House committee reports that a location has been purchased for the County Home and a supervisor's house has been built on the property.
1861	North Carolina secedes from the Union and joins the Confederacy, entering the Civil War. During the war years, there is much suffering on the home front as well as on the battlefield, as families struggle to farm without the help of the men who are in the Confederate Army.
1861	The County Court of Pleas and Quarters establishes a committee to spend up to \$10,000 for the aid of Confederate soldiers' families. Although the county is not the site of major battles, times are difficult as the social order changes and basic supplies become unavailable or scarce.
1910-1920	The county undergoes a period of rapid industrialization. Whole families leave their farms and go to work in cotton mills, established to take advantage of cheaper labor in the South. At first, the mills are seen as a godsend to fatherless families, since the mills will employ widows and orphans.
1900-1920	The Progressive Era is a period of hope for social reform. Many women become involved in the effort to improve conditions for factory workers, eliminate child labor, outlaw alcohol, and improve public education.
1919	Catawba County appoints Charles E. Hefner, a local politician and grocery store owner, as its first Welfare Worker in response to a new state law. The new position will report jointly to the County Commission, County Board of Education and the State Welfare Board.
1923	North Carolina enacts a Mother's Aid law, a forerunner of the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. Mother's Aid, or direct payments to poor mothers, is seen as a more humane way to assist poor widows with young children. It is designed to replace earlier methods, such as placing the family in the County Home, or placing the children in orphanages or foster homes. Funding for this program is limited and does not help all needy mothers.
1925	Stella Price is named the second Welfare Worker in the county. She comes from humble beginnings and brings to the office a passion for helping the poor.
1929	Catawba County establishes a hospital for treating children with tuberculosis at the urging of Stella Price. A public health screening she organizes finds an alarming rate of TB among local school children. Before the hospital opens, Price resigns her position because she has developed TB. After treatment in a sanatorium, she returns to Catawba County, where she continues to raise funds for the fight against TB.
May 1929	Catawba County appoints Margaret Breitz as Welfare Superintendent. She is a graduate of Salem College in Winston-Salem and has done welfare work in other locations. She will soon be put to the test, as the caseload of needy residents swells.

October 1929	The stock market crashes. Although first believed to be a temporary economic downturn, the economic slide deepens, resulting in what is now known as The Great Depression.
July 1, 1931	Margaret Breitz resigns as Welfare Superintendent when her pleas for more money to run the department are ignored by the County Commission and her salary is cut. Her blistering letter of resignation is published in the <i>Catawba News-Enterprise</i> . In part, it reads: "The only step that will permanently insure high standards of work in the welfare department will be its permanent removal from political entanglement of any nature."
1931	The county hires Victoria Bell as Welfare Supervisor. Bell has previously been employed as a social worker at Brookford Mills and held several other social work positions.
1931-1934	Victoria Bell appeals to the public for help in meeting the needs of the area. Along with Anna Rowe, home demonstration agent, she encourages county women to raise vegetable gardens and can the surplus. Extra vegetables and canned goods are donated to the needy or sold at farmers markets. Bell resigns in 1934 to accept a supervisory position with one of the New Deal programs.
1933-1977	State legislation creates the Eugenics Board of North Carolina in 1933, allowing the involuntary sterilization of state residents who are considered mentally defective. Over time, this law is used as a tool to combat poverty and welfare costs. The State Eugenics Board remains in operation until 1977. In 2003 the state repeals its involuntary sterilization laws. During the period of the Eugenics Board, Catawba County social workers, like others in the state, are empowered to recommend sterilization of individuals they believe to be unfit for parenthood.
1934	Frances Lentz, the daughter of a local politician and building supply owner, is named the next Welfare Director. She holds the job until 1942, when she resigns unexpectedly. She holds a variety of other jobs in the area, including serving as the truant officer for the City of Hickory Public Schools.
1935	President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act, ushering in the current era of federally funded relief efforts. Although at first reluctant to participate, North Carolina's legislature accepts the federal money, and accompanying regulations, in 1937. Among the programs authorized by this act are Aid to Dependent Children, Social Security (old age insurance), and Unemployment Insurance. The act will be amended many times over the years as the role of the federal government expands.
1942	Joseline Graves Harding is named superintendent of the County's Welfare Office. She serves until her death in 1958 from cancer.
1945	Sipe's Orchard Home, a Catawba County orphanage for boys, accepts its first resident. Like most other orphanages or "children's homes," the institution primarily cares for children who have been removed from their families. In most cases, they have at least one living parent. In most cases, children sent to orphanages remain there until they reach adulthood.
Oct. 5, 1948	Joseline Harding and Annie May Pemberton, a supervisor from the State Welfare Department, inspect the County Home and find it unfit. They recommend closure of the institution.
July 5, 1949	The County Home is closed and the property sold at auction to Sipe's Orchard Home. Most of the County Home residents are elderly and in poor health. They are transferred to a nursing home in Lincoln County. However, two sisters ask to remain. They are allowed to stay until their deaths in 1964 and 1989.
1958	Villard "Chuck" Blevins is hired as director of welfare. He serves until 1978. His priority is child welfare.
January	President Lyndon B. Johnson declares War on Poverty. Congress soon passes landmark

