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# “UNDER THE WINGS OF COLUMBIA”: JOHN LEWIS GERVAIS AS ARCHITECT OF SOUTH CAROLINA’S 1786 CAPITAL RELOCATION LEGISLATION

MATTHEW A. LOCKHART\*

LONE VOICES FROM THE SOUTH CAROLINA BACKCOUNTRY began crying out for a “more central” seat of government in the 1760s. But it was not until the debtor crisis of the mid-1780s prompted planters throughout the state to unify politically in opposition to the merchants of Charleston and their allies in the General Assembly that the idea finally gained resonance. “Town” and “country” parties blurred traditional sectional alignments, and as Charleston lawyer Timothy Ford observed in 1786, the issue of capital relocation was absorbed into a larger struggle between “merchant & planter . . . between debtor & creditor” over “whose interest will be the greatest in the legislature.” It seems more than a little ironic, then, given the geographic and economic contours of the relocation debate, that the legislator who came forward to champion removal of South Carolina’s seat of state government from Charleston was himself a merchant of the port city.<sup>1</sup>

In March 1789 the General Assembly adjourned from Charleston for the final time and convened the following January at a crude, half-finished frame building in “a wilderness of pines” near the geographic center of the state. Though it represents a milestone in the political emergence of the backcountry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, South Carolina’s capital relocation and the movement that made it possible have received little critical attention from scholars. Existing treatments are brief and cursory, and within them, individuals of influence receive only passing mention. For example, from Salley and Wallace to Nadelhaft and Klein to Moore and Edgar, all document John Lewis Gervais as having introduced the legislation in the General Assembly in March 1786 that established a town on the Congaree River for the purpose of “removing the Seat of

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<sup>1</sup> Provincial Congress Journal, November 15, 1775, in William Edwin Hemphill and Wylma Anne Wates, eds., *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina, 1775-1776*, The State Records of South Carolina (Columbia: South

they formed the nucleus of the new institution. In essence, then, the transfer represented continuation of the original Charleston Museum.<sup>61</sup>

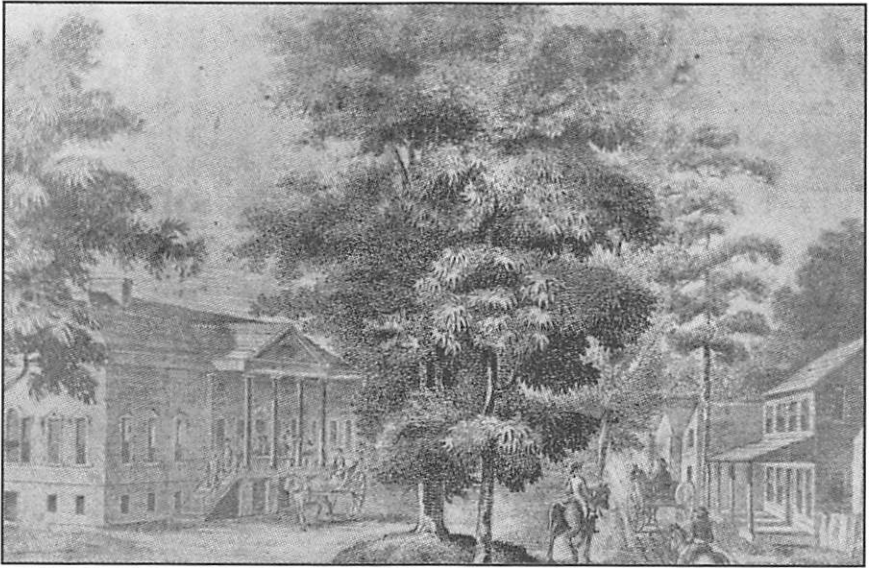
By mid-century, Charleston had risen to a place of prominence in natural history circles in the United States, and the work of its leading naturalists was well recognized. John Bachman, John Edwards Holbrook, Edmund Ravenel, Francis S. Holmes, Lewis Reeve Gibbes, and John McCrady stood as equals of other American naturalists and enjoyed recognition in Europe as well. Indeed, natural history in Charleston had soared to a lofty place by 1860, and while several factors account for this exemplary flight, it must not be overlooked that the Literary and Philosophical Society, despite its ups and downs, helped to lay the base for the scientific activity that flourished in Charleston from around 1815 to the outbreak of the Civil War.<sup>62</sup>

The Literary and Philosophical Society lived on as the Literary Club or Conversation Club until, as Porcher noted, "the war broke it up" in 1861.<sup>63</sup> Sometime after the end of the war, Manigault revived the society, but it lasted only a brief time. The devastating impact of the American Civil War upon Charleston as well as upon the rest of the South was not confined to economic damage; it also eroded the collective memory of many things, including the Literary and Philosophical Society. Though scattered and incomplete, the records indicate, however, that it had played an important role in a region where "intellectual products" were generally unremarkable. In Charleston the society had generated interest in intellectual development for nearly half a century; nourished a fine museum of natural history for more than three decades and passed on priceless specimens to its successor; fostered presentation of many papers, some of which represented pioneering studies; and, directly or indirectly, fanned flames of interest in science. Certainly, then, the Literary and Philosophical Society of South Carolina was a successful forum for intellectual progress in Charleston, and it played an important role in developing the city into the scientific center of the Old South.

<sup>61</sup> Gabriel E. Manigault, MS of autobiography, in Manigault Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina; Francis S. Holmes, "[Announcement of] Museum of Natural History, College of Charleston, South Carolina, July 25th, 1852," Record Unit 52, Smithsonian Institution Archives; Lester D. Stephens, *Ancient Animals and Other Wondrous Things: The Story of Francis Simmons Holmes, Paleontologist and Curator of the Charleston Museum*, Contributions from the Charleston Museum, XVII, February, 1988, 11, 14.

<sup>62</sup> Stephens, *Science*, 264-267.

<sup>63</sup> Stoney, "Memoirs," 227.



The State House at Columbia from Rives's Tavern, May, 1794. Image courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

Government thereto" and as having named it Columbia. None, however, offer even a footnote as to who he was or why he did what he did.<sup>2</sup>

Only Moore, in *Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740 to 1990* (1993), has had the space and inclination to analyze the relocation biographically. Yet Moore's is a local study given to local biases, and since Gervais was not a local, his contribution to the founding of Columbia is minimized. Instead, Moore emphasizes the role of property holders with deep roots in Richland County, especially Wade Hampton, who saw in relocating the capital to their own backyard a windfall opportunity for personal profit through speculation in land. "Shrewd Wade Hampton," the interpretation goes, "never spoke for his interests" in the

Carolina Archives Department, 1960), 131; Joseph W. Barnwell, ed., "Diary of Timothy Ford, 1785-1786," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 13 (1912): 195, 202 (*South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* and its successor, *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, are hereinafter cited as SCHM).

