

# THE SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

JULY 2013

VOLUME 114 • NUMBER 3



Sponsors at the College of Charleston include:

Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture

Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World Program

Department of History

© 2013 South Carolina Historical Society

THE  
SOUTH CAROLINA  
HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

JULY 2013

VOLUME 114 • NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- "I Am Afraid to Venture until the New Constitution":  
John Kean and the Ratification Debate in South Carolina  
by Jonathan Mercantini 192
- Complicated Sympathies: John C. Calhoun's  
Sentimental Union and the South  
by Zoltán Vajda 210
- "Little Better than a Heap of Rubbish": History, Legend,  
and the Archaeological Record at Camden  
by Kenneth E. Lewis 231

- BOOK REVIEWS 249
- ARCHIVES UPDATE 267
- NEWS 274

## "LITTLE BETTER THAN A HEAP OF RUBBISH": HISTORY, LEGEND, AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD AT CAMDEN

KENNETH E. LEWIS\*

IN MAY 1781, A MILITARY FORCE COMPOSED OF REGULARS AND loyalists ended its nearly year-long occupation of the town of Camden, an abandonment that signaled the dramatic collapse of Great Britain's armed effort to stifle rebellion and reassert imperial control of the South Carolina backcountry. Camden had been the centerpiece of a strategy that established permanent garrisons at key points in the interior to serve as bases from which to pacify the countryside and launch an invasion of adjacent southern colonies. Although the British campaign initially met with success, threats posed by conventional American forces and an intensifying guerrilla movement soon left their interior garrisons isolated and increasingly vulnerable to attack. By late spring, the deteriorating situation compelled the British commander at Camden, Lieutenant Colonel Francis, Lord Rawdon, to evacuate the town and move his troops and loyalist refugees to a safer location.<sup>1</sup> Rawdon removed useable stores and destroyed all that he could not carry, razed the defensive works, and set fire to other buildings to deny the advancing enemy anything of value. A loyalist who evacuated Camden with Rawdon remarked that "the army . . . left all the town burn-

\* Kenneth E. Lewis is professor of anthropology at Michigan State University. The research presented in this article was derived from data collected by the author during archaeological projects conducted for the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology in the fall of 1974 and the summer of 1975 and for the Historic Camden Foundation in the summers of 1996, 1997, and 1998. The author wishes to thank Chris Valvano for producing the fine maps accompanying the text. Woody Bowden, Carolyn Baker Lewis, and several anonymous reviewers read and provided helpful commentary on the article.

<sup>1</sup>The British commander's account of the conditions leading to the abandonment of Camden are found in Francis, Lord Rawdon, to Charles, Earl Cornwallis, May 24, 1781, Cornwallis Papers (CP), 30/11/6, 106-111, Public Record Office (PRO), London; Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, July 24, 1781, CP, 30/11/74, 47-48, PRO. Major Charles Stedman, a loyalist officer familiar with Camden, discussed the circumstances surrounding these actions in his contemporary account. See Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War* (London: Printed for the author and sold by J. Murray, J. Debrett, and J. Kerby, 1794), 2: 355-362. See also Banestre Tarleton, *A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* (1787; repr., Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Co., 1967), 473-474; Henry Lee, *The American Revolution in the South*, edited with a biography of his father by Robert E. Lee (1869; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969), 343-345.

ing." Upon occupying Camden immediately after its abandonment, General Nathanael Greene, commander of American forces in the South, noted that his adversaries had reduced it to "little better than a heap of rubbish."<sup>2</sup> Such descriptions created an image of massive destruction that came to characterize the aftermath of the vicious backcountry war. But how accurate were these raw, early reports of the burning of Camden by the British?

This question was particularly significant in the eyes of eighteenth-century observers because of Camden's role as the central settlement in the interior of colonial South Carolina. The town had become the focus of a regional economy and hub of trade in the Wateree Valley. By the 1760s, low-country mercantile interests provided the capital to expand specialized export production and improve transportation, both of which accelerated the integration of the frontier within the larger Atlantic world.<sup>3</sup> While Camden remained small compared to contemporary European towns of similar function, it was laid out on a regular plan, housed a number of commercial and industrial activities as well as the district courts, and contained the Georgian mansion of its wealthiest merchant, Joseph Kershaw. All of these elements reflected Camden's status as an urban center and set it apart from other settlements of the backcountry.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Ingraham Diary, May 10, 1781, Historic Camden Foundation, Camden, S.C.; Nathanael Greene to Samuel Huntington, May 14, 1781, Nathanael Greene Papers (NGP), Papers of the Continental Congress (PCC), R-175, I-155, vol. 2, 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> The classic study of Camden's eighteenth century history is, of course, Thomas J. Kirkland and Robert M. Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, vol. 1, *Colonial and Revolutionary* (Columbia, S.C.: State Co., 1905). More recent historical accounts are included in Robert L. Meriwether, *The Expansion of South Carolina, 1729-1765* (Kingsport, Tenn.: Southern Publishers, 1940), chap. 9; Joan A. Inabinet and L. Glen Inabinet, *A History of Kershaw County, South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), chaps. 3-7.

