



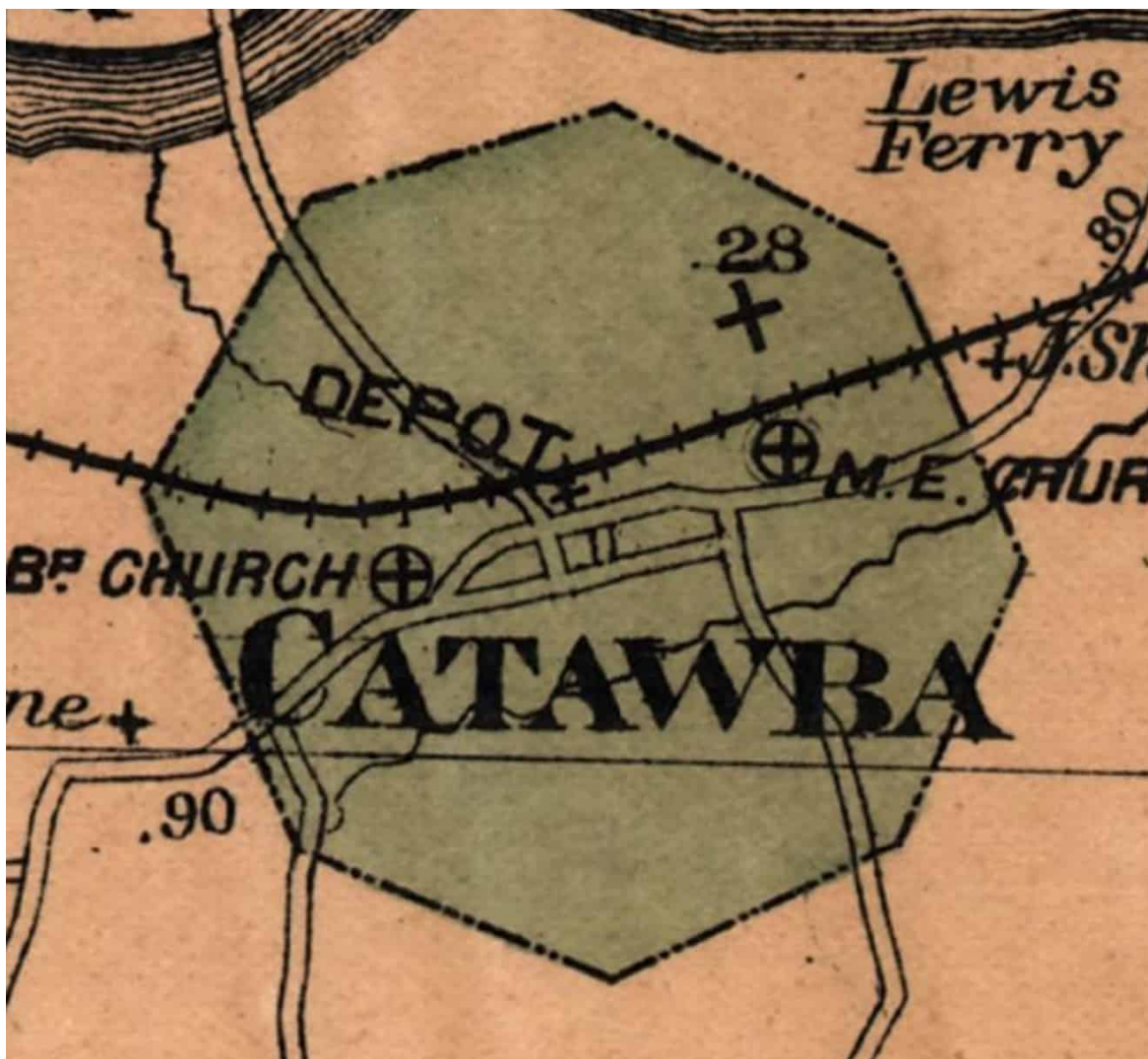
North Carolina Map Blog

A great place to discuss North Carolina's cartographic history

Octagonal towns – better than circles



Octagonal towns. A [previous post](#) discussed the abundance of circle towns in North Carolina (and throughout the South) and the various reasons behind this geometric town limit. The impracticality of a circular boundary, from a surveyor's perspective, was also mentioned. What's the solution to keeping the circular benefits in a way that would be practical to the surveyor? The octagonal town, of course!