<sup>2</sup> South Carolina House of Representatives Journal, March 13, 1789, and January 4, 1790, in Michael E. Stevens and Christine M. Allen, eds., *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1789-1790*, The State Records of South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1984), 288, 291; J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Diary of Edward Hooker, 1805-1808* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), 854; "An Act to Appoint Commissioners to Purchase Land for the Purpose of

legislature in 1786, but recruited Gervais, a third-party mouthpiece, for the purpose. Gervais's initiative, therefore, was not his own but Hampton's.<sup>3</sup>

Gervais owned no land near Columbia and stood to gain nothing from the micro-real estate bonanza his bill promised. Still, the Charleston merchant had as much at stake materially in the relocation as did any backcountry speculator. In fact, he likely believed at the time that his very livelihood was tied to its success. This essay will survey the evolution of the effort to establish an inland capital in South Carolina, examine how Gervais came to have a vested interest in removing the seat of government from his hometown, and argue that, hardly Hampton's puppet, he played the pivotal part in engineering one of the landmark events in the political history of South Carolina.

Gervais was born of Huguenot parents in Hameln near Hanover, Germany, circa 1741. He grew up poor but received a first-rate education in the German schools and as a young man managed a granary in Hameln for Richard Oswald, a wealthy London merchant who held the contract for supplying bread to British forces in Germany during the Seven Years War (1756-1763). Impressed by Gervais's ability and aspiration, with the onset of peace Oswald provided him a letter of introduction to an associate in South Carolina who could help him get ahead, the colony's foremost merchant and a fellow Huguenot, Henry Laurens.<sup>4</sup>

Building a Town, and for Removing the Seat of Government Thereto," March 22, 1786, in Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord, eds., *Statutes at Large of South Carolina* [1682-1838], 10 vols. (Columbia: A. S. Johnston, 1838-1841), 4: 751. For earlier histories of the relocation of South Carolina's state capital, see, for example, A. S. Salley, "Origin and Early Development," in *Columbia: Capital City of South Carolina, 1786-1936*, ed. Helen Kohn Hennig (Columbia: The Columbia Sesquicentennial Commission, 1936), 1-6; David Duncan Wallace, *The History of South Carolina*, 4 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, Inc., 1934), 2: 345; Jerome J. Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War: The Revolution in South Carolina* (Orono, Maine: University of Maine at Orono Press, 1981), 136-38; Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 143-45; John Hammond Moore, *Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 41-45; Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 248. On efforts to establish inland capitals in other states, see Rosemarie Zagarrri, "Representation and the Removal of State Capitals, 1776-1812," *Journal of American History* 74 (1988): 1239-56.

<sup>3</sup> Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 44-45; *ibid.*, "Reflections on Columbia and Richland County," *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1992): 3.

<sup>4</sup> N. Louise Bailey, Mary L. Morgan, and Carolyn R. Taylor, eds., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776-1985*, 3 vols. (Columbia: University of

Gervais arrived in Charleston in June 1764 and shortly thereafter became Laurens's partner in a land development deal in the area of northwestern South Carolina that would later become Ninety Six District. Together the partners took out grants for 18,000 acres and made plans to people a section of the tract with German immigrants. To protect their interests, Gervais settled in Ninety Six. On Oswald's credit, he purchased over 5,000 acres in addition to the joint grants, slaves, and livestock, and put to planting on the banks of Hard Labor Creek, a tributary of the upper Savannah. The Gervais plantation, Herrenhausen, produced a variety of profitable crops including hemp and indigo, and its master quickly entered the small but rapidly expanding ranks of the backcountry elite. Respected by his frontier neighbors and bolstered by his economic and political connections to the coast, Gervais assumed a position of leadership in the district. He served as justice of the peace, tax collector, and was appointed a commissioner to supervise the building of a courthouse and jail at Ninety Six in 1769. Gervais's attempt at frontier speculation fizzled, but thanks to his successful planting activities, within a few years he was able to establish himself as a merchant in Charleston. In the 1770s he made his fortune in the slave and dry goods trades.<sup>5</sup>

From the beginning of the American Revolution, Gervais sided wholeheartedly with the colonial malcontents. Still a landowner in Ninety Six, he represented the district in the First and Second Provincial Congresses and the First and Second General Assemblies of 1776-1778. During this period he also served as quartermaster of the First and Second South Carolina Regiments and as deputy paymaster general of the Southern Department of the Continental Army. In 1779 Gervais lent £59,637 to the

South Carolina Press, 1986), 1: 559-60; David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 59-69, 139-40, 226-37, 389.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Laurens to Richard Oswald, July 7, 1764, *The Papers of Henry Laurens, Volume Four: Sept. 1, 1763-Aug. 31, 1765*, ed. George C. Rogers, Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1974), 331-32; Anne C. Gibert, "The Legacies of John De La Howe and John Lewis Gervais," *Transactions of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina* 82 (1977): 78-79; Mary Katherine Davis, "The Feather Bed Aristocracy: Abbeville District in the 1790s," *SCHM* 80 (1979): 141-42. Between 1772 and 1774, Gervais imported seven shiploads of African slaves to Charleston for sale to the highest bidder. Bailey, Morgan, and Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate*, 1: 560. In 1772 he imported 10,000 gallons of rum from Philadelphia, rum he insisted be "of the strongest quality." John Lewis Gervais to William Fisher, August 6, 1772, John Lewis Gervais Papers, South Caroliniana Library (hereinafter cited as SCL).



**John Lewis Gervais.** Image courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

war effort, and holding the rank of colonel, he helped organize the defense of Charleston one year later.<sup>6</sup>

Gervais's most significant service in the war came as a member of the Council of Safety during the Revolution's chaotic first years, 1775-1776, and of the Privy Council in its critical last years, 1780-1781. Created by the Provincial Congress in 1775, the Council of Safety was an interim executive body granted almost unlimited authority to prosecute the incipient rebellion in South Carolina. It was composed of thirteen members and headed by the

<sup>6</sup> John Lewis Gervais to Henry Laurens, August 2, 1777, John Lewis Gervais Papers, South Carolina Historical Society (hereinafter cited as SCHS); Gervais to John Laurens, October 27, 1777, Gervais Papers, SCHS; Andrew Williamson to Gervais, September 17, 1778, Gervais Papers, SCHS; Bailey, Morgan, and Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate*, 1: 560.



governor. The Privy Council, an advisory board to the governor, was established by the state constitution of 1776.<sup>7</sup>

Holed up at Charleston as Sir Henry Clinton and the British army drew closer and closer in the spring of 1780, Governor John Rutledge, Gervais, and the other members of the Council of Safety were advised by the American commander in the South, Major General Benjamin Lincoln, to evacuate so that some sliver of the state's revolutionary government might continue to function should the city fall. It was decided that the majority of the council would remain, and three members would accompany Rutledge to safer ground. On April 13 Gervais was among those that slipped out of Charleston with the governor amid a hail of cannon and mortar fire from Clinton's besiegers.<sup>8</sup>

