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# OF TIME AND THE CITY: CHARLESTON IN 1860

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KNOWN AS THE LITTLE CITY THAT STARTED THE BIG WAR, Charleston is the enigma within the riddle of secession that has puzzled generations of historians. The "problem of South Carolina," a term that has become shorthand for the intractable questions of why the most conservative Americans fell so completely under the sway of the radical fire-eaters, reacted so violently to perceived political threats upon their "distinctive way of life," and were so heedless of the authority of the federal government also might be labeled "the problem of Charleston."[1]

Charleston, "the Queen City of the South," was nearly two hundred years old in 1860. Still lovely in many ways then, her grace and dignity were that of a dowager. Although newly arrayed with large, conspicuous mansions built during a recent cotton boom, time had taken its toll. No longer an international hub of trade and increasingly isolated from the political and intellectual mainstream, Charleston had assumed a staid character, seemingly dozing on a piazza while other American ports (even New Orleans) buzzed with purpose. Ranking fourth in population among the cities of the United States when the Constitution was ratified in 1788, Charleston began a precipitous decline around 1830 and thirty years later landed at a humiliating twenty-second place. The whole state, with its soil worn and opportunities few, lost population as the fertile fields of states to the west, Alabama and Mississippi in particular, opened up for settlement. Concomitantly, the number of South Carolina's delegates in the U.S. House of Representatives dropped ominously from nine to four. As Congress became more inclined to legislate on aspects of slavery and its expansion, especially during the debates over Missouri in 1819, the national capital in Washington began to seem a distant and hostile place.

In retrospect, DuBose Heyward would famously conclude that a diminished Charleston had been "forgotten by Time."[2] But he was wrong. Charleston was haunted and stalked by Time. Members of the city's oldest and once powerful families were painfully aware in 1860 of being swept up in Time's

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[1] James M. Banner Jr., "The Problem of South Carolina," in *The Hofstadter Aegis: A Memorial*, ed. Stanley M. Elkins and Eric L. McKitrick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 60; James Haw, " 'The Problem of South Carolina' Reexamined: A Review Essay," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 107 (January 2006): 9.

[2] Dubose Heyward's actual statement in *Porgy*, which has been shortened in general usage, described Charleston as an "ancient, beautiful city that time had forgotten before it destroyed." DuBose Heyward, *Porgy* (1925; repr., Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 16.

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"ever-rolling stream," as the old hymn went.[3] With every peal of the bells at Saint Michael's Church, with every turn of the calendar's page, with every phase of the moon, those Charlestonians still rooted in many ways in the political culture of the eighteenth century sensed disturbing changes in the nation. Time was altering the landscape of their lives, twisting like a kaleidoscope that left them feeling as unstable as the bits of colored glass continually being rearranged in unfamiliar and perplexing patterns. They were planters in an age of capital and aristocrats in an age of democracy, individualists in an age of standardization and slaveholders in an age of expanding liberty.

Time did not mellow these Charlestonians. It enraged them. Declaring a war against Time, the secessionist's goal in 1860 was not to pursue a different future from the northern free states, but to return to their own past. Those hoping to stanch the flow of history might be compared to Miss Havisham of the Charles Dickens novel *Great Expectations*, coincidentally first serialized in *Harper's Weekly* in December 1860. Having been jilted by her lover, Miss Havisham withdrew from the world: still dressed in her bridal finery, she closed herself up in her ruined mansion and stopped all of the clocks at the moment of her disappointment.

Time had once been Charleston's friend. After surviving an uncertain infancy, the colonial outpost founded in 1670 was hoisted aloft by the rising tide of the increasingly interconnected Atlantic World. By 1730 the town had emerged as a dynamic crossroad of trade, ideas, and culture. By 1774 it had blossomed into the belle of British North America; nine of the ten wealthiest men in the British colonies lived in Charleston's adjacent plantation districts. In 1776 the city donned the robes of Athena. Her considerable suffering during the American Revolution was ameliorated by the deeply held belief among Charleston patriots that they had aligned themselves with the logic of the Enlightenment and brought forth a world historical event. The irony of slaveholders fighting for their own liberty and later crafting civilization's most enduring documents of freedom was considered an American, rather than a southern, paradox. With victory in 1781, Charleston's citizens could hold their heads high amongst those of her nearest competitors—New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.[4]

Charleston's moment of greatest national influence coincided with the calling of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, when the loose confederation of independent states proved inadequate to the financial and security

[3] "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" was written in 1719 by Isaac Watts and draws its text from Psalm 90.

[4] Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 153. For more on the American "marriage of slavery and freedom," especially in the context of Virginia, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 6.

needs of the struggling Republic. South Carolina's four delegates, all connected to the Charleston planter aristocracy, realized that without their state, there could be no federal Union. They successfully argued that guarantees of federal protection of slavery, consideration of a portion of the slave population in determining state representation, and continuation of the slave trade for twenty years must be encoded in the Constitution. The New England delegates, who had their own interests to promote (especially the parity between the large and the small states) agreed without enthusiasm.[5] The events of 1860 would have their roots in these compromises that could not stand the testing of time, as well as in disputes over the nature of the Union itself.