<sup>4</sup> Camden's rise as an economic center is examined in Judith Jane Schulz, "The Rise and Decline of Camden as South Carolina's Major Inland Trading Center, 1751-1829: A Historical Geographic Study" (M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1972). Joseph A. Ernst and H. Roy Merrens present arguments for the town's role as an urban center based on the presence of public functions rather than size. See Ernst and Merrens, "'Camden's Turrets Pierce the Skies': The Urban Process in the Southern Colonies during the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. ser., 30 (October 1973): 549-574. The link between Camden's morphology and the cultural processes of development in the southern backcountry are further explored in Kenneth E. Lewis, *Camden: A Frontier Town in Eighteenth Century South Carolina*, Anthropological Studies 2 (Columbia: South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, 1976). For the economic development of Camden in the larger context of the South Carolina backcountry, see Lewis, "Economic Development in the South Carolina Backcountry: A View from Camden," in *The Southern Colonial Backcountry: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on*

The image of a devastated town of such importance fit the popular perception of a merciless enemy having sought, even in defeat, to destroy the material wealth of those who followed the rebel cause. Barely a year after the evacuation, Camden resident Mary Clay spoke of the "destructions committed by the once inexorable Britains, in every corner of our little town." Even a decade later, when President George Washington visited Camden during his southern tour, he found it a "small place . . . much injured by the British."<sup>5</sup> As the new nation emerged, the picture of a ravaged Camden became embedded in literary works relating to the American Revolution in South Carolina. In her popular travel account of 1831, Anne Royall spoke of "the conflagration of the British, who burnt Camden to the ground," and a dozen years later, William Gilmore Simms's influential geography text commented that Camden was "destroyed" by the British "when they were compelled to abandon it." Similarly, Joseph Johnson's massive 1851 account of the Revolution in the South related that "Camden was left in ruins," and a biographical sketch of Nathanael Greene from 1859 referenced "the destruction of Camden."<sup>6</sup> The town's obliteration symbolized the intensity of a patriotic war now rapidly fading from living memory, and its fate was a part of the mythology that grew out of that seminal experience.<sup>7</sup>

Other accounts cast doubt on the notion that Camden was largely destroyed in a massive conflagration. Even the contemporary observers, who extrapolated widespread destruction, were specific in mentioning particular structures in their accounts: the mill, jail, barracks, and defensive works. Major Charles Stedman, a loyalist, mentioned only the destruction of "such stores . . . as could not be removed."<sup>8</sup> Of these, the barracks alone were actually situated within the nucleated settlement. Despite reports that other

*Frontier Communities*, ed. David Colin Crass, Stephen D. Smith, Martha Zierden, and Richard D. Brooks (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 87–107; Lewis, "The Metropolis and the Backcountry: The Making of a Colonial Landscape on the South Carolina Frontier," *Historical Archaeology* 33, no. 3 (1999): 3–13.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Clay to Nancy Clay, November 9, 1782, Mary Clay Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 6, *January 1790–December 1799* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 148.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Royall, *Mrs. Royall's Southern Tour; or, Second Series of the Black Book* (Washington, D.C.: By the author, 1831), 2: 41; William Gilmore Simms, *The Geography of South Carolina* (Charleston, S.C.: Babcock and Co., 1843), 89; Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South* (Charleston, S.C.: Walker and James, 1851), 466; W. L. Barre, *Lives of Illustrious Men of America, Distinguished in the Annals of the Republic as Legislators, Warriors and Philosophers* (New York: George F. Tuttle, 1859), 326.

<sup>7</sup> Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 1: 270–271.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Stedman, for example, mentioned only the destruction of "such stores . . . as could not be removed." See Stedman, *American War*, 362.

buildings in the town were burned along with the military stores, written sources attest to the fact that many were not. Captain Walter Finney, an American officer passing through Camden immediately after the evacuation, remarked that "at present there is not more than a half dozen houses [that] can be occupied, the rest being either totally demolished or so much wrecked by the British that the[y] are abandoned by their owners."<sup>9</sup> Three years later, traveler William Drayton noted that although private buildings had been burned and much of their furniture destroyed, there were still "some good houses in this town."<sup>10</sup> The survival of several significant structures implies that the destruction was far from universal and much of the town remained intact, if not untouched, by the fire.