The refugees scurried up the coast to Georgetown, but when Charleston capitulated on May 12 and British regulars were dispatched in their direction, Rutledge and his party had no choice other than to again flee before them. When they set out this time, though, their numbers were decreased by half. Councilors Charles Pinckney and Daniel Huger, convinced that the situation was hopeless, had decided to return to Charleston to give their paroles. Civilian government in free South Carolina thus dwindled to two men, but Rutledge and Gervais, undaunted, kept on the run in a desperate effort to keep the Revolution alive. Nearly captured on several occasions, they hurried north to solicit aid from their colonial neighbors. Gervais stopped off at Williamsburg, Virginia, and Rutledge made his way to Philadelphia to apprise the Continental Congress of the dire situation in South Carolina.<sup>9</sup>

From Virginia's capital Gervais maintained close communication with the home front, but the news was not good. "They have had a great spleen against me particularly," Gervais wrote of the British to Henry Laurens, then a political prisoner in the Tower of London. "I believe I am the only one in the whole State, whose whole property they have removed to Charles Town—horses, Cattle & Most of all sorts they have either destroyed or carried off from the plantation," including "all my negroes." The British also converted Gervais's house in Charleston into a hospital and plundered all

<sup>7</sup> Bailey, Morgan, and Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate*, 1: 560; Provincial Congress Journal, June 14-June 17, 1775, in Hemphill and Wates, *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina, 1775-1776*, 49-56.

<sup>8</sup> Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 464-65.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 488, 517, 533-34; Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1780-1783* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), 508-09.

his furniture. "In a Word," Gervais concluded, "they have left me nothing but my Land, which thank God they could not carry away."<sup>10</sup>

By the summer of 1781 the tide of war in South Carolina had shifted sufficiently to allow the governor's return. Rutledge sent for Gervais, and in August the two joined General Nathanael Greene at his camp in the High Hills of Santee. For remaining steadfast to the cause during his exile, Gervais was well received at home. Ninety Six District elected him as their senator to the Jacksonborough Assembly, and when the assembly convened in January 1782, Gervais was chosen President of the Senate. In March Gervais and Rutledge left the state heading northward again, this time as two of South Carolina's five delegates to the Continental Congress. Finally, in the spring of 1783, Gervais returned to Charleston ready to resume his life as a merchant and recoup his lost riches amid "the blessings of peace." He soon discovered, however, that replicating his prosperity of the previous decade in the postwar years would prove difficult, if not impossible.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after Gervais's flight from Charleston in April 1780, Clinton captured the city and declared all of its citizens prisoners on parole. In order to continue conducting business through the transfer of power, Charleston merchants were required to take an oath of allegiance to Great Britain. Rather than face certain financial ruin, many complied with the demand. But since a number of the city's leading merchants were also its leading patriots, quite a few did not. Merchants from Britain were only too eager to fill the commercial vacuum they left, and considering the handsome profits to be made importing and exporting in Charleston's heightened wartime market, the siege guns had hardly cooled before the first batch arrived.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1782, with an American victory in sight and knowing that their army would soon evacuate the city, the British merchant community of Charleston began to adroitly seek security for themselves and their wares from the other side. They requested permission from South Carolina's new

<sup>10</sup> John Lewis Gervais to Henry William Harrington, July 26, 1780, quoted in Alexander Gregg, *History of the Old Cheraws* (1867; reprint, Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Company, 1965), 321-22; Gervais to Henry Laurens, September 27, 1782, John Lewis Gervais Papers, SCL.

<sup>11</sup> Gervais to Harrington, July 26, 1780, quoted in Gregg, *History of the Old Cheraws*, 321-22; Gervais to Henry Laurens, September 27, 1782, John Lewis Gervais Papers, SCL; McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1780-1783*, 511, 559, 562, 572; Bailey, Morgan, and Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate*, 1: 560-61.

<sup>12</sup> George Smith McCowen, Jr., *The British Occupation of Charleston, 1780-1782* (Columbia: Published for the South Carolina Tricentennial Commission by the University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 9, 52-53; Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War*, 91; George C. Rogers, Jr., "Aedanus Burke, Nathanael Greene, Anthony Wayne, and the British Merchants of Charleston," SCHM 67 (1966): 75-76.

governor, John Mathews, to stay in the state for an additional eighteen months to sell their remaining merchandise and collect debts owed them. Mathews and the planter-packed General Assembly readily assented, contending that the British merchants' generous credit in the wake of the war was "conducive to the happiness and commercial interests of the State."<sup>13</sup>

Charleston jurist Aedanus Burke was among the most outspoken critics of the General Assembly's decision regarding the British merchants. An ardent patriot himself, Burke believed that the legislature should have been leading the state toward establishing its independence on a firm basis. Instead, its rash action would allow the British to retain a "standing army of merchants, factors, clerks, agents, and emissaries" in Charleston and promised to turn the postwar years in South Carolina into "the sunshine harvest of British commerce, policy, and influence." Besides, Burke argued, allowing the British merchants to remain in South Carolina was not to the benefit of the entire state as the assembly had averred, for "their superiority of capitals will enable them to ruin our own merchants . . . As well might a pigmy be compared to a giant, as the impoverished miserable funds of an American merchant, who lost his fortune in the war, to the immense capitals of British traders." As Burke saw it, local merchants relying on local capital would be swamped by the foreign competition. Unfortunately for Gervais and Charleston's other "native" merchants, his prediction was right on.<sup>14</sup>

Upon returning to Charleston in 1783, Gervais entered into a partnership with longtime associate John Owen, but according to Gervais, their mercantile company struggled from the outset. "The great source of the distressed situation of our Trade has been in a great measure owing to the British Merchants which were suffered to remain here at the evacuation of Charleston with goods perhaps to the value of Five hundred Thousand pounds sterling, which they sold at an amazing advance." Everybody, Gervais related, "was in want of necessaries & made purchases at any price on Credit without considering how they could make payments."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War*, 91-94; George C. Rogers, Jr., *Evolution of a Federalist: William Loughton Smith of Charleston (1758-1812)* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1962), 97-111; "An Act for Regulating Trials in Courts of Justice in This State, Between Subjects of Foreign Nations in Alliance or Neutrality with the United States, and the Citizens Thereof; and for Other Purposes Therein Mentioned," March 16, 1783, in Cooper and McCord, *Statutes at Large*, 4: 548-49.

<sup>14</sup> [Aedanus Burke], *A Few Salutary Hints . . .* (1785; reprint, New York: S. Kollock, 1786), 4, 8-9.

<sup>15</sup> John Lewis Gervais to Henry Laurens, August 25, 1784, John Lewis Gervais Papers, SCL; John Owen to Henry Laurens, Jr., November 3, 1784, Gervais Papers, SCHS; Gervais to Leonard De Neufville, April 13, 1786, Gervais Papers, SCL.