Being present at the creation of the new government also would be the high tide of fame for the Pinckneys, the iconic Charleston family, and by extension the old low-country aristocracy with whom they had extensively and strategically intermarried. Two members of the Pinckney family, Charles Cotesworth and his cousin (once removed) Charles, were signers of the Constitution. Charles Cotesworth's younger brother Thomas was elected governor of South Carolina in 1786 and chair of the state ratification convention two years later. Along with other supporters of the Union, including their political allies among the Rutledge family, the Pinckneys skillfully overcame the reservations of backcountry delegates who were reluctant to give up local control to a more energetic federal government.[6]

On May 23, 1788, South Carolina became the eighth state to enter the Union (by a vote of 149 to 73) when Governor Thomas Pinckney signed the ordinance in Charleston, a stronghold of Federalism, incorporating the U.S. Constitution into the "organic law" of South Carolina.[7] Crowds cheered wildly and waved the American flag outside of the Exchange Building.

On December 20, 1860, the South Carolina Secession Convention unanimously repealed the 1788 ordinance in Charleston, a stronghold of disunion, removing the state from the jurisdiction of the Constitution and dissolving South Carolina's bond with the other states of the Union. Crowds cheered wildly, waving the South Carolina flag outside of Institute Hall and wearing

[5] Edgar, *South Carolina*, 248; George C. Rogers Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 130.

[6] Rogers has skillfully woven the rise of the Pinckney family with that of Charleston as it moved into its "golden age" in his classic *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, 116–140. In this essay, I do not discuss either the very influential Charles Pinckney (1757–1824), who broke with his Federalist cousins and became a Republican supporter of Thomas Jefferson, or his son Henry Laurens Pinckney (1794–1863), who played a particularly important role in the nullification controversy and, like his father, approached the issues differently from his cousins and the old low-country gentry.

[7] Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, *The Life of General Thomas Pinckney* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), 92.

insignias of the French Revolution. Many among them believed that in returning to their earlier status as an "Independent Sovereignty," they could turn back the clock and be liberated from perceived federal oppressions.[8]

With the crowd, in spirit at least, was Governor Thomas Pinckney's only surviving son, several grandsons, and two great grandsons waiting in the wings for an opportunity to reclaim the old family glory. Symbolic of the "problem of Charleston" was the latter-day Pinckneys' firm belief that in rolling back their honored ancestor's signal achievement and even raising his sword against the Union, they were doing honor to his memory.

Built on compromises, both large and small, the Union had slipped out of its angle of repose in one generation. In 1789, the year that George Washington was inaugurated, Governor Pinckney's second son Charles Cotesworth II was born, strong and robust. The infant's future appeared as limitless as that of the new nation. His cosmopolitan father, a prominent Federalist and member of Washington's inner circle, was widely considered to be destined for the "Presidential chair."[9] He was a candidate in 1796 (as was his brother Charles Cotesworth Pinckney in 1804 and 1808), but he was beaten out by political chicanery from the supporters of John Adams, the founder of an American political dynasty in Massachusetts of the sort that the Pinckney brothers once imagined they might head in South Carolina.

In 1828, when Cotesworth Pinckney's own second son, Thomas, was born in Charleston weak and sickly during a summer of dengue fever, his future seemed far from secure. His father was a Charleston lawyer of no notable legal gifts with interests in the family rice plantations. The local economy remained stagnant after a decade of decline; grass grew in the business streets of the city. Keenly aware of the vagaries of history, some cautiously ventured analogies between once-flourishing Charleston and decayed Venice. Congressman Robert Y. Hayne sensed in 1828 that Charlestonians were beginning to feel "as strangers in the land of their fathers."[10]

The fortunes of the Pinckney family and Charleston were so intimately intertwined, one might be tempted to say that the events of the year in which young Thomas Pinckney was born had sealed his fate as well as the city's. Had

[8] E. Milby Burton, *The Siege of Charleston, 1861–1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 2–3.

[9] Edward Rutledge to Henry Middleton Rutledge, October 20, 1796, quoted in Frances Leigh Williams, *A Founding Family: The Pinckneys of South Carolina* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 312. General Thomas Pinckney, son of Eliza Lucas and Charles Pinckney, was married first to Elizabeth Motte, daughter of Jacob and Rebecca Motte, and second to another of their daughters, the widow Frances Motte Middleton, who was the mother of Edward Rutledge Middleton.

[10] Theodore D. Jervey, *Robert Y. Hayne and His Times* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1909), 223; Walter J. Fraser Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 206–207.

a black-draped soothsayer been summoned to the cradle of this infant prince, as in fairy tales of old, he would not have seen the revival of his noble family as so many hoped. Instead, the seer would have reeled back in horror, for all four horsemen of the apocalypse—War, Hunger, Death, and Conquest—were already in motion, hurtling like a whirlwind toward this child, this family, and their city. Of course, since history is largely shaped by human endeavor, not the fates, all along the road to ruin, major and minor contingencies might have deflected the thundering herd, but they did not.