Perhaps the most visible prewar structure was the mansion of Joseph Kershaw, Camden's leading merchant. Completed in the 1770s, this extraordinary building was a large two-storied Palladian house set on a raised cellar. Its square plan incorporated paired rooms on either side of a central hallway, with a two-storied pedimented portico in front and a piazza to the rear. Reminiscent of houses occupied by the elites of Charleston, the mansion was unique in the backcountry and testified to its owner's wealth and high standing.<sup>11</sup> Situated just east of town, it had served as the headquarters of the occupying army and was incorporated into Camden's fortifications. Despite its military use, the mansion remained habitable, and only two weeks after the British left Camden, the Kershaw family found conditions there suitable enough for them to move from their rural exile back into "J K's large new House."<sup>12</sup>

One of the principal structures within the palisaded town that survived the evacuation was the British military hospital. Camden's central location in the network of interior military posts made it an ideal location for a general hospital capable of treating casualties incurred by units operating throughout the eastern portion of the province. The town's proximity to a major battle in August 1780, together with the widespread prevalence of malaria, smallpox, and other debilitating diseases among the troops, required that significant space be devoted to the care of the sick and wounded. Situated

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Lee Boyle, ed., "The Revolutionary War Diaries of Captain Walter Finney," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 98 (April 1997): 133.

<sup>10</sup> Keith Krawczynski, ed., "William Drayton's Journal of a 1784 Tour of the South Carolina Backcountry," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 97 (July 1996): 202-203.

<sup>11</sup> Alice R. Huger Smith and D. E. Huger Smith, *The Dwelling Houses of Charleston, South Carolina* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1917), 93, 190. See also Kenneth E. Lewis, *A Functional Study of the Kershaw House Site in Camden, South Carolina*, Research Manuscript Series 110 (Columbia: South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Mathis Diary, May 23, 1781, in Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 1: 402.

in the southwestern part of Camden, the Kershaw-Chesnut store provided a building large enough to accommodate this activity, and circumstantial evidence suggests that it was used for this purpose.<sup>13</sup> The battle at nearby Hobkirk's Hill, just days before the 1781 evacuation, left the hospital filled with British wounded who could not be removed as well as Continental prisoners left for exchange.<sup>14</sup> Upon occupying Camden, the American army assumed management of the British hospital, and it continued to operate at least through the summer of that year.<sup>15</sup> The hospital building stood until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Kershaw's brewhouse was a massive brick structure and perhaps the town's major prewar industrial building, one important enough to be enclosed by the southwestern section of the palisade. It too escaped largely unscathed by the holocaust. Despite having been "much injured" during the occupation, the building, together with its tools and equipment, seems to have emerged intact. The war had not been kind to Joseph Kershaw, however. Even though the brewhouse soon returned to business, indebtedness subsequently forced its sale, and the facility passed out of the Kershaw family's ownership. In the hands of others, it remained in operation, or at least in existence, into the early years of the new century.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the defensive works, consisting of five redoubts and the palisade that surrounded the town itself, appear to have been only partially dismantled by the British army. Upon entering Camden, one of Nathanael Greene's first concerns was the removal of the existing fortifications. Judging them a potential threat to his army now encamped in and around the town, Greene immediately ordered his subordinates to "collect all the militia & negroes you can about the country, & march into Camden, in order to

<sup>13</sup> Guilford Dudley, application R-254, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>14</sup> Rawdon to Cornwallis, May 24, 1781, in R. W. Gibbes, ed., *Documentary History of the American Revolution* (Columbia, S.C.: Banner Steam-Power Press, 1853), 79; Nathanael Greene to Samuel Huntington, May 14, 1781, NGP, PCC, R-175, I-155, vol. 2, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Mathis, receipt, Stub Indents for Revolutionary Claims (SEIRC), book D, no. 35, 139, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; James Bettie, application, Audited Accounts of Claims Growing Out of the Revolution (AA), reel 8, frame 588, file 473, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

<sup>16</sup> See Kenneth E. Lewis, *Camden: Historical Archaeology in the South Carolina Backcountry* (Belmont, Calif.: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Deeds transferring the property as late in 1801 referred to the tract as that "where the brewhouse now stands." Lancaster County, Records of the Clerk of Court, Conveyances, book B, p. 10, May 6, 1786, Lancaster County Courthouse, Lancaster; diary, February 12, 1793, August 14, 1794, James Kershaw Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Kershaw County, Records of the Clerk of Court, Conveyances (KCRCC/C), book C, p. 190, 1801, Kershaw County Courthouse, Camden.

destroy the works left there. Let the parapets be leveled, the palisades cut down, & the abattis burnt."<sup>18</sup>

The immediate use of Camden as a base to support the American army's offensive operations further implies that enough of the town had escaped the fire to provide shelter for personnel and storage for equipment and supplies. Numerous Continental and militia units moved through the town as the seat of war shifted closer to the low country, and Camden became an important logistical center for Greene's southern campaign.<sup>19</sup> Military correspondents mention the transfer of large quantities of tents, clothing, shoes, and other baggage as well as corn, livestock, and forage to the town in the summer and fall of 1781. Dissemination of information was key to Greene's extensive military campaign as well, and Camden's role as the nexus of communications in this operation was reflected by the placement of the army's official printing office there.<sup>20</sup>

This documentary evidence seems to conflict with the legend of Camden's fate at the hands of Lord Rawdon. Despite the image of total destruction that characterized postwar historical literature, contemporary accounts suggest a somewhat different picture—a town that was damaged by the British army's occupation and rapid withdrawal, but one that remained mostly intact and persisted after the war. So what really was left of Camden in the late spring of 1781?