Finding their business with the debt-ridden planters confined only to "small orders," Gervais and his partner turned their attention to South Carolina's western frontier where they became heavily involved in the Indian pelt trade. Early in the eighteenth century the Indian trade had been the golden goose of many a Charleston merchant, but by the 1780s the industry was on its last leg. Constant wars, disease, and European encroachment had taken their toll on South Carolina's great tribal trading partners, the Cherokee and the Creek. Decades of overhunting had made the mainstay of the industry, the white-tailed deer, increasingly scarce. The pelt trade was a marginal economic activity that produced only modest returns, but "the Indians were not in debt," Gervais stated, and unlike the state's financially strapped planters, at least they could "pay us in Skins."<sup>16</sup>

Gervais was not the only one in Charleston who found the British merchants "irksome . . . to live with." Incensed by the assembly's lenience toward former enemies at their expense, struggling native merchants and artisans of the city formed the Marine Anti-Britannic Society, a grass-roots organization dedicated to the expulsion of foreign traders. Under the leadership of the fiery Alexander Gillon, commodore of South Carolina's fledgling navy during the war and now a member of the state House of Representatives, the society filled the local press with anti-British propaganda and took to the streets in mass demonstrations that frequently escalated into near riots. For all their bluster, the impassioned protests of Gillon and his followers fell on deaf ears at the Statehouse. In fact, the assembly's only response came during a poorly attended session in 1783 dominated by the contingent from the capital with close ties to the British merchants, including a coterie of prominent lawyers who made their living prosecuting debt collection, in which an act was passed to incorporate the city of Charleston. The move was designed to provide local officials with the regulatory powers necessary to suppress the disturbances.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> John Lewis Gervais to Henry Laurens, August 25, 1784, John Lewis Gervais Papers, SCL; Laurens to Babut, Fils & LaBouchere, February 25, 1786, *The Papers of Henry Laurens, Volume Sixteen: September 1, 1782-December 17, 1792*, eds. David R. Chesnutt and C. James Taylor (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 636; Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 67-103; Gervais to Leonard De Neufville, April 13, 1786, Gervais Papers, SCL.

<sup>17</sup> John Lewis Gervais to Henry Laurens, May 5, 1784, *The Papers of Henry Laurens, Volume Sixteen*, 449; Richard Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans, 1763-1789* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1959), 114-24; D. E. Huger Smith, "Commodore Alexander Gillon and the Frigate *South Carolina*," SCHM 9 (1908): 189-95, 217-19; Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*, 112-23; "An Act to Incorporate Charleston," August 13, 1783, in Cooper and McCord, *Statutes at Large*, 7: 97-101.

The complexion of opposition to the British merchants of Charleston changed drastically when the state's planters entered the fray. A shortage of slave laborers, a series of crop failures, and the loss of major overseas markets for South Carolina staples made the postwar years lean ones for agriculturists. Whether grasping to maintain the luxurious way of life to which they had grown accustomed along the coast or simply trying to scratch out a bare subsistence in the backcountry, planters everywhere were "impelled by their necessities" to contract debts from the newly-arrived British traders, who in a short time became "the creditors of a great part of the State." South Carolina's economic woes continued through mid-decade, and as attorney Timothy Ford observed, the majority of planters remained insolvent as "the time of payment began to draw nigh." When overextended British mercantile establishments "insisted rigidly upon the punctual fulfillment of their contracts," wrote Ford, "an [*sic*] universal alarm took place." In September 1785 Governor William Moultrie called a special session of the General Assembly to address South Carolina's debtor crisis. What Moultrie had in mind was extreme but justified, he believed, given the scale of the emergency: a wholesale "interposition of the Legislature in private Contracts." Planters from around the state who had been absorbed in pressing "rural concerns" since war's end now reentered the political arena as one.<sup>18</sup>

With an intersectional coalition of planters in the assembly itching to enact sweeping debtor relief legislation, the state's entire class of creditors had little choice but to close ranks. Still conducting what business they could with planters and owed money by them, most of Charleston's native merchants grudgingly aligned themselves with their British counterparts to fight the emerging pro-debtor "Country Interest" in the legislature—but not John Lewis Gervais. Concerned as he was primarily with the Indian trade, Gervais stood to lose little financially if the planters were relieved of their debt. He remained a vehement opponent of Charleston's resident British merchants, and as the backcountry's push for removal of the seat of government from the port city gained strength in late 1785 and early 1786, he became convinced of capital relocation's potential to permanently loosen

<sup>18</sup> Robert A. Becker, "Salus Populi Suprema Lex: Public Peace and South Carolina Debtor Relief Laws, 1783-1788," SCHM 80 (1979): 65-71; David Ramsay, *History of South Carolina, From Its First Settlement in 1670 to the Year 1808*, 2 vols. in 1 (1809; reprint, Newberry, S.C.: W. J. Duffie, 1858), 2: 235-38; Barnwell, "Diary of Timothy Ford," 193; William Moultrie to the House of Representatives, South Carolina House of Representatives Journal, September 26, 1785, in Lark Emerson Adams and Rosa Stoney Lumpkin, eds., *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1785-1786*, The State Records of South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1979), 313; *Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, March 11, 1786 (hereinafter cited as CMPDA).

the stranglehold foreign traders currently had on the state's economy—and his own pocketbook.

The roots of capital relocation in South Carolina were grounded in the quarter-century preceding the American Revolution when a massive migration of settlers down the piedmont from Virginia and Pennsylvania occasioned a backcountry population boom. Largely an unoccupied Indian frontier in 1750, by the mid-1760s the region contained about thirty-five thousand settlers—a full three-fourths of South Carolina's white population—and was experiencing severe social and political growing pains. As early as 1767, Anglican itinerant Charles Woodmason described in a remonstrance to the assembly the plight of the "Back-Inhabitants" owing to the fact that South Carolina's capital was "not Central, but In a Nook by the SeaSide."<sup>19</sup>

Despite the dramatic demographic shift, South Carolina's colonial government continued to be confined to the earlier-settled lowcountry and focused at Charleston, South Carolina's capital since the colony's founding in 1670. As Rachel Klein has pointed out, although the region contained less than one-fourth of the colony's white population, its residents held almost ninety percent of the taxable wealth and slaves—and with the wealth went power. Lowcountry polity enjoyed unchallenged rule in South Carolina until the populous backcountry, teeming with potential voters, began its quest for political parity in the late 1760s.<sup>20</sup>

During the colonial period the lowcountry managed to retain its dominance of South Carolina government by keeping the burgeoning backcountry politically impotent, insisting that seats in the legislature be apportioned by taxable property, not population. In 1771, for instance, the lowcountry elected forty-five of the forty-eight members of the Commons House of Assembly, the colonial legislature's powerful lower house. Finally, in the mid-1770s, political relations between the coast and the interior experienced a watershed. Effectively excluded from government to that point, the backcountry gained its first political leverage on the eve of the American Revolution. The lowcountry, particularly Charleston, had been the hottest for independence. When war with Britain began to loom heavy, however, the lowcountry turned to the backcountry and its white manpower for support. With regards to the backcountry, Charleston patriot Arthur Middleton wrote in 1775, "[W]e must have *peace* or rather *union* let it cost

<sup>19</sup> Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 7-10; Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 215.