Actually, no prophet was needed to see the hazards to Charleston looming in 1828. Events on the national scene were unsettling. The Federalist Party and its association with the old governing elite was moribund. The election of Tennessee Democrat Andrew Jackson as president (the first ever by popular vote) over John Quincy Adams introduced the "age of the common man," as many states (not South Carolina) had made their suffrage laws more democratic. Charlestonians began to imagine a future day when slavery, already a hotly contested issue in some state legislatures, might be decided by public referendum. Earlier that year, in another sign that southern states were losing influence, Congress passed the "Tariff of Abominations," which protected nascent northern manufacturers at the expense of southern agriculturalists. In December, the Pinckneys' friend and Jackson's newly elected vice president, John C. Calhoun, anonymously wrote *The South Carolina Exposition and Protest*. Moving away from his earlier nationalistic view to become more focused on the minority rights of southern states, Calhoun challenged the constitutionality of protectionism that violated the Republic's commonwealth tradition. As other more angry and less restrained voices were added to Calhoun's, politically volatile words such as "disunion," "nullification," and even "secession" began working their way into the public vocabulary. The one bright spot in 1828 was the beginning of construction of a federal fort in Charleston Harbor as part of a national coastal defense system. Its name would be Fort Sumter.[11]

From the day of his birth, the household of young Thomas Pinckney would resound with hot political discussions. His father, Cotesworth, and his two uncles, Colonel Thomas Pinckney Jr. and Edward Rutledge Pinckney, both planters, excitedly debated what courses of action were open to South Carolina in view of the sinking economy and perilous political climate. They vacillated between despair and wild expectation.[12] Although future histori-

[11] Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 206–207.

[12] C. Cotesworth Pinckney (1789–1865) graduated from Harvard College in 1810, took up the practice of law in Charleston, and married Phoebe Caroline Elliott of Beaufort in 1811. They had five children. Colonel Thomas Pinckney (1780–1842) attended Princeton College, served briefly in the U.S. Army and the state militia during the War of 1812, lived the lordly life of a rice planter at Fairfield Plantation on

ans would try to parse out the origins of Charlestonians' discontent (with each generation emphasizing contemporary concerns of their own time), in the minds of the Pinckney brothers, the issues surrounding states' rights, the protection of slavery, the vitality of the plantation economy, their family's safety, and their personal honor were all of a piece. The year 1828 proved challenging on each of those fronts.

In November, the former governor later known as General Thomas Pinckney, a veteran of both the American Revolution and the War of 1812, died at age seventy-nine "full of years and honors."[13] His loss at the end of this critical year hit Charlestonians particularly hard. As the presiding president-general of the Society of the Cincinnati and the last of the great fathers of the American Revolution, Pinckney symbolized an era when Charleston enjoyed the reputation as a cradle of liberty rather than the Gibraltar of slavery; when South Carolina's heroes, Thomas Sumter and William Moultrie, were the nation's heroes; and when its politicians, Henry Laurens and John Rutledge, were American statesmen.

Pinckney's passing should have bathed Charlestonians in nationalist sentiment, but the vigil at his bedside seemed more like a wake for the old Republic, their first love. Something stirred in their hearts as they draped the city in black for his state funeral. Charlestonians reflected on their decline and became nostalgic. They remembered that South Carolina was older than the Union and that when Pinckney had been elected governor, South Carolina was still a sovereign state with Charleston, not Columbia, as its capital.[14]

In 1828 General Pinckney's extraordinary career as soldier, statesman, diplomat, and pioneer agriculturalist was fresh in the minds of Charlestonians because the second edition of Alexander Garden's *Anecdotes of the American Revolution* had just been published. Garden held up "impetuous" Thomas Pinckney and his brilliant brother Charles Cotesworth Pinckney as models of selfless public service. Garden's embellished accounts of their

the Santee River, and dabbled in local politics. He and his wife, Elizabeth Izard, had two girls. Edward Rutledge Pinckney (1800–1828), half-brother of Thomas and Cotesworth, disappointed his father by being asked to leave West Point in 1816 during his second year. He too took up rice planting on the Santee on his father's Eldorado Plantation, won a seat in the state senate in a special election in 1830, and died unmarried in 1832. Alicia Mauldin (U.S. Military Academy Library), e-mail message to author, May 31, 2011; N. Louise Bailey, Mary L. Morgan, Carolyn R. Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate, 1776–1985* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 2: 1281.

[13] Pinckney, *General Thomas Pinckney*, 235; *City Gazette* (Charleston, S.C.), November 3, 1828.

