

Pickneys Played Important Role In S.C. History

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Indigo industry pioneer Eliza Lucas married Charles Pinckney, a Chief Justice of the Province of South Carolina, in 1774. These illustrious South Carolinians had two sons who became national heroes after the Revolutionary War: Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and Thomas Pinckney, who served as a South Carolina governor and a minister to both Spain and Great Britain.

Born in 1746, at age 7 Charles Cotesworth Pinckney accompanied his parents to England, where he received a solid education at Oxford University and Middle Temple School in London. Although he admitted to the English bar in 1769, young Charles decided to travel through Europe and then return to South Carolina, where he was admitted to the bar in 1770.

Pinckney's political career began in 1769 with a special election that placed him in the Twelfth-Ninth Assembly, where he stayed until 1775. Elections to the first and second Provincial Congress (1775-1776) and General Assemblies (1776-1780; 1783-1784) followed.

In 1773, Pinckney married Sarah, daughter of Henry Middleton and sister of Arthur Middleton, one of South Carolina's four signers of the Declaration of Independence.

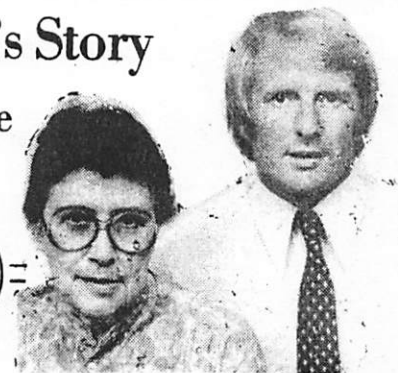
Pinckney played a very active role in the Revolutionary War as an ardent patriot. In a letter to a friend he wrote, "The freedom and independence of my country are the gods of my idolatry."

His most important service during the war was to set up a battery that drove the British warships out of Charleston harbor. He also built Moultrie's famous fort on Sullivan Island and was later captured by the British.

The British sent him to Philadelphia, where he was imprisoned with his brother Thomas for a time. When the British exchanged him in 1782, he rejoined the patriot army.

South Carolina's Story

The making of a state



After the war, Pinckney returned to his law practice, but his desire to serve the public remained strong all of his life. South Carolina elected him to the lower house of the legislature in 1782, even before he left the army.

William Pierce wrote that Pinckney "was intimately acquainted with every species of political learning, and has a spirit of application and industry beyond most men."

Perhaps Charles Cotesworth Pinckney's greatest contribution to American history and to the making of South Carolina was his prominent role in the proceedings of the 1787 convention leading to the drafting of the American Constitution.

Pinckney was one of four South Carolinians elected to the Constitutional Convention, the others being his cousin Charles Pinckney, John Rutledge and Pierce Butler. Although at age 29 Pinckney was one of the youngest men at the convention, his ability had been recognized both in his state and in Congress in August 1786, when he was made chairman of the subcommittee that reported a draft of amendments to the Articles of Confederation.

Controversy still exists over whether Pinckney actually wrote the Constitution. The draft of a document that he presented at the convention, reportedly containing most of what was put in the finished documents, was lost.

Of the controversy, South Carolina historian Lewis P. Jones writes, "Certainly his (Pinckney's) role was of considerable importance, not made less so by his own claims, Pinckney being overly vain and not prone to hide his light under a bushel."

Nevertheless, Pinckney is generally credited with suggesting the year 1788 as the date at which Congress should assume power over the foreign slave trade; persuasively opposing any religious test for office; and arguing strongly for extending senate power to ratify treaties as a check against possible presidential abuse of power.

After the Philadelphia convention, Pinckney continued to play a leading role in constitutional affairs, serving in 1789 as a member of the state convention that ratified the Constitution and as a delegate to the state's Constitutional Convention of 1790.

With the resolution of this important business, Pinckney remained active in public affairs, serving as a minister to France and as a Federalist vice presidential candidate in 1804 and 1808.

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, one of South Carolina's ablest public servants, died in Charleston in 1825.