<sup>20</sup> Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 9-10; Robert M. Weir, "'The Harmony We Were Famous For': An Interpretation of Pre-Revolutionary South Carolina Politics," *William and Mary Quarterly* 26 (1969): 473-501.

what it may." For the lowcountry, the obligatory "cost" of backcountry cooperation in the coming war was a substantial, though still not nearly numerically proportional, stake in the revolutionary government.<sup>21</sup>

When the backcountry was granted a sizeable representation in the new regime, any sense of sectional political arrival that might have resulted was offset by the inconvenient location of the seat of government and the daunting prospect of its elected representatives having to make regular, extended trips to Charleston. South Carolina's last royal governor, Lord William Campbell, dissolved the Commons House of Assembly and fled the rebellious colony in September 1775. An extralegal convention, an organ of revolution called the Provincial Congress, was already in place, and complete with representation for the backcountry, it stepped into the void of royal authority as a *de facto* government. The Provincial Congress provided backcountry representatives with a baptism of fire in the exigencies of legislative participation. This body, the predecessor of the modern South Carolina House of Representatives, first convened on January 11, 1775, and proceeded to hold four sessions in the next fifteen months, sessions that lasted on average nearly a month apiece. When roll was called on opening day of the first session, 173 of 184 members were present. However, because of the long, arduous journey to the capital, the expenses of travel and lodging, and the neglect of their private affairs at home, the number of delegates from the interior taking their seats in succeeding sessions of the congress steadily dwindled. Due to taxing logistics, the backcountry was having to forfeit the political voice it had waited so long to receive.<sup>22</sup>

On November 15, 1775, in the third week of the Provincial Congress's third session, an anonymous backcountry representative made a motion that future meetings of the congress be held at "some other more central and convenient place." The proposal was handily defeated, but the nature of the grievance was such that it persisted despite the vicissitudes of the war, including the Provincial Congress's adoption of a written constitution on March 26, 1776, and its transformation into the *de jure* General Assembly of South Carolina. On February 8, 1780, James Mayson, a representative of Ninety Six District, gave notice to the House that after the expiration of ninety days he would "move for a removal of the seat of government from Charles Town to . . . some other more central part of the state." This time the

<sup>21</sup> Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War*, 16-17, 19-26, 43; Arthur Middleton to William Henry Drayton, August 4, 1775, in Joseph W. Barnwell, ed., "Correspondence of Hon. Arthur Middleton, Signer of the Declaration of Independence," SCHM 27 (1926): 123.

<sup>22</sup> McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 66-68, 101; Hemphill and Wates, *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina, 1775-1776*, xiii-xxii, 1, 69.

relocation proposal would not come to a vote. By late March the British army had laid siege to the capital, and following the fall of Charleston in May, civil government ceased in South Carolina until the war's conclusion. The first regular session of the General Assembly held in Charleston following the war convened in January 1783, and almost immediately a backcountry representative aired the now familiar call for relocation of the capital to a more central part of the state. Once again the proposal was defeated, but in the coming years the movement to transfer the capital inland was destined to gain serious momentum.<sup>23</sup>

In 1785 petitions calling for relocation poured into the assembly from every corner of the backcountry. On March 7 a petition was presented to the House from the "Sundry Inhabitants of Little River in the District of Ninety Six" complaining that "the Seat of Government is very inconvenient on account of loss of time and expence . . . to Inhabitants who are obliged to attend on public or private business. We would pray that it may be removed as near the Center of the State as the Legislature may see fit." A "Petition and Remonstrance" was also presented to the House on October 5 from "the Inhabitants of the lower part of Camden District." Waxing philosophical, the petitioners of lower Camden stated, "[I]t has ever been in free governments an inviolable right and privilege of the people to acquaint their representatives with the grievances they labor under." Since "continuing the seat of government at Charleston, is attended with great inconveniences to the inhabitants of the upper parts of the state," in the name of the "principles of equanimity," they requested the capital's "removal to a central situation." Even the backcountry's newest residents, the inhabitants of the area recently ceded from North Carolina called New Acquisition District, joined in the petition campaign for a central seat of state government.<sup>24</sup>

This groundswell of grass-roots support for capital relocation coincided with the mustering of a "Country Interest" in the General Assembly bent on the same objective. Pierce Butler, a planter from Prince William Parish and a leader of the intersectional coalition for debt reform, summed up his

<sup>23</sup> Provincial Congress Journal, November 15, 1775, in Hemphill and Wates, *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina, 1775-1776*, 131; South Carolina House of Representatives Journal, February 8, 1780, in William Edwin Hemphill, et. al., eds., *Journals of the General Assembly and House of Representatives, 1776-1780*, The State Records of South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 287; McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, 432; John Almon, *The Rembrancer, or Impartial Repository of Public Events* 16 (1783): 33-34, quoted in Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War*, 136.

<sup>24</sup> House Journal, March 7, 1785, in Adams and Lumpkin, *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1785-1786*, 194-96; House Journal, October 5, 1785, in Adams and



party's argument for relocation: not only were backcountry South Carolinians "thickly settled in places far distant" from the port city and were "consequently ignorant of public transactions," but the location of the seat of government at Charleston allowed the merchants to enjoy "great influence and weight" in the legislature, "it being always in their power, by the assistance of those who fluctuated in opinion, to carry everything their own way."<sup>25</sup>

By the close of the General Assembly's second session of 1785, Ralph Izard, a Goose Creek aristocrat closely connected to Charleston's anti-debtor legislation establishment, lamented that "the country interest" had "overshadowed that of the town." A committee was appointed to take into consideration the petitions and report back to the House early in the next session. The 1786 session convened on January 10 and by February 21 the committee report was ready. It recommended "that the next General Assembly be held as nearly central in the state as conveniency will allow" and concluded "that Camden appeared to be the most convenient place."<sup>26</sup>

From his seat in the Senate Gervais watched with growing concern as on March 1, 1786, the House of Representatives voted 68 to 54 to reject Camden as the new seat of state government. With the support finally in place to move the capital from the coast after decades of agitation, Camden, South Carolina's oldest and largest inland town, should have been a shoo-in for relocation. That it failed was the result of a sizeable bloc of pro-relocation legislators voting with the "Town Interest" against the proposal because, in the words of LeRoy Hammond of Ninety Six District, they did "not think Camden by any means either central or convenient."<sup>27</sup>

The Camden vote spelled serious trouble for the relocation movement, and Gervais—by far the most polished politician in the ranks of the reformers—knew it. Unless and until "country" members could unite behind a single site and one more central than Camden, the capital would remain where it was. At the time, the only other option was Stateburg, but backed as it was by such a controversial character as Thomas Sumter,

Lumpkin, *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1785-1786*, 330-32; CMPDA, March 3, 1786.