[14] In 1786 the South Carolina legislature, in an opening volley of protest against the long-held political hegemony of the low-country planters, voted to move the state capital from the coastal city of Charleston to a more central and convenient location in the center of the state.

wartime daring, suffering, and dire financial losses in the cause of liberty instilled in the current generation the imperative for patriotic gentlemen to act boldly and without personal regard. Historian Robert M. Weir links the attempt to replicate the selflessness of the eighteenth-century revolutionary ideal with the precipitous, even suicidal behavior of Charlestonians in 1860. "It was the impulsive act that most demonstrated heedlessness of self," writes Weir. His observation helps to explain the series of events in December 1860 that so many participants would later describe as "crazy" or "madness."[15]

By bequeathing one of his swords to each of his three sons, General Pinckney posthumously reinforced the message that principle was more important than consequence. With the revival of interest in the heroics of the American Revolution, a comparison between the 1828 tariff and the colonial tax controversy spawning Charleston's Tea Party in 1774 was inevitable. During an 1828 Carolina Day commemoration of the American victory at Fort Moultrie, Cotesworth Pinckney raised his glass and made a pointed toast, "Let *New* England beware how she imitates the *Old*."[16]

All three Pinckney brothers joined the States' Rights and Free Trade Party, which was organized around the proposition that Congress had overextended its power in the matter of the tariff. Colonel Thomas and Cotesworth served as delegates to the Nullification Convention in November 1832 that declared both the "abominable" tariff and a compromise tariff null and void in the state of South Carolina.[17] President Jackson's explosive "Proclamation to the People of South Carolina" of December 10, warning of the treasonous perils of disunion and threatening to force the collection of federal taxes by military might if necessary, stunned the Pinckney household with its force.

[15] See Alexander Garden, *Anecdotes of the American Revolution, Illustrative of the Talents and Virtues of the Heroes and Patriots, Who Acted the Most Conspicuous Parts Therein* (1822; repr., Charleston, S.C.: A. E. Miller, 1828). Pinckney, *General Thomas Pinckney*, 208; Robert M. Weir, *"The Last of American Freemen": Studies in the Political Culture of the Colonial and Revolutionary South* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1980), 227, 229–230. Cotesworth Pinckney's son, the Reverend C. C. Pinckney, would claim that abolitionists "goaded the South to madness" and that the "anti-slavery fanaticism of those whose ancestors imported slaves and then sold them to us" drove South Carolina to the desperate act of secession. Pinckney, *General Thomas Pinckney*, 95.

[16] *National Register*, July 26, 1828, 352, quoted in Robert Tinkler, *James Hamilton of South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 94.

[17] Pinckney, *General Thomas Pinckney*, 230; *Journal of the Convention of the People of South Carolina Assembled at Columbia on the 19th November 1832, and Again on the 11th March 1833* (Columbia, S.C.: A. S. Johnston, 1833), 21. Colonel Thomas Pinckney represented the Pendleton District and Cotesworth Pinckney, the Charleston parishes of Saint Michael's and Saint Philip's. Edward Rutledge Pinckney, who was then completing his first term as state senator from Saint James Santee Parish, died on September 1, 1832, before he could attend the Nullification Convention in November.

The "situation of our state" was the "the all absorbing topic" during that yuletide season. The adults, wreathed in anxiety, felt "too deeply the crisis of our affairs" to share four-year-old Thomas's "joy" or even to muster a response to his cheerful "Merry Christmas!"[18]

Cotesworth's cousins Harriott and Maria Henrietta Pinckney, two of General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney's extremely wealthy daughters who ran his plantations after his death in 1824, were unfazed by the parvenu president's tirade. Recognized as the family's "Great Politicians" and numbered among Charleston's most militant nullifiers, the sisters enjoyed the freedom of "blessed singularity" in the family mansion on East Bay Street, which they planned to convert into "Nullification Castle" should Jackson order a raid on Charleston. Totally unafraid of the possible dire consequences, Maria Henrietta colluded with Governor James Hamilton Jr. to import a cargo of sugar in "a practical test of the working of the tariff law."[19]

A compromise was negotiated before South Carolina's militia fired shots at federal vessels or President Jackson had Maria Pinckney hung, but the audacity of the nullification effort would taint the reputation of Charleston, even among southerners, and force South Carolina into greater isolation from the mainstream political life of the nation. When rice and cotton rice prices rose, the nullification fever receded and then went dormant, but it still lingered like malaria in Charleston's body politic, ready to erupt in moments of stress. Unionist James Louis Petigru exclaimed to William Elliott III, young Thomas Pinckney's uncle, that "the public mind is poisoned."[20]

As if to demonstrate Petigru's point, a few years after the nullification crisis had passed, Maria Henrietta, defiant to the end, refused her doctor's orders to repair to a cooler climate because, according to a cousin, "her *patriotism* will not let her travel North of the Potomac." In 1836 she died where she had always lived, sacrificing herself on the altar of states' rights and becoming perhaps Charleston's first casualty in the War for Southern Independence.[21]

[18] Caroline Elliott Pinckney to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney Jr., December 26, 1832, Means-Pinckney Family Papers, 1701–1983, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston (hereafter cited as M-PFP).

[19] Ibid.; James Louis Petigru to Hugh S. Legare, February 5, 1833, in James Petigru Carson, *Life, Letters, and Speeches of James Louis Petigru: The Union Man of South Carolina* (Washington, D.C.: W. H. Lowdermilk and Co., 1920), 118n. Maria Henrietta Pinckney wrote a cogent defense of states' rights and nullification, *The Quintessence of Long Speeches, Arranged as a Political Catechism* (Charleston, S.C.: A. E. Miller, 1830).