To help answer this question, we can turn to the early settlement's remains, which hold the residue of its past. The role of archaeology in historical research and interpretation has long been a topic of discussion and debate among those who study the material record. Their arguments have often centered upon the question of how documents and material culture

<sup>18</sup> Nathanael Greene to John Marshall, May, 11, 1781, Greene to Arthur Brown Ross, May 11, 1781, in Dennis M. Conrad, ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. 9, *11 July 1781–2 December 1781* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Rhode Island Historical Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 238, 239.

<sup>19</sup> Nathanael Greene to Thomas Sumter, July 3, 1781, Greene to John Armstrong, July 4 and 8, 1781, in Dennis M. Conrad, ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. 8, *30 March–10 July 1781* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Rhode Island Historical Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 484, 489, 506; Greene to Henry Lee, August 22, 1781, in *ibid.*, 9: 622; "Extract of a Letter from Major General Greene," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), August 15, 1781.

<sup>20</sup> Nathanael Greene to John Armstrong, July 8, 1781, in Conrad, *Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, 8: 506; Edward Carrington to Greene, July 15, 1781, John Hamilton to Greene, August 31, 1781, Peter Horry to Greene, September 28, 1781, Nathaniel Pendleton to Greene, November 24, 1781, in *ibid.*, 9: 12, 273, 406, 622; Christian Kinesler, SEIRC, book Y, no. 375, 68; Isaac Ross Jr., SEIRC, book Y, no. 495, 83; Burwell Boykin, application, AA, reel 12, frame 319, file 699; Jesse Perry, application, AA, reel 117, frame 226, file 5869; Abraham Belton, application, AA, reel 8, frame 110, file 432A.



compare as primary sources of data. Although not all archaeologists agree on the issues involved, their discussions reflect an understanding that each source of information is the result of distinct processes of transmission, and both are best used in combination to arrive at a more complete and accurate picture of the behavior that generated them.<sup>21</sup> One outcome of such a comprehensive approach has been an increasing emphasis on the archaeological investigation of short-duration events. Relatively quickly passing activities were once assumed to have produced few artifacts and left no obvious marks on the land. Consequently, such places might be expected to offer little potential for archaeological research.<sup>22</sup> But as historical archaeologists turned their attention to transitory occupations, battlefields, and other sites related to conflict, a very different picture began to emerge. Frequently, these locations not only contained extensive artifacts, but also yielded distributions that were crucial to interpreting the encounters that took place there and the behaviors associated with them. Utilizing innovative techniques, researchers have been able to generate new information that has expanded our knowledge of the form and nature of dynamic past events, including many that are well documented but perhaps less understood.<sup>23</sup>

The material remains of eighteenth-century Camden lie buried in the soil. When its inhabitants gravitated toward higher ground farther from the Wateree River during the early nineteenth century, they abandoned the old town site and it passed into agricultural use. None of its buildings exist today. But all evidence of the settlement and its contents did not vanish under the plow. The material record of early Camden, which has survived underground, is a valuable source of information about what happened

<sup>21</sup> Discussions of major issues in the discipline of archaeology have been presented in Kathleen Deagan, "Avenues of Inquiry in Historical Archaeology," in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, vol. 5, ed. Michael B. Schiffer (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 151–177; Deagan, "Neither History nor Prehistory: The Questions That Count in Historical Archaeology," *Historical Archaeology* 22, no. 1 (1988): 7–12; Charles E. Orser Jr. and Brian M. Fagan, *Historical Archaeology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 33–37.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Ivor Noël Hume, *Historical Archaeology* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), 188.

<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the best known example of the use of archaeology in the interpretation of short-term events is the analysis of material remains from the Little Big Horn Battlefield in Montana. See Douglas D. Scott, Richard A. Fox Jr., Melissa A. Conner, and Dick Harmon, *Archaeological Insights into the Custer Battlefield* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); Fox and Scott, "The Post-Civil War Battlefield Pattern: An Example from the Custer Battlefield," *Historical Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (1991): 92–103. Recent work is summarized in Scott and Andrew P. McFeaters, "The Archaeology of Historic Battlefields: A History and Theoretical Development in Conflict Archaeology," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 19 (2011): 103–132.

to the town in 1781. Although sometimes more difficult to read than the written record, it is less likely show conscious bias.<sup>24</sup>

The site of the eighteenth-century town of Camden has been the subject of archaeological investigations since the late 1960s. Early projects examined the Kershaw mansion and the surrounding area extensively and surveyed the periphery of the town in search of evidence of the fortifications erected during the occupation. Later projects explored the town itself and investigated several individual structures within its bounds. All of these excavations were aided by a military map showing the town and its fortifications at the time of the American occupation (figure 1). This map displays the town's principal structures arranged in a north-south alignment on either side of Broad Street as well as along a perpendicular secondary street that bisected the town. Joseph Kershaw's brewhouse appears in the southwestern corner, and his mansion is situated east of Camden. A ring of fortified positions surrounds the town. They consist of six redoubts, one of which contains the jail and another, the fortified magazine. A separate palisade wall encloses the Kershaw mansion and another structure south of town. The nucleated settlement is surrounded by a rectangular palisade with a southern extension encompassing the brewhouse. Just inside its walls, seven groups of smaller buildings are situated, arranged neatly in rows, with several others in front. Their regular order implies a hierarchical structure, and their number corresponds to that of the British and loyalist units who occupied Camden. They are probably the hastily constructed barracks erected to house the troops.<sup>25</sup>

In order to learn more about colonial and revolutionary Camden, I conducted a number of archaeological projects aimed at delineating structures and illuminating the activities of their inhabitants. These began in 1974 and 1975 with exploratory excavations designed to encompass all of the

<sup>24</sup> During her lifetime, early resident Sarah Thompson Alexander witnessed the disappearance of the old settlement as Camden moved northward to higher ground farther from the Wateree River. Writing in 1850, she remarked that "not a vestige remains of that once memorable city." By the late antebellum period, nearly all of the old town site had passed into the hands of the Salmond family and other area planters, who placed it in agriculture. Sarah Thompson Alexander, "Camden Fifty Years Ago," box 2-23, Thomas J. Kirkland Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; William M. Bullock, ordinary to Ann C. Salmond, KCRCC/C, book DD, pp. 725-726, October 30, 1858; James Chesnut to Ann C. Salmond, KCRCC/C, book DD, pp. 737-738, November 30, 1877; Thomas Evans to Thomas Salmond, KCRCC/C, book K, pp. 254-255, March 16, 1824; Mordecai M. Levy to John Workman, KCRCC/C, book Q, pp. 229-230, December 4, 1844; Commissioner, Court of Equity, to E. A. Salmond, KCRCC/C, book T, pp. 546-548, April 25, 1867; Ann C. Salmond, petition, Kershaw County, Records of the Probate Judge, book A, p. 706, March 31, 1857, Kershaw County Courthouse.

<sup>25</sup> Plan of Camden, May 12, 1781, NGP, PCC, R-175, 1-161, vol. 2.

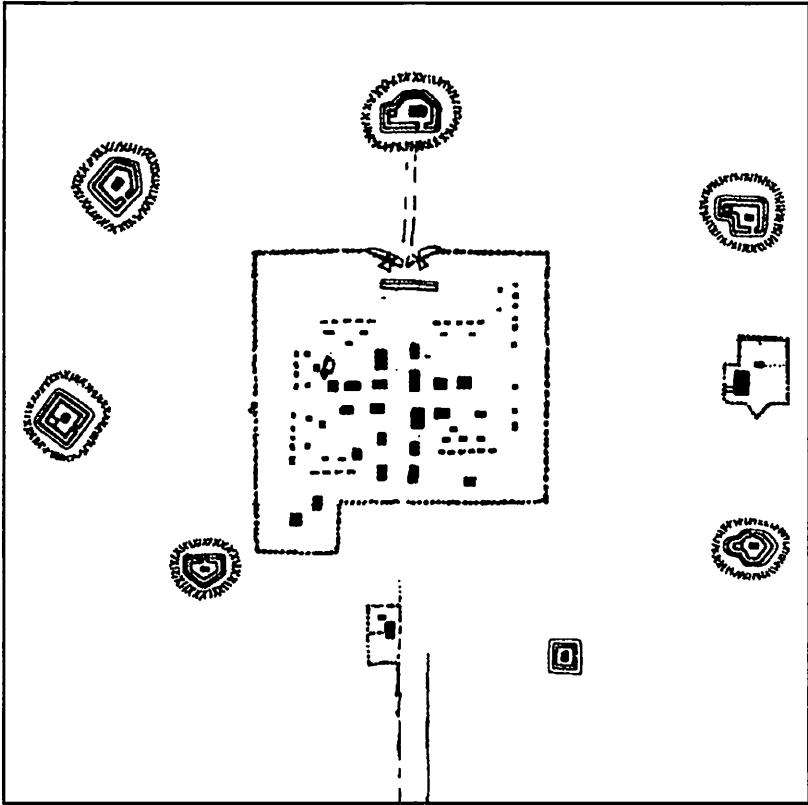
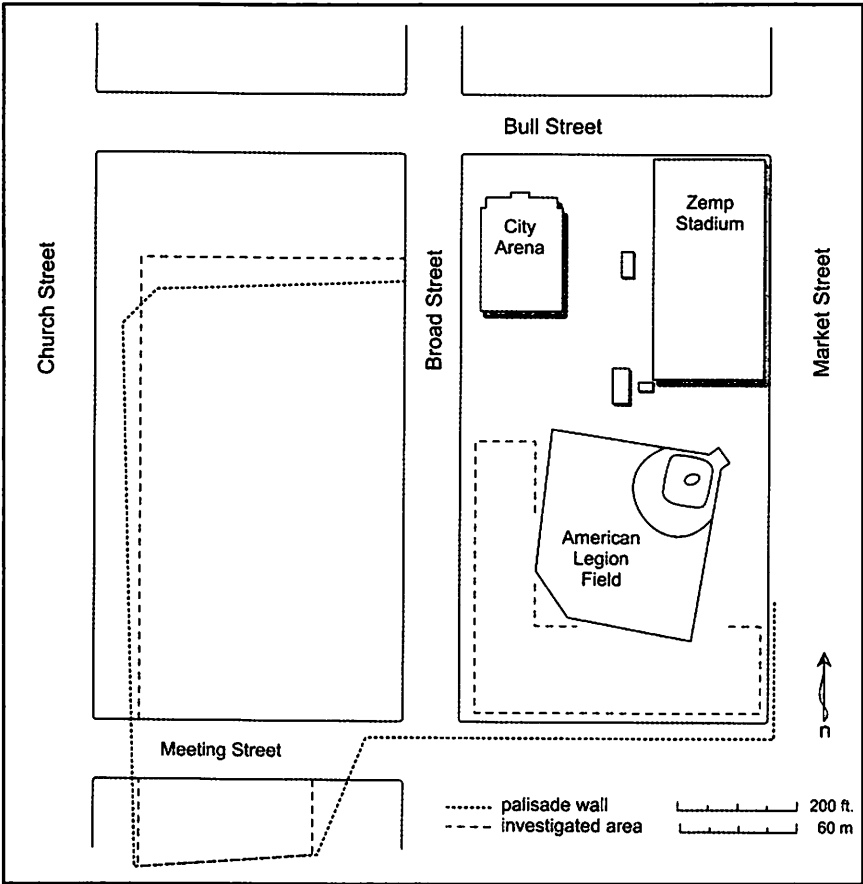


Figure 1. Plan of Camden and the military fortifications at the time of the British evacuation in May 1781. The town is surrounded by a palisade wall that includes an extension in its southwestern corner to enclose the brewhouse. Principal buildings line Broad Street, which runs through Camden from north to south. The geometric configurations of smaller structures closer to the wall appear to be groups of barracks. Broad Street continues north of Camden, where it intersects the northernmost redoubt containing the jail. Four additional redoubts lie east and west of the town. The fortified magazine is situated to the southeast, and Joseph Kershaw's palisaded house is situated between the two eastern redoubts. Adapted from the Nathanael Greene Papers, Papers of the Continental Congress, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

accessible portions of the town site. Based on the results of this research, I was able to locate and define particular structures and features that were analyzed further during subsequent projects carried out in 1979, 1981, 1996, 1997, and 1998 (figure 2). These later investigations revealed the layout and content of eighteenth-century Camden and produced a body of evidence sufficient to explore questions as diverse as the town's role in the frontier



**Figure 2. Map of the site of Camden at the time of the archaeological investigations, 1974-1998. This plan shows the layout of streets and the areas examined in the excavations. The line of the 1780-1781 palisade is superimposed, as are the locations of modern buildings that intrude on the town site. Map by Chris Valvano.**

economy of South Carolina’s backcountry and the nature and composition of its individual households. Through archaeology it has been possible to observe and examine Camden’s development over time and identify the presence of the Revolutionary War occupation.<sup>26</sup> These material data also

<sup>26</sup> The results of all of the archaeological projects at Camden are summarized in Lewis, *Camden: Historical Archaeology*. Additional information included in this article has been taken from the author’s field notes for the various archaeological projects at Camden.

make it possible to address the question at hand—namely, to what extent did the events associated with the British evacuation impact Camden? Were contemporary accounts of a limited destruction correct, or was the town indeed left "little better than a heap of rubbish?"

Interpreting the archaeological evidence at Camden depends on recognizing material patterning in soils affected by more than a century of agricultural activity. Although cultivation obliterated remnants at the surface, historical period artifacts remain in the soil, contained within a plow zone that nevertheless has preserved the patterning of their distribution over the town site. Below this layer lie more deeply buried features such as postmolds, trash pits, cellars, foundations, and other structural material. These deposits are undisturbed. The plow-zone materials and the buried features represent different archaeological contexts, but both were formed by the same events and activities that shaped the early development of Camden. The patterning visible in each could inform us about the town's Revolutionary War experience.

The distribution of archaeological materials obtained from the plow-zone excavations yielded evidence of broad-scale patterning. Because the site of the eighteenth-century town was too large to be excavated in its entirety, it was examined utilizing a stratified, unaligned, systematic sample designed to reveal the distribution of architecture and activities.<sup>27</sup> I planned these sampling excavations so as to explore all of the town enclosed by the palisade wall erected by the British army and illustrated in the 1781 military map. The archaeological sampling excavations, which included every portion of the town site not covered by modern construction, revealed the placement of major structures and mapped the locations of past activities by observing the distribution of artifacts in the plow zone. Moreover, they uncovered deeper features, the form and content of which provided additional information about the settlement.<sup>28</sup>

Concentrations of burned architecture and other materials provide the best evidence for the destruction of buildings by fire. These were clearly present in the remains of the Camden jail, situated to the north of the palisaded town. British soldiers deliberately fired this building on Lord Rawdon's order. Separate archaeological investigations carried out at the site of the jail in 1979 unearthed the foundations of this structure, which displayed extensive evidence of fire in the form of charcoal and burned

<sup>27</sup> For discussions of archaeological sampling and its uses, see James W. Mueller, *The Use of Sampling in Archaeological Survey*, *Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology*, no. 28 (Washington, D.C.: Society for American Archaeology, 1974); Charles L. Redman, "Surface Collection, Sampling, and Research Design: A Retrospective," *American Antiquity* 52 (April 1987): 249–263.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, *Camden: A Frontier Town*, 32–33.

artifacts.<sup>29</sup> Similar archaeological remains helped to identify the locations of other burned buildings elsewhere in Camden.

The sampling excavations exposed several architectural features that exhibited indications of burning and destruction. On the west side of Broad Street, four excavation units uncovered areas of concentrated brick rubble and charcoal. The northernmost unit was situated near where high numbers of melted glass fragments also occurred, implying that a building burned on the site (figure 3). A comparison of this location with those of buildings shown on the 1781 map and contemporary property records indicate that the feature was situated on land owned by John Adamson, a loyalist officer who operated a store in Camden during the occupation. Adamson's store certainly would have held supplies that might have led to its destruction during the rapid abandonment of the town. But this area appears to have been located within the barracks complex at the northern end of town, and the burning may have been associated with the destruction of these structures. Another cluster of three features containing charred architectural remains lies farther south and closer to the western palisade wall. All were situated well behind the principal buildings on Broad Street in a part of town where only barracks stood. Since Lord Rawdon ordered the barracks and other elements of the military infrastructure burned upon abandoning Camden, these features are likely the remains of the western barrack complexes.<sup>30</sup>

Although twenty-one other excavation units in the 1975 sample excavations uncovered architectural remains west of Broad Street, none showed signs of burning. The absence of burned rubble throughout this extensive area signifies that fire did not destroy the principal buildings on this side of Camden. Subsequent intensive excavations carried out during the 1990s at the sites of four structures discovered in the earlier sample units revealed several buildings situated here that survived the British occupation intact (figure 4). None exhibited evidence of burning, and all seem to have been dismantled later or disintegrated as a result of natural processes. They include the large, wooden, earthfast building that served as the Kershaw-Chesnut store and later the military hospital as well as a smaller, wooden, earthfast residence on Broad Street.<sup>31</sup> The patterning of the posts that once

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth E. Lewis, "The Camden Jail and Market Site: A Report on Preliminary Investigations," *South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology Notebook* 16 (October–December 1984): 29–31.

<sup>30</sup> Lewis, *Camden: Historical Archaeology*, 73.

<sup>31</sup> The earthfast buildings erected at Camden employed a wooden frame atop posts set at intermittent intervals in the ground. Earthfast architecture derived from medieval English building traditions, elements of which were well adapted to frontier

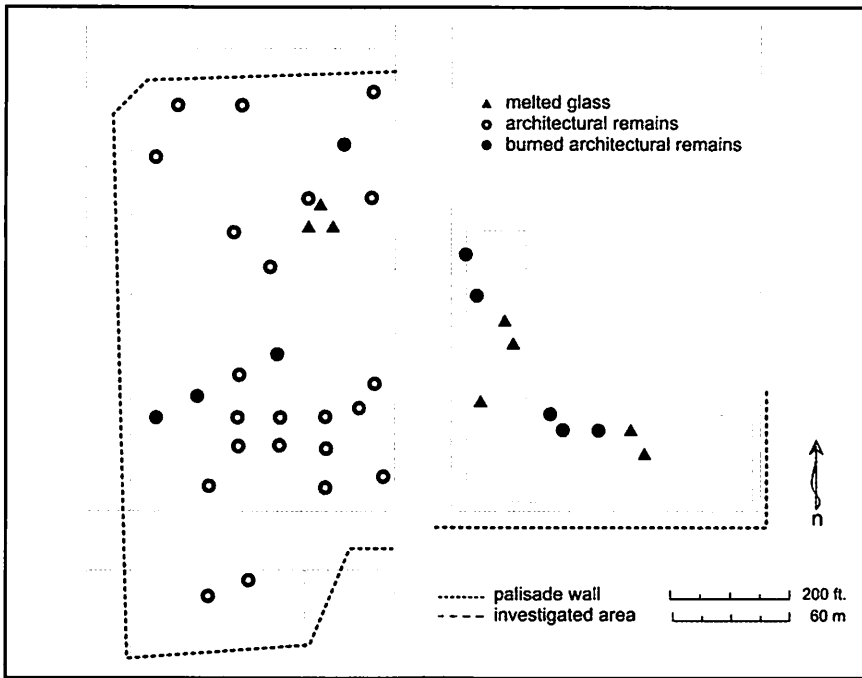


Figure 3. Map showing the locations of architectural remains and evidence of burning on the west side and east side of Broad Street. The patterns observed are based on data uncovered in the archaeological sampling excavations carried out in 1974 and 1975. The pit containing the arms and other cached materials lies near the southeastern corner of the palisade wall. It was discovered during excavations conducted at the wall in 1970. Map by Chris Valvano.