<sup>25</sup> *City Gazette and the Daily Advertiser*, January 26, 1789.

<sup>26</sup> Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*, 124-29; CMPDA, March 3, 1786; CMPDA, February 22, 1786; House Journal, March 23, 1785, in Adams and Lumpkin, *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1785-1786*, 284-85; House Journal, January 10, 1786, in Adams and Lumpkin, *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1785-1786*, 361.

<sup>27</sup> CMPDA, March 15, 1786; CMPDA, March 3, 1786; CMPDA, March 2, 1786.

Gervais was sure the town founded by the Gamecock three years earlier for the express purpose of becoming the state's new capital stood no chance of garnering the kind of broad-based support in the legislature necessary to effect the change.<sup>28</sup>

Motivated by his constituents' petition for a capital "near the Center of the State" and his own fierce desire to undermine the hegemony of the British merchants and their minions in the assembly, the Charlestonian sitting for Ninety Six District in the Senate took it upon himself to see to the removal of the seat of government from his hometown. With Camden out of the running and Stateburg never really in it, Gervais proposed "to erect a new town capable of becoming the seat of government." What he had in mind was no pipe dream, but a comprehensive relocation plan "framed in such a manner as to do away all objections that had been raised against former ones for a similar purpose." Gervais "flattered himself" that his paper capital "carried on its face superior advantages," including a more central location than Camden and a creative funding concept that would allow the plan to pay for itself "without laying the smallest additional burden upon the people." The plan's chief advantage, however, would be the people behind it.<sup>29</sup>

Gervais stated before the Senate that he "was not particularly instructed by his constituents to fix upon this or that place, nor had he indeed received any instructions upon this point; but he was convinced that his constituents and the public in general, would be well satisfied to see the seat of government established near Friday's Ferry." In 1754 Martin Fridig (Friday) opened a public ferry across the Congaree River just below the fall line, and in succeeding decades a small commercial center known as Granby had grown up at its western terminus. Friday's Ferry was certainly located in the geographic heart of the state, but it is doubtful that scrutiny of maps or measurements by compass led Gervais to the spot. He needed to find a backcountryman with an eye for speculation who was receptive to his plan and had the popularity and political connections to help him pull it off. On the eastern bank of the Congaree a few miles upriver from Friday's Ferry near the confluence of the Broad and Saluda Rivers, he found two: Thomas Taylor and Wade Hampton.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Due to the wartime excesses of "Sumter's Law," in 1786 much of the state still saw the Gamecock as a plunderer, not a patriot. Matthew A. Lockhart, "The 'Center of the State' and Thomas Sumter: The Story of Stateburg in South Carolina's Capital Relocation of 1786," (Master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 2001), 27-54.

<sup>29</sup> CMPDA, March 11, 1786.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; "An Act . . . for Establishing a Ferry over Santee River, in the Township of Saxe Gotha, from the Land of Martin Fridig, on the South Side, to the Opposite Landing, on the North Side, of the Said River, and for Vesting the Same in the Said Martin Fridig . . .," May 11, 1754, in Cooper and McCord, *Statutes at Large*, 9: 175-77.



**Wade Hampton I.** Image courtesy of the Historic Columbia Foundation, Columbia, S.C.

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Following the Revolution Wade Hampton had emerged as a leading planter and political figure of the backcountry—and one of South Carolina's most audacious speculators. Because he owned extensive property in the vicinity of Friday's Ferry and was actively involved in a variety of land-grabbing ventures on the frontier, John Hammond Moore has concluded that it was actually Hampton who was the mastermind of the plan to create a capital city at "Taylor's Hill" on the Congaree. "Then," wrote Moore, "he adroitly let Gervais lead the charge." Hampton was capable and energetic and circumstances suggest that he indeed played an integral part in accomplishing the relocation, but as contemporaneous newspaper reports clearly indicate, his role was not seminal. In March 1786 it was common knowledge that Gervais hatched the idea of erecting a new capital near Friday's Ferry, that he approached Hampton and Taylor with it, and as

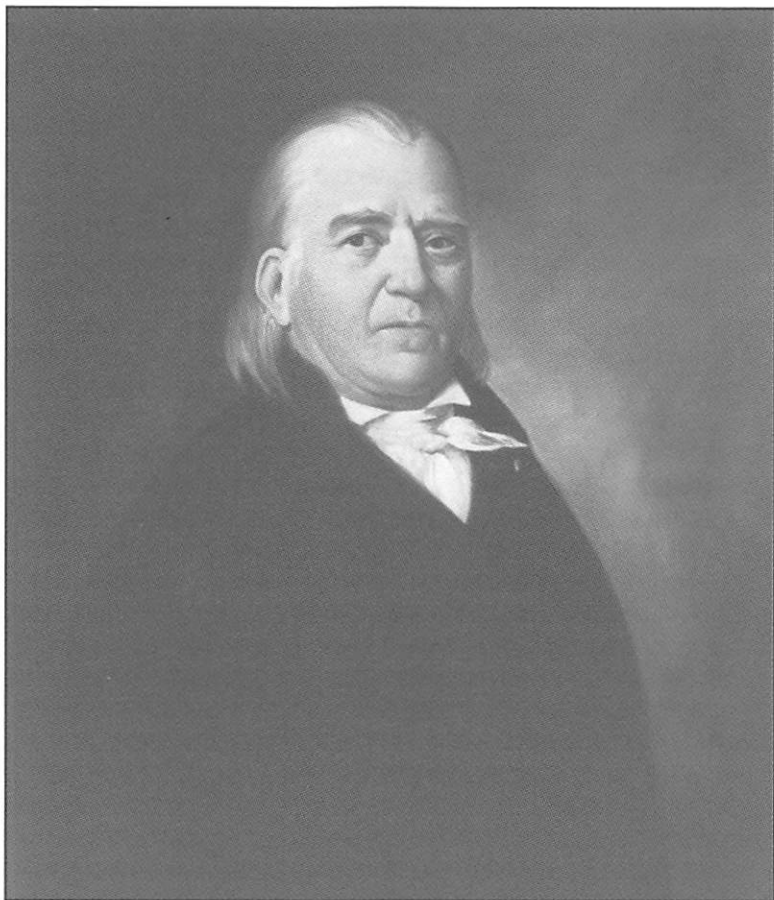
related in the *Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, that the proprietors of the lands were "well pleased with the proposal."<sup>31</sup>

Gervais's choice of backcountry boosters for his prospective capital was as astute as it was calculated. Writing of Thomas Taylor and Wade Hampton shortly after the Revolution, Aedanus Burke noted that "their gallantry in the war, their property, and some talents, give them great influence in that part of the country." Even though they had served under Sumter during the Revolution, Taylor and Hampton had maintained spotless military records and late in the war had distanced themselves from their commanding officer in the public eye. Members of all the right social clubs and regular returnees to the legislature, the two men were widely known and well-respected. Far-reaching family ties were no less important. Both immigrated to South Carolina early in life with their extended families and settled among communities of kith and kin who had also made the trek south from Virginia. As young men, both married women of property from large, locally prominent families. The bottom line: Taylor and Hampton were personally popular and had powerful intersectional political connections. If anyone could help Gervais rally "country" members to his plan, they could.<sup>32</sup>

Thomas Taylor was not a member of the General Assembly in 1786, but James, his brother, represented the District Between Broad and Catawba Rivers in the House. Wade Hampton's brother, Henry, sat for the same district, and Wade himself was a representative from Saxe Gotha District. Another Hampton brother, John, spoke for the Lower District Between Broad and Saluda Rivers in the House, and yet another, Richard, was senator for Saxe Gotha. Add to that in-laws, cousins, cousins of cousins,

<sup>31</sup> Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 44-45; CMPDA, March 7, 1786; *ibid.*, March 11, 1786. Ronald Bridwell has thoroughly examined Hampton's career as a speculator and uncovered no documentation linking him to the relocation legislation. Moreover, Bridwell's exhaustive biography of Hampton does not even mention the possibility of the man he calls South Carolina's "King of the Speculators" influencing the location of the new capital. Ronald E. Bridwell, "The South's Wealthiest Planter: Wade Hampton I of South Carolina, 1754-1835" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1980), 210-318.

<sup>32</sup> Aedanus Burke to John Lamb, June 23, 1788, Lamb Papers, New York Historical Society, quoted in Bridwell, "The South's Wealthiest Planter," 226; Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences of the American Revolution in the South* (1851; reprint, Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Company, 1972), 536-42; B. F. Taylor, "Col. Thomas Taylor," SCHM 25 (1926): 204-08; N. Louise Bailey and Elizabeth Ivey Cooper, eds., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, vol. 3, 1775-1790 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981), 3: 310, 702-04; Bridwell, "The South's Wealthiest Planter," 1-74, 80-97, 118-209, 230-32.



Thomas Taylor. Image courtesy of the Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.

compatriots from the war, and business associates also serving in the legislature at the time, and the Hampton/Taylor circle of influence became quite expansive. In fact, to one degree or another, it included the majority of members of the General Assembly who favored relocation.<sup>33</sup>

On March 6, only five days after indecision and infighting in the pro-relocation ranks of the House killed Camden's chance to become the new capital, Gervais introduced his relocation bill in the Senate. The bill called

<sup>33</sup> Walter B. Edgar, ed., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Session Lists*, vol. 1, 1692-1973 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1974), 1: 202-09; Bailey, Morgan, and Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate*, 3: 1810-11.

for the election by the General Assembly of commissioners who were to purchase then divide 640 acres of land near Friday's Ferry, "including the plain of the hill whereon Thomas and James Taylor, Esquires, now reside," into half-acre lots. Once the money from the sale of one-quarter of the lots came due, the commissioners were to contract for the building of a state house. As soon as the building was erected, "either in whole or in part, in such manner as shall be sufficient to accommodate the Legislature," the town was to become the state's new seat of government.<sup>34</sup>

Having formerly served as President of the Senate, Gervais carried considerable weight in that body—and he threw every ounce of it behind the bill. Richard Hampton also came out strongly for Friday's Ferry in the Senate, as did William Hill of New Acquisition District, who had fought shoulder-to-shoulder with Thomas Taylor in Sumter's campaign of 1780, and Joseph Atkinson, a native merchant of Charleston and colleague of Gervais's. St. Helena Parish's John Barnwell was concerned that "when the appointed time came for the legislature to meet they might be obliged to take up with lodgings under the trees." Yet, with minimal debate, Gervais's plan passed the Senate by a vote of 11 to 7. The only hitch was over what to call the intended capital.<sup>35</sup>

In the body of the bill Gervais did not propose a name, but had left a blank space to be filled in by the General Assembly. Arnoldus Vanderhorst of Christ Church Parish, the intendant of Charleston who had openly sworn to oppose any attempt at relocation "through the whole of its progress," stated that he "thought any new town laid out, should have a typical name affixed to it." And "wishing therefore, always to maintain some degree of propriety," he sarcastically suggested that the backcountry capital be called Town of Refuge because it would be beyond the pale of law and order and men of desperate fortunes would fly to it for asylum. To this Gervais countered that he had "no objection to its being a town of refuge, but not in an opprobrious way." Speaking for distressed debtors and down-and-out native merchants alike, he hoped that "in this town we should find refuge under the wings of COLUMBIA, for that was the name he wished it to be called." Columbia, a symbolic representation of the young United States and studied slap in the face to the overbearing British presence at Charleston, won out over Washington, Barnwell's offering to honor "a living hero of immortal memory," and on March 9 the Senate sent the bill on to the House.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> CMPDA, March 7, 1786.

<sup>35</sup> CMPDA, March 11, 1786; South Carolina Senate Journal, March 6 and March 9, 1786, South Carolina Department of Archives and History (hereinafter cited as SCDAH).

<sup>36</sup> CMPDA, March 11, 1786. There is no primary evidence to support Alex Salley's grandiose democratic assertion, later repeated by other historians, that

The Columbia bill was given its first reading in the House on March 10. Its initial reception in that chamber, however, could be described as lukewarm at best. The following day Dr. Thomas Tudor Tucker of St. George Dorchester noted that members still held "very different opinions . . . as to the central place" and moved that a committee be appointed to definitively determine the precise geographic center of the state. Thomas Sumter was able to secure an appointment to the committee and made sure its definition of centrality included Stateburg. But while Sumter and his fellow committeemen were pouring over maps, exerting "the utmost industry to make a correct report," Wade Hampton and friends seem to have been rapidly mobilizing to ram the Columbia bill through. They doubtless asked favors and pulled strings and within a few days of the bill's introduction had marshaled most of the House's pro-relocation forces to their camp. LeRoy Hammond, an Indian trader and associate of Gervais's from Ninety Six District, became a vocal supporter of the site, as did fellow Ninety Six delegates Patrick Calhoun and his nephew John Ewing Colhoun. Joining them were Richard and Minor Winn, leading men of Fairfield County indirectly related to the Hamptons, as well as Henry Pendleton, a prominent judge who represented Saxe Gotha alongside Wade. The support of planter and political power broker Pierce Butler of Prince William Parish was particularly important. In addition to being a champion of debt reform and leader of the "country" party in the legislature, Butler was Wade Hampton's business partner.<sup>37</sup>

Practically overnight and almost to a man, the powerful political push from Gervais and the crowd for Friday's Ferry rallied "country" members of the House behind Columbia. By the time Sumter's "Center of the State" committee made its report on March 13, the location of the long-awaited inland seat of government was a foregone conclusion. By a count of 65 to 61, the House voted that day to accept Friday's Ferry as the site for relocation. The closeness of the tally did not reflect a lack of support for Columbia, but rather disagreement over certain clauses within the bill. The House proceeded to make several textual alterations, including increasing the size of the proposed town to two square miles and widening its streets, and then took another vote on whether to return the amended version to the Senate. According the *Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, the question passed in the affirmative "by a very large majority." The Senate agreed to