1886 Map of Catawba County by R. A. Yoder. Imaged courtesy of the Library of Congress, available on line at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3903c.la000585/>

A recent inspection of the 1886 R. A. Yoder map of Catawba County revealed a perfectly shaped octagon for the town limits of Catawba, in the eastern part of the county. I have not been able to determine the origin for this town's octagonal boundary. An act of the General Assembly in 1872, incorporating the Town of Catawba, made no mention at all of the geographic boundary of the town.¹ Seven years after publication of Yoder's map, another act of the General Assembly incorporated the Town of Catawba (I don't know why they needed to do it again), giving only four boundary points, insufficient to define an octagon, and with no information on how those four points were to be joined.² Looking at Yoder's map, one could wonder if Catawba County's motto was "We lead the world in polygonal towns!". All six towns in the county were polygons, including four rectangles (three of which were square), a circle, and an octagon.

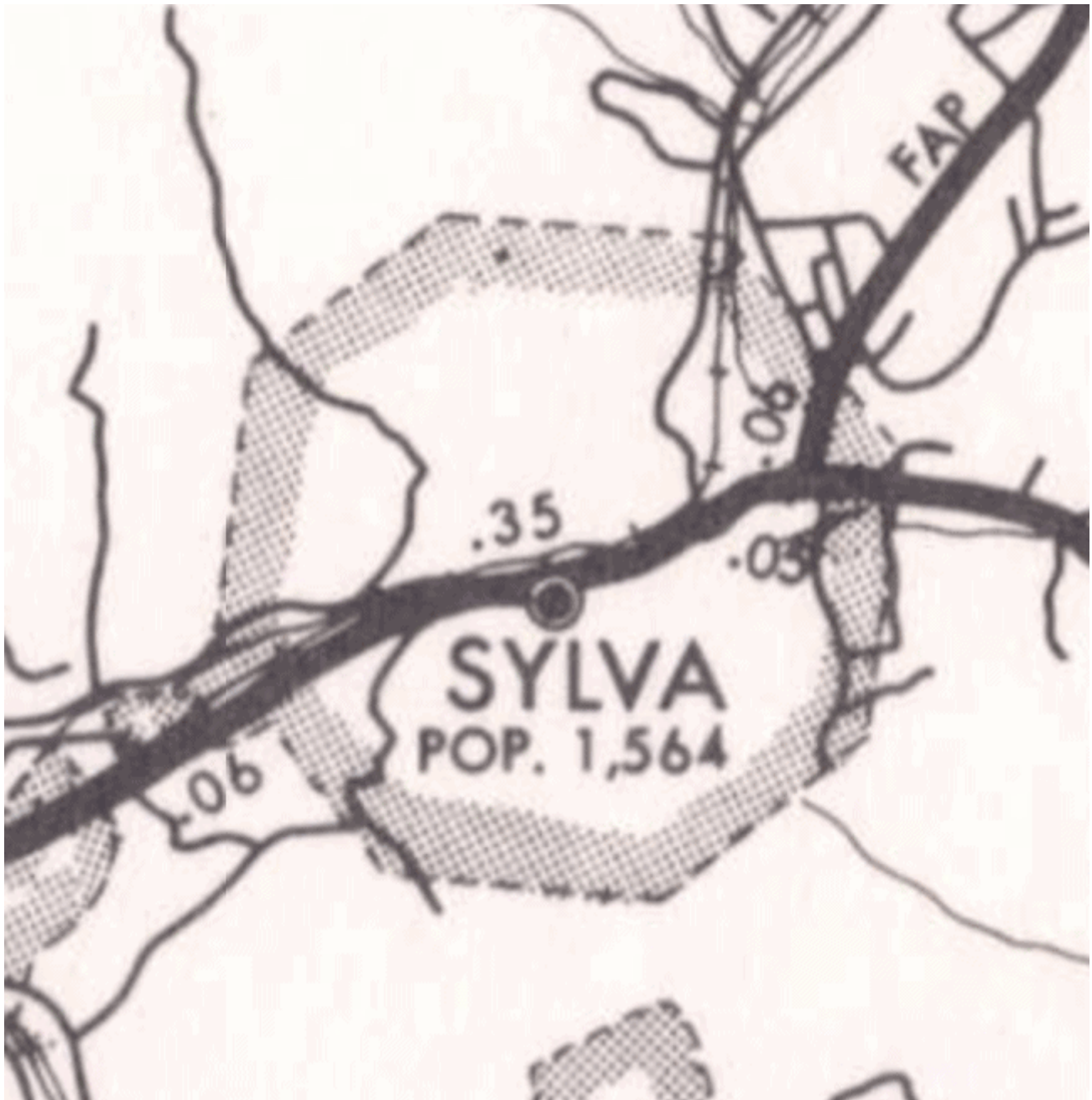
UPDATE: A supplemental act in 1872 described the Catawba town limits as “one half mile in each direction from the railroad depot...”³ Each direction? There are only eight directions? It sounds like the General Assembly tried to make Catawba a circle town, just like nearby Hickory. Perhaps the town commissioners or the surveyor realized how much easier it would be to survey and mark an octagon with straight line segments rather than a circle with a continuous arc.