[20] James Louis Petigru to William Elliott, September 4, 1832, in Carson, *James Louis Petigru*, 91.

[21] Jeffery Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670–1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 220.

Petigru likewise wryly noted in 1832 that "fanaticism of all kinds spreads."[22] In 1828, the same year that Cotesworth Pinckney lost his faith in the federal government, he had "found the way of salvation." Pinckney was in the vanguard of low-country men and women, particularly those in Beaufort (his wife's family home), who embraced both nullification and evangelical religion. Stung by the accusations of northern abolitionists who had begun denouncing not only slavery as a sin but also slaveholders as sinners, Pinckney vowed to parry their accusations. Instead of the torturous logic others would pursue that slavery was a positive good, he admitted a flaw in the southern system. Slaves should have access to religion, which was, he argued, more important than freedom.[23] The planters along the Santee River denounced him as "crazy" when he began his experiment of running his plantations under the mantle of Christian paternalism, at least as he imagined it. Pinckney waved away alarmists who reminded him that Denmark Vesey, reputed fomenter of a Charleston slave revolt in 1822, also had been a churchgoer. Cotesworth Pinckney concluded, as his father had, that the real danger to South Carolina resided in the literate free blacks who spread the contagion of revolt. He professed absolute certainty that his family had nothing to fear from their own slaves. The Pinckney children taught in Sunday schools held for the slave children on their plantations; in 1832 even young Thomas tutored his own "scholar."[24]

Belief that their righteousness and abundant good acts placed them among God's elect encouraged the Pinckneys and the other true believers in the low country to assume that God was on their side, an attitude that still would be in currency in 1860. At the time of Jackson's fierce rebuke to South Carolina in 1832, Thomas's aunt Mary Elliott "was much alarmed at the threats of the Pres[ident]—for I felt that as a People, we were more awake to our duties to God, and less deserving of judgments than at any former period of our history & I therefore trusted that He would protect us from the evil counsels of our opponents." Although Thomas's uncle Stephen Elliott hoped

[22] James Louis Petigru to Hugh S. Legare, December 21, 1832, in Carson, *James Louis Petigru*, 114.

[23] Caroline Pinckney Seabrook to Mary M. Leverett, July 1, 1865, in *The Leverett Letters: Correspondence of a South Carolina Family, 1851–1868*, ed. by Frances Wallace Taylor, Catherine Taylor Matthews, and J. Tracy Power (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 397; Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, *An Address Delivered in Charleston, before the Agricultural Society of South Carolina, at Its Anniversary Meeting, on Tuesday, the 18th August, 1829* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1829), 14, 18, 24.

[24] Caroline Elliott Pinckney to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney Jr., December 26, 1832, M-PFP. In General Thomas Pinckney's widely read pamphlet published under a pseudonym *Reflections, Occasioned by the Late Disturbances in Charleston, by Achates* (Charleston, S.C.: A. E. Miller, 1822), he blamed the alleged Denmark Vesey rebellion on the literate free blacks and the inflammatory writings by zealous abolitionists.

for a peaceful resolution rather than a showdown, he wrote that "should God in his wisdom, send war upon us, I should go to the struggle, without fear or doubt because my conscience in this matter is clear before God."[25]

Cotesworth Pinckney, who had been quite "unconscious" of his election to the largely ceremonial office of lieutenant governor by the state legislature in 1832, withdrew from public life after the nullification crisis, having come to accept religion as the cure to all strife and politics "incompatible with Christian charity and brotherly love." So did his eldest son, Cotesworth Jr., who left his Beaufort law firm in 1832 along with five others (including a future bishop), abandoning Caesar for Christ, to take up the cloth.[26]

Young Thomas Pinckney was raised in an environment of sectional antagonism, inflamed southern pride, political passion, growing southern nationalism, declining expectations, and contested ideals of patriotism. Never robust as a child, he idled his time away immersed in history books and adventure tales of Scottish chieftains embroidered by Jane Porter and Sir Walter Scott. He grew into an aristocratic, intelligent young man, but like many of his class, he was not deeply reflective or questioning of the great southern truths that, unchallenged, had hardened into dogma over the years. He drew his identity from his membership in the Pinckney family and wanted nothing so much in the world as to be like his father and win his approval.[27]

Although Thomas's only real ambition was to live the independent life of a rice planter working his family's thousands of acres with their hundreds of slaves, in 1846 he obeyed when his father, keenly aware of the uncertain future of rice culture in the low country, insisted that he attend a southern college, master a profession, and in the process, master himself. After two years at the University of Virginia, he returned to Charleston to enter the Medical College of South Carolina. He graduated in 1850, the year that John C. Calhoun died and Charleston held its first state funeral since General Pinckney's death in 1828. Free of Calhoun's tempering influence, Robert Barnwell Rhett and his radical followers accelerated their campaign to attract other southern states

[25] Mary Elliott to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney Jr., January 3, 1833, M-PFP. Stephen Elliott is quoted in Caroline Elliott Pinckney to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney Jr., December 26, 1833, ibid.

[26] Caroline Elliott Pinckney to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney Jr., December 26, 1833, M-PFP; Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney Jr., May 20, 1834, letter, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

[27] James C. Hemphill, *Men of Mark in South Carolina: . . . A Collection of Biographies of Leading Men in the State*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Men of Mark Publishing Co., 1907), 301–302.

to the secessionist fold. During the decade of the 1850s, the fissures within the nation visible in 1828 grew wider and deeper.[28]

In November 1860, the Pinckney family was in Flat Rock, North Carolina, preparing to move back to the low country for the winter when they received word of Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency. Having lived all of his life under the threat of secession, and having no strong connection to any of the national parties, Thomas Pinckney, and indeed his whole family, had fallen more or less into the "dross of indifference" about yet one more crisis. He met the long-expected news with equanimity.[29]

As the Pinckneys made their way across the state by stage and train, however, and upon realizing that "secession" had become the "watchword" in Columbia, they "took fire" and were swept up in the frenzy of excitement when they reached Charleston. The entire family became "*able* politicians" and anxiously traded newspapers back and forth to catch up on the latest dispatches from all over the country. No headline, of course, was more heart stopping than that of the *Charleston Mercury* on November 8: "The tea has been thrown overboard, the revolution of 1860 has been initiated."[30]

Once again seeing a holy cause that linked past and present, Cotesworth Pinckney experienced a surge of the old passion. Vindicated by the resurrection of the spirit of '32, he assured his anxious family that the right to secede was "self-evident," since his father, when governor, would have never irrevocably locked the republic of South Carolina into the "federal compact."[31]

Thomas Pinckney was not so sure. Although he would have at no time considered openly questioning his father, he was attuned to opposing opinions even within his own family. Two of Pinckney's uncles, Francis Kinloch Huger and William Elliott III, who had opposed nullification and now secession, believed disunion meant war. Huger's son Colonel Benjamin H. Huger and his grandson, an 1860 West Point graduate, had sworn oaths of allegiance to the Unites States, and both would face an unbearable moral dilemma if their state seceded. Elliott, not unsympathetic to South Carolina's grievances, was realistic about the inadequacy of the southern economy to

[28] Joseph W. Barnwell, "Captain Thomas Pinckney," *Confederate Veteran*, August 1916, 344; Lacy K. Ford, *The Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 194.

[29] Mary Elliott Pinckney to Phoebe Elliott, December 14, 1860, in *A Savannah Family, 1830–1901: Papers from the Clermont Huger Lee Collection*, comp. and ed. Anna Habersham Wright Smith (Milledgeville, Ga.: Boyd Publishing, 1999), 65.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.; Thomas Pinckney, "My Reminiscences of the War and Reconstruction Times," proof sheets, 1910, Alderman Library, Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1. The manuscript copy of Pinckney's wartime reminiscences is on deposit at the South Carolina Historical Society.

sustain a war and worried most of all about the rabid secessionists, "the incompetency of the men—now having our fortunes and lives in their keeping."[32]

In contrast to his seventy-year-old father who saw secession as the great culminating, justifying event of his life, Thomas Pinckney feared that war would ruin his own life chances. In March 1860, his father had finally given him title to Echaw, a plantation that had once belonged to General Pinckney located about twenty miles up the South Santee River from his father's establishment. Despite the unsettled state of politics and the breakdown of the Democratic National Convention the following month, the eager young Pinckney had confidently gone deeply in debt to buy slaves for his rice operation.[33]

On December 21, Thomas Pinckney faced his options soberly. Supporting secession as a constitutional right was one thing, but bearing arms against the United States was quite another. Believing that the exemption from militia service he enjoyed as a physician would continue for the near term at least, he adopted the same strategy on secession as lame-duck president James Buchanan: "Watchful Waiting."[34]

His parents and surviving cousin Harriott Pinckney, on the other hand, who were ambitious to see military glory once again attached to the family name, pressed him to make a decision. They hoped he would take up one of old General Pinckney's swords and join a prestigious unit such as the Charleston Light Dragoons. In his will, General Pinckney had left instructions that future generations inheriting his swords should never draw one "in a private quarrel nor leave it in its scabbard, when their country demanded their service." As Thomas Pinckney contemplated his future course of action, the word "country" would have presented him with a quandary after South Carolina's secession. He considered himself a patriot, of course, but for all practical purposes, Pinckney was a man without a country to love. The new "Independent Sovereignty," as he called the republic of South Carolina, did not even have an official flag; the proposed Confederacy was yet unborn. According to reports, Mississippi and Alabama were expected to secede soon and ally with the Palmetto State. He did not love those states as much as he did his own, nor was he even sure that he loved them more than Virginia, the

[32] William Elliott Sr. to William Elliott Jr., April 10, 1861, Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1701–1898, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (hereafter cited as EGFP). Francis Kinloch Huger, an aide to General Pinckney during the War of 1812, later married his daughter Harriott Lucas. William Elliott III of Beaufort (and brother of Phoebe Caroline Elliott Pinckney) had been Cotesworth Pinckney's roommate at Harvard College.

[33] Ibid.; Robert G. Pasquill Jr., *Battery Warren and the Santee Light Artillery* (Columbia: R. L. Bryan Co., 1987), v.

[34] Pinckney, "My Reminiscences," 2.

aristocratic state so similar to South Carolina where he had attended school and that, so far, remained in the Union.[35]

An article entitled "Patriotism," published in *Harper's Weekly* during the week of Lincoln's inauguration in March 1861, raised the same question that men, North and South, were contemplating "at every corner." "What is our country?" it asked. The problem posed by secession was condensed to two queries. First, "How much country must a man love to be a genuine patriot?" And second, "Can you be a patriot by loving your own state and not the others of the Union or the Confederacy?" If a man professed love of the Stars and Stripes in South Carolina, the article claimed, he risked imprisonment for treason. "One says you must love the whole country under the nation's flag. The other—it is enough to love your own state." Following that logic, the article concluded, "then one person might say loving one's own county is sufficient, another, his own town, and still another, the farm of his birth."[36]

While Pinckney was searching his soul about going to war, the war came to him. On December 30, 1860, Governor Francis W. Pickens urged all Santee planters to build batteries on their properties to defend the entrances to Winyah Bay and the Santee Rivers from northern invasion. "I doubt not that the same Patriotism which characterized your Sires burns as strongly in your Breasts now," Pickens wrote. Dutifully, Thomas Pinckney had his slaves dig rifle pits along the riverfront at the family's Eldorado and Fairfield Plantations and his own Echaw Plantation.[37]

Pinckney took his stand on the South Santee quite literally in defense of his ancestral home. After authorities predicted that "marauding Yankees" had likely set course for the vulnerable rice lands, the gold mines of South Carolina, he deemed "the time had come when everyman should be prepared to answer a call from his state, should it come." On January 5, 1861, he enlisted in a Georgetown cavalry unit headed by then Captain Arthur Middleton Manigault, a veteran of the Mexican War and former businessman who had been planting rice on the North Santee in his retirement.[38] Although other officers chose the shorter, lighter sabers used by the British in India, Pinckney clung to his grandfather's sword as if it were Excalibur until it was taken from him at gunpoint by one of General George Armstrong Custer's men deep in the Virginia woods during the terrible summer of 1864. General Pinckney's sword was his tie to the past and a badge of legitimacy linking the rebellions

[35] Pinckney, *General Thomas Pinckney*, 230; Pinckney, "My Reminiscences," 1–2.

[36] "Patriotism," *Harper's Weekly*, March 2, 1861, 130.

[37] Pasquill, *Battery Warren*, 1. By the end of 1862, Battery Warren, named after a local hero from the American Revolution, Colonel Samuel Warren, would be built on Pinckney's Echaw Plantation.

[38] Pinckney, "My Reminiscences," 2.

of 1860 and 1776. The relict also endowed him, a young doctor, with a status unwarranted by his inexperience in military affairs.[39]

In late January 1861, a high-spirited Captain Pinckney sporting a general's sword called on his eight-five-year-old cousin Harriott Pinckney to receive her blessing. Steeled with the outraged militancy of Joan of Arc in spite of her advanced age, she was wholeheartedly behind the war and learning to knit socks for soldiers. Mary Boykin Chesnut referred to her as "the last of the Old World Pinckneys."[40]

After gaining all the limited "knowledge of cavalry tactics" offered in Georgetown, Pinckney helped organize an unaffiliated company that became known variously as the Santee Mounted Rifles, Saint James Santee Mounted Rifles, and (after his election as captain) Captain Thomas Pinckney's Company of Independent Riflemen. Commissioned as a home guard by the governor, Pinckney's company was merged into a coastal defense operation and given specific responsibility for operating a picket line along the isolated, twenty-mile strip between the outlet of the North Santee River and Bull's Island. Pinckney candidly admitted at the time that they were still basically "civilians with little knowledge or experience in military matters."[41]

Predictably, Pinckney recruited his kin among the Cordes, Alston, and Mazyck families for leadership positions in his company. Although later historians would be perplexed by their motives, Pinckney was not at all surprised when from out of the piney woods, off of the rivers, and across the fields came white non-slaveholders and non-property holders to enlist at his muster. All manner of men—young, old, backwoodsmen, stock minders, overseers, turpentine gatherers, yeomen farmers, cousins, and brothers—from all around Saint James Santee Parish and a few from All Saints Parish rode in to volunteer, straddling farm horses with homemade saddles and carrying shotguns or even flintlocks. Pinckney first raised a company, then later a squadron. Although these volunteers left no written records explaining their willingness to fight, they surely were moved by the most basic motivation of protecting their homes and families. "Yankee marauders" were their

[39] Mary Elliott Pinckney to Caroline Pinckney Seabrook, January 22 [1861], M-PFP; Gabriel Edward Manigault, "Autobiography," 320, in folder 13, Manigault Family Papers, 1824–1897, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina. Captain Thomas Pinckney was captured during the Battle of Haw's Shop in Hanover County on May 28, 1864. Pinckney, "My Reminiscences," 23.