Gervais declared before the Senate that he hoped the "oppressed of every land" might find refuge at South Carolina's inland capital. Hennig, *Columbia: Capital City of South Carolina*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> House Journal, March 10, 1786, in Adams and Lumpkin, *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1785-1786*, 511; CMPDA, March 13, 1786; House Journal, March 11 and March 14, 1786, in Adams and Lumpkin, *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1785-1786*, 515, 533; CMPDA, March 15, 1786; *ibid.*, March 21, 1786; Bridwell, "The South's Wealthiest Planter," 250-51.

the changes, and on March 22, the last day of the session, the bill became law. As soon as Columbia came into being, what one senator derisively referred to as Gervais's "famous new town" would become the new capital of the state.<sup>38</sup>

The exact degree to which the capital relocation blunted the "great influence and weight" of the British merchants in the legislature is difficult to say. It certainly facilitated backcountry attendance and the new surroundings may have helped sway "those who fluctuated in opinion," but Charleston's foreign trading faction remained a force in state politics for years to come. Despite Ralph Izard's prediction that relocation would instantly "strengthen the country interest in a proportion of four to one," through the 1790s British-sympathizing "arch-Federalists" such as Izard, William Loughton Smith, and Jacob Read provided powerful representation for the merchants' interests not only in Columbia, but at the federal capital of Philadelphia as well. In 1800 Charles Pinckney, former governor and fierce Democratic-Republican, proudly reported to Thomas Jefferson that "our country interest . . . is I think as powerful as ever," a consequence he attributed in large measure to the fact that "our Legislature meets 130 or 140 miles from the Sea." Even so, it was only with the demise of the Federalist party in South Carolina in the decade that followed and the great reorientation of Charleston's trade away from Europe and toward the American North amid the embargo, non-intercourse acts, and War of 1812 that—over two decades after Gervais first spoke of finding "refuge under the wings of COLUMBIA"—British influence in the General Assembly was finally broken once and for all.<sup>39</sup>

Wade Hampton and Thomas Taylor, eager speculators who in 1786 owned extensive real estate near the site of the soon-to-be state capital, began reaping the material rewards of relocation almost immediately. By May 1 of that year, barely a month after the enabling legislation was passed, Charleston newspapers were reporting that "the new town called Columbia appears in a very forward way of soon being erected" and that "land thereabout has risen 150 percent." As for Gervais, evidence that he ever enjoyed private gain from his public service of 1786 is only circumstantial. Extant business records of Gervais & Owen from the late 1780s and 1790s are spotty and inconclusive. Yet, possessed of nothing but neglected, near-

<sup>38</sup> House Journal, March 13 and March 14, 1786, in Adams and Lumpkin, *Journals of the House of Representatives, 1785-1786*, 525, 533; CMPDA, March 15, 1786; "An Act to Appoint Commissioners. . .," March 22, 1786, in Cooper and McCord, *Statutes at Large*, 4: 751-52; CMPDA, March 11, 1786.

<sup>39</sup> CMPDA, March 3, 1786; Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*, 264-70; Charles Pinckney to Thomas Jefferson, October 16, 1800, quoted in John Harold Wolfe, *Jeffersonian Democracy in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 155; Rogers, *Evolution of a Federalist*, 342-55, 363-76.



worthless backcountry land at war's end and struggling mightily through the middle years of the 1780s "in a great measure owing to the British Merchants," by the time of his death in 1798 Gervais had managed to accumulate a sizable second fortune. His considerable estate included a 1,627-acre plantation on the Cooper River, one hundred head of cattle, two corn mills, a prime Charleston lot occupied by a fine townhouse full of mahogany furniture, and eighty-two slaves.<sup>40</sup>

The first State House in Columbia sat facing east at the northwest corner of Richardson (later Main) and Senate Streets. In the 1850s the humble structure was moved to the opposite side of the square and construction began at the old site on a new, larger capitol that would run perpendicular to the foundation of the original. With its public face now turned north, when eventually completed the building's grand front portico overlooked Gervais Street—an unplanned but appropriate tribute to the man most responsible for it being there in the first place.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> CMPDA, May 1, 1786; Charleston County Wills, C (1793-1800), 506-07, SCDAH; Charleston County Inventories, C (1793-1800), 425-26, SCDAH; Bailey, Morgan, and Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate*, 1: 560-61.

<sup>41</sup> John M. Bryan, *Creating the South Carolina State House* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 4-36, 94-123.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Lift Up Thy Voice: The Grimké Family's Journey from Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leaders.* By Mark Perry. (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2003. Pp. xxiii, 406; \$15.00, paper.)

Two of the most important antebellum abolitionists in the United States were born and raised in Charleston. Sarah and Angelina Grimké were born into upper-class Carolina privilege, yet both chose to move north as adults to crusade against the evils of slavery rather than to acquiesce in the life of their Carolina peers. The sisters' story is familiar to most students of antebellum history, but Mark Perry goes beyond the usual accounts of the Grimké sisters in two important ways. First, he places them in the context of the American abolition movement. More importantly, he extends the family's story by examining the lives of two black Grimkés, Francis and Archibald. Perry includes Sarah and Angelina's black nephews (whom they met after the war and encouraged in their education and activism) to show two generations of activists for racial equality. His approach reminds the reader that the abolition movement's story ended with neither the Civil War nor with Reconstruction.

Perry begins by explaining Sarah Grimké's journey from a wealthy Charleston family to a modest Quaker household in Philadelphia. He carefully details Sarah's two outstanding character traits: independence and introspection. Even as a girl, Sarah refused to conform to the standard role which Carolina society expected of a dutiful daughter. Despite the discomfort of her parents, they only infrequently limited her attempts to learn and tolerated her deviations from the family's denominational preference. Like many nineteenth century Americans, Sarah took religion very seriously, constantly worrying about the morality of her actions and the correctness of her beliefs. In 1805, when Sarah was thirteen, her youngest sister, Angelina, was born; Sarah performed so much of Angelina's care that her sister began calling her "Mother." Angelina unsurprisingly would follow her older sister's refusal to accept family and social norms, but in a different way. Perry argues that Angelina's religious beliefs made her sure of her rectitude, unlike her constantly unsure sister.

Both sisters' beliefs led them to conclude that slavery was immoral. Unlike other southerners who believed similarly in the early 1800s, they acted on their convictions. Sarah and later Angelina taught some of the Grimké slaves to read and write and imparted religious lessons in defiance of custom and local law. The sisters also advocated racial equality, spurning the popular solution of colonization for former slaves. Combined with their unusual religion and behavior (such as when Sarah adopted the Quaker mode of dress), Charleston became increasingly uncomfortable. Sarah