1964	legislation beginning Food Stamps, Medicaid and Medicare. This legislation lifts millions from extreme poverty but ultimately fails to eliminate poverty.
1965	Catawba County moves into a new building on Highway 70. The building, which is crowded even before it opens, is needed due to the expansion of federal anti-poverty programs.
1965	Catawba County opens its first Receiving Home to provide temporary care to children who have been removed from their homes. Although intended as a temporary residence, many children spend 200 days or more there due to the lack of foster homes in the area.
1964	Congress votes to make Food Stamps a permanent program. It had been operated earlier as a pilot program. However, the program requires legislation by states and counties, which will have to contribute a portion of the cost.
1968	Catawba County commissioners vote to begin offering Food Stamps in the county. The program officially begins in 1969.
1972	Catawba County Commissioners vote to construct a community Mental Health facility, using federal funds.
1972	The state of North Carolina passes a law to make it mandatory for some persons, such as doctors and school teachers, to report suspected child abuse. It makes reporting optional for others, but provides protection from legal liability for those making reports in good faith.
1974	The Department of Public Health and Department of Social Services receive a grant from the federal government to buy and operate vans for transportation of needy citizens to essential services, such as doctor's visits and trips to buy groceries. This service operates until 1999, when it merges with the Piedmont Wagon (now Greenway) public bus system.
1975	Jean Settlemyre, administrator of Frye Regional Medical Center, and Dr. Millie Hancock, a local pediatrician, meet with Welfare Director Villard Blevins and several local social workers to enhance efforts to combat child abuse in Catawba County. The Children's Protection Council is formed out of those efforts.
1975	North Carolina passes a law giving Departments of Social Services authority to investigate cases of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of disabled adults.
1978	Bobby Boyd is named Catawba County Director of Social Services. He emphasizes staff development, best practices, and efficiency. He also emphasizes that staff should respect persons coming to the department for help.
1979	The Child Support Unit of Social Services is reorganized, with greater emphasis on obtaining child support from absent parents.
1982	Catawba County Social Services gets its first computer terminals, which link the department to the NC Department of Health and Human Resources.
1984	Social Services moves from its headquarters on Highway 70 to a new building adjacent to the Health Department. The new building includes 22,000 square feet and costs \$1.3 million to build. The county plans to create a Human Resources Complex, including Mental Health, Social Services and Public Health in adjacent buildings for the convenience of clients.
1985	Social Services receives its first "micro computers" that begin the transition from paper to computerized records.
1996	Catawba County Social Services becomes a "reinventing government" agency. By agreeing to meet specific goals, it obtains greater freedom in budgeting.
1996	President Bill Clinton signs landmark legislation repealing Aid to Families with Dependent Children and replacing it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. This legislation, known as Welfare Reform, ends decades of support to families in poverty with minor children. It is replaced by programs to encourage adults in these families to find and keep

	employment.
1996	Catawba County Social Services, in consultation with area businesses, develops a Welfare to Work Plan. It is judged the best in the state by the state Department of Health and Human Resources. However, the state Legislature decides to award the first 15 pilot projects through a lottery. Catawba County's plan is not selected. However, it is included in later funding for Welfare Reform in the state.
2001	Catawba County Social Services opens its newest building, Building C, at its headquarters in Hickory.
2002	North Carolina implements mental health reform, separating the administrative function from the treatment function of community mental health centers. As a result, Catawba County Mental Health is split into three components: an administrative unit or Local Management Entity; Catawba Valley Behavioral Healthcare, which provides treatment to adults; and Family N.E.T. (Nurturing, Educating and Treating), which provides treatment to children and youth. Family N.E.T. becomes a unit of Catawba County Social Services.
2007	The economic downturn known as The Great Recession begins as a result of speculation in mortgage-backed securities and other poorly understood financial products. The loss of confidence quickly spreads throughout the economy, resulting in job losses, foreclosures and business failures. The Catawba Valley region, whose economy depends heavily on manufacturing, is especially hard hit.
2008	John Eller is named the new Director of Social Services. His focus is on maintaining quality service and influencing public policy through statewide advocacy to improve conditions for vulnerable populations.
2008	President Barack Obama signs into law the Affordable Care Act, the first nationwide program to make affordable health insurance available to all Americans. The roll out of this program encounters many glitches, especially with the website healthcare.gov. States are given the option of expanding Medicaid under this legislation. North Carolina decides not to expand Medicaid.
2012	North Carolina begins the implementation of NC FAST, a new statewide computer system designed to simplify the application process for Social Services benefits. Catawba County is a pilot county. The new software experiences significant problems during its roll out.
January 2014	President Barack Obama addresses the widening gap between the country's wealthiest individuals and the rest of the population. He calls for an increase in the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour.