

# *Pendleton Farmers Society A Leader*

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One of America's most illustrious farmers' societies was organized in October 1815. Eminent historian David Duncan Wallace has noted, in assessing the contributions of the Pendleton Farmers Society, that it became "a constant leader for diversifying crops, checking soil erosion and discouraging the abandonment of South Carolina for the West."

Only 30 years before the society's organization, Pendleton District had been a hunting ground for Cherokee Indians. As the white man moved in, however, it changed from a wilderness to an area of rich farmland. Pendleton village became a bustling trade center for the entire district.

The increased agricultural activity encouraged a group of the town's leading citizens to organize a farmers' society with the stated purpose of "increasing the real comfort and happiness of every farmer in the district and making him respectable and independent."

Gathering on the historic October day were some of the leading dignitaries in South Carolina, including Benjamin DuPre, Col. Thomas Pinckney Jr., Andrew Pickens and Robert Anderson.

The society's charter members included many prominent individuals — ministers, teachers, scientists, statesmen, judges, lawyers, doctors and industrialists from several states. Col. Pinckney was elected president.

The society erected the first Farmers Hall (a building still standing) on a half-acre lot acquired in 1818. Soon after, the society organized the first Pendleton Fair, a forerunner of the State Fair. It became an annual event attracting people from throughout the state.

Farmers sold cattle, grain and other types of produce. Awards were given for the best acre yields of crops such as corn, wheat and millet, and the best bull, calf, ram, boar, ewe and sow of improved breed.

An important event for the society and for Pendleton District occurred in 1826, when the eminent John C. Calhoun, perhaps South Carolina's most distinguished statesman, moved from Washington to Fort Hill, a residence located a few miles from Pendleton village. The society had Calhoun and his wife one of the most elaborate dinners in its history in honor of the occasion.

Calhoun took an interest in the society and its affairs. As one writer has noted, "There was nothing Calhoun enjoyed more than the role of gentleman farmer. He gave serious thought to agriculture and introduced to the neighborhoods many improved farming methods."

The early history of the society can be described as one of cooperation and experimentation. In the late 1820s, for example, there was an attempt to introduce silk culture to Pendleton District. Some people proved successful at producing silk, but the fortunes people thought they would make from the enterprise didn't materialize.

Interested in education, the society established the Pendleton Manual Labor School near Pendleton. But it closed a few years later when the area was severely hit by a typhoid fever epidemic.

One of the lasting contributions of the Pendleton Farmers Society was to organize an impressive library, which included many books by the noted agricultural writers of the day. The library, now preserved in the Clemson University Library, includes several early American agricultural periodicals such as the *American Farmer*, *Southern Farm Magazine* and the *Farmer and Planter*, which was founded in Pendleton in 1850.

With the division of Pendleton District into Pickens and Anderson counties in 1827 and the building of a new courthouse in Anderson, the Pendleton Farmers Society moved out of its log house and into the old courthouse that had served Pendleton District. Later this building showed signs of deteriorating, and the society moved again.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, society member Thomas G. Clemson, the son-in-law of John C. Calhoun, proposed that a science college be established with the name "Confederate States Scientific University." But the confederacy's defeat killed that proposal.

After the war, Clemson made another proposal for a science college. This spurred the Pendleton Farmers Society to appoint a committee and query its membership about establishing "an institution for educating our young people in the sciences, to the end that our agriculture may be improved, our worn and impoverished land be recuperated, and the great natural resources of the South be developed."

Under Clemson's initiative, the society tried to solicit books, funds and apparatus. But the South was poor, devastated by the Civil War, and the effort to establish a college failed.

Clemson's dream of a scientific college didn't materialize until 1889, when Clemson Agricultural College, now Clemson University, was established.

More than 170 years after its founding, the Pendleton Farmers Society is still active and can lay claim to being the third oldest farmers society in America still in existence.