[40] Mary Elliott Pinckney to Caroline Pinckney Seabrook, January 22 [1861], M-PFP; Mary Boykin Chestnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, ed. Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1905), 32.

[41] Pinckney, "My Reminiscences," 1–2, 5; "Thomas Pinckney," Compiled Service Record M267, roll 381, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as PCSR).

enemies too. Confidently, they enlisted for the duration of a war that they were promised would be brief.[42]

Fostering harmony across all classes of the white population had always been a matter of both good politics and domestic security in the coastal black belt. Visitors to the Santee parishes in the late eighteenth century were often surprised to see overseers attending church with the "fashionable" planters. Homespun brushing up against silk, everyone was united under the liturgy of the Episcopal church. Pinckney believed that the tradition of inclusion along the Santee River forged in the seventeenth century during the days of the "Cavaliers" and the "Huguenots" had assured the volunteers of 1860 that the planters would continue to look after the needs of their families when they went off to fight in common cause.[43]

The state militia law demanding service of all white men also fostered personal relationships among the classes. By 1860 each militia beat bore responsibility for manning slave patrols. At the regularly scheduled musters, planters, wearing their father's or grandfather's old moth-eaten officer's uniforms and ill-fitting plumed hats, seldom pressed the privates to drill any more than they were inclined. Afterwards, they spent the rest of the day together engaged in horse races, drinking, and general jollification. At election time, candidates for the state House of Representatives (the only branch elected by popular ballot) competed for voters with barbeques and spirited punches. Politics on the Santee were enduringly local.[44]

Despite his unpromising start, Pinckney had grown tall and oak-like. His parents had sent him away to the healthier pinelands around Pendleton for much of his childhood to protect him from the swamp fevers that plagued the rice plantations. In contrast, many of his recruits, victims of the toxic disease-ridden environment, were as spindly as pine saplings with pockmarks, bowlegs, and sunken cheeks. Pinckney's younger sister Mary Elliott felt discouraged that her compatriots in this new country would be these "fever-shaken, mosquito-bitten wretches" and tactlessly expressed her doubt they could defeat northern soldiers "from better climes."[45]

[42] Serving in the Santee Mounted Rifles with Captain Thomas Pinckney were First Lieutenant Edward F. Allston, Second Lieutenant P. Bacot Allston, Lieutenant Alexander Watson Cordes, Sergeant George McDuffie Cordes, and Corporal Philip P. Mazyck. See PCSR.

[43] G. S. S. [pseud.], "Sketches of the South Santee," *American Monthly Magazine*, October 1836, 315.

[44] David Doar, *A Sketch of the Agricultural Society of St. James, Santee, South Carolina, and an Address on the Traditions and Reminiscences of the Parish Delivered before Society on 4th of July, 1907* (Charleston, S.C.: Calder-Fladger Co., 1908), 22–23.

[45] Mary Elliott Pinckney to Phoebe Elliott, December 14, 1860, in Smith, *Savannah Family*, 65.

Pinckney, however, came to love these rough-hewn recruits that he compared to the famed "irregulars" who rode with the "Swamp Fox," General Francis Marion. They became his country. He invested heart, soul, and ambition in them. To his parent's distress, he would refuse future promotions rather than be parted from "his troopers." He stayed with them, and they him. He took particular pride in the fact that they had volunteered and compared them unfavorably with the "Tories," those "ignorant whites" populating the mountains around Flat Rock who would "take to the balsam" rather than fight the "rich man's war."[46] Over time, Pinckney's Santee Riflemen and the other independent South Carolina companies lost their local identities as they were folded first into larger state units in April 1861 and then in October 1861 into the provisional army of the Confederate States of America.[47]

With the attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, everything changed for the city of Charleston. The world no longer followed daily events there once Virginia and states of the Upper South seceded. After more than thirty years of threats and compromises, the deed had been done; the war had come. Charleston's four months of fame were over. Over the next four years, South Carolina's soldiers would be diverted to more strategic locations. Charleston would be blockaded, bombed, burned, and abandoned. The whirlwind blew up the Carolina coast. War, Hunger, Death, and Conquest rampaged in its wake. As always, Time, that "ever rolling stream, bore all its sons away," and with them not only the Old South but also Old America, with its "defects and virtues," were gone forever.[48]

[46] Pinckney, "My Reminiscences," 2; Mary Elliott Johnstone to Anne Elliott, July 13 [1861], EGFP.

[47] Pinckney served as captain of Company A in Major Edward Manigault's battalion (later Byrd's Battalion), also known as the Sixth Battalion, South Carolina Infantry, and mustered into service at McClellanville on April 15, 1861. After the reorganization of 1862, his troops became Company D, Fourth South Carolina Cavalry (Rutledge's Regiment), and would be assigned in 1864 to General Matthew C. Butler's brigade attached to Hampton's Legion that was fighting with the Army of Northern Virginia. Compiled Service Records, M267, rolls CW 916 and 564, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; PCSR.

[48] Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).