Searching the vastness that is the World Wide Web, I found reference to two other octagonal towns. In 1899, the town boundary of Leesville, SC, was defined as “making an octagon shaped area formed upon the extremities of eight lines,” each line extending one mile from the train depot in N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, and NW directions.⁴

The town of Sylva, in Jackson County, NC, currently [retains only half](#) of its original eight sides. The octagonal town boundary was prescribed by the General Assembly in 1899:

*Sec 2 That the corporation boundary lines of the town of Sylva shall be as follows to wit Beginning at the southeast corner of the depot as now located shall run three fourths of a mile each north south east and west with the cardinal points of the compass and intermediate points of same a like distance of three fourths of a mile so as to form an exact octagon.*⁵

As late as 1962, Sylva maintained a nearly perfect octagonal shape. As shown on a 1962 county highway maintenance map, there is a tiny outgrowth of the town at the southwest angle:



Octagonal town boundary of Sylva, NC, as shown on the 1962 [Highway maintenance map of] Jackson County, North Carolina. Image courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives, accessible on line at <https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ncmaps/id/7157>

Please share any comments or corrections, or locations of other octagonal towns, via the “What’s on your mind?” comment box below.

The blogger is most appreciative of the information provided by Alex Floyd, Curator of the Evelyn Rhodes Genealogy Room in the Catawba County Public Library in Newton, NC.

REFERENCES

1. See Chapter CI (101), starting at the bottom of page 149:

[https://books.google.com/books?](https://books.google.com/books?id=7kpNAQAAMAAJ&newbks=0&dq=%22catawba%20station%22%20incorporated%201872&pg=PA149#v=onepage&q&f=false)

[id=7kpNAQAAMAAJ&newbks=0&dq=%22catawba%20station%22%20incorporated%201872&pg=PA149#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=7kpNAQAAMAAJ&newbks=0&dq=%22catawba%20station%22%20incorporated%201872&pg=PA149#v=onepage&q&f=false) ↵

2. See [https://books.google.com/books?](https://books.google.com/books?id=_6U4AAAIAAJ&lpg=PA411&ots=HGvsTI83-o&dq=town%20of%20catawba%20is%20hereby%20incorporated&pg=PA411#v=onepage&q=%22town%20of%20catawba%22&f=false)

[id=_6U4AAAIAAJ&lpg=PA411&ots=HGvsTI83-](https://books.google.com/books?id=_6U4AAAIAAJ&lpg=PA411&ots=HGvsTI83-o&dq=town%20of%20catawba%20is%20hereby%20incorporated&pg=PA411#v=onepage&q=%22town%20of%20catawba%22&f=false)

[o&dq=town%20of%20catawba%20is%20hereby%20incorporated&pg=PA411#v=onepage&q=%22town%20of%20catawba%22&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=_6U4AAAIAAJ&lpg=PA411&ots=HGvsTI83-o&dq=town%20of%20catawba%20is%20hereby%20incorporated&pg=PA411#v=onepage&q=%22town%20of%20catawba%22&f=false) ↵

3. See chapter CXXXIV on page 185: [https://books.google.com/books?](https://books.google.com/books?id=7kpNAQAAMAAJ&newbks=0&dq=%22catawba%20station%22%20incorporated%201872&pg=PA186#v=onepage&q&f=false)

[id=7kpNAQAAMAAJ&newbks=0&dq=%22catawba%20station%22%20incorporated%201872&pg=PA186#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=7kpNAQAAMAAJ&newbks=0&dq=%22catawba%20station%22%20incorporated%201872&pg=PA186#v=onepage&q&f=false) ↵

4. See [https://books.google.com/books?](https://books.google.com/books?id=Bn5DAQAAMAAJ&lpg=PA352&ots=oXNA-2HWYk&dq=octagon%20town%20limits&pg=PA352#v=onepage&q=octagon&f=false)

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[2HWYk&dq=octagon%20town%20limits&pg=PA352#v=onepage&q=octagon&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=Bn5DAQAAMAAJ&lpg=PA352&ots=oXNA-2HWYk&dq=octagon%20town%20limits&pg=PA352#v=onepage&q=octagon&f=false) ↵

5. See [https://books.google.com/books?](https://books.google.com/books?id=w0ZNAQAAMAAJ&newbks=0&printsec=frontcover&pg=PA124&dq=sylva+octagon&hl=en&source=newbks_fb#v=onepage&q=sylva%20octagon&f=false)

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