supported these structures not only exposed their outlines in the subsoil, but the contents of the postmolds, trash pits, and other subterranean features associated with them also provided clues to their identities and the times of their occupation. The intact foundations of a brick shop building lie just behind the store. An analysis of ceramic artifacts provided initial occupation dates and date ranges for these structures and confirmed that all were in

settlements. Ease and simplicity of construction along with an abundance of wood encouraged its use in eastern North America, where it became widespread in South Carolina and other British colonies by the seventeenth century. Cary Carson et al., "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern Colonies," in *Material Life in America, 1600–1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 114–117.

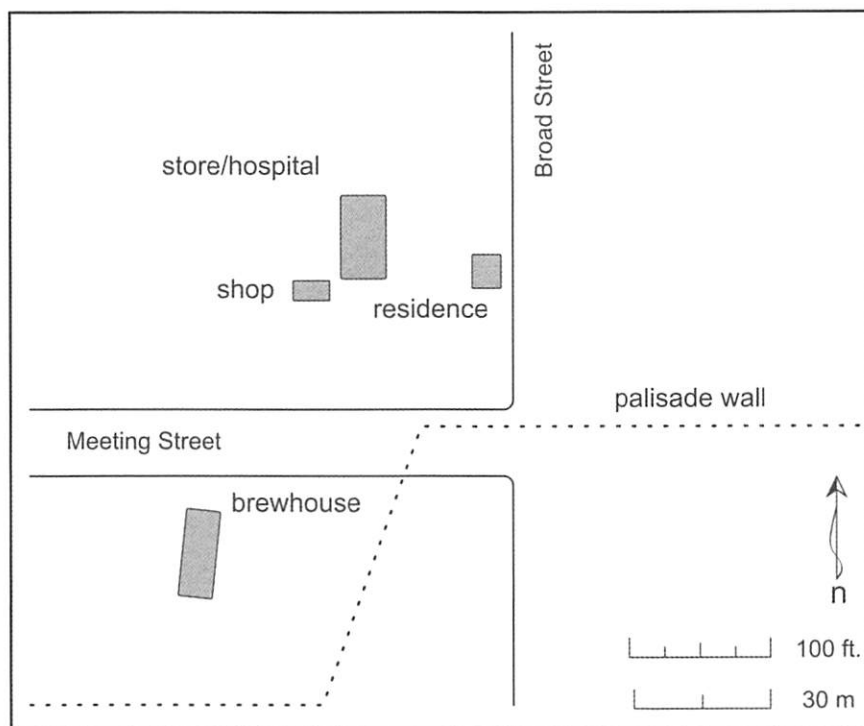


Figure 4. The locations of excavated structures situated on the west side of Broad Street. The brewhouse south of Meeting Street was examined in 1981. Investigations in 1996, 1997, and 1998 uncovered the earthfast store/hospital and house as well as the brick shop building. Map by Chris Valvano.

use before the Revolution.<sup>32</sup> The store and house were occupied until the closing years of the eighteenth century, and a nearby brick structure stood for perhaps another decade.<sup>33</sup>

Concentrations of brick rubble south of Meeting Street identified the location of the brewhouse, a massive brick building that sat on a large lot in the southwestern corner of town. The sample excavations detected

<sup>32</sup> The date ranges for the excavated structures and other archaeological features discussed here were calculated using the bracketing technique and the mean ceramic dating formula. The latter employs a statistical formula that computes a median date for an archaeological assemblage by comparing the use ranges and frequencies of occurrence of historic ceramic types. Stanley South, *Method and Theory in Historical Archeology* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 214–218.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, *Camden: Historical Archaeology*, 93–97, 114–115.



no evidence of burning, nor did any appear in the extensive excavations conducted here in 1981 (figure 4). Instead, the archaeology revealed the remnants of a building that had been deliberately demolished. Whole bricks were salvaged for reuse, even from the wall footing trench, leaving a heap of brick bats and rubble to mark the site. A comparison of the ceramic artifacts established that the brewhouse was constructed in the 1760s and occupied into the second decade of the next century.<sup>34</sup>

On the east side of Camden, the archaeology presented a far different picture. The excavations identified the remains of at least two burned structures (figure 3). One lies near Broad Street in the vicinity of two concentrations of melted glass. Here, two sample units exposed part of a rectangular feature that contained brick fragments and charcoal as well as burned artifacts. Analysis of the ceramics indicated that they were deposited over the time of the Revolution, implying that these were the remnants of one of the buildings shown along Broad Street on the 1781 map (figure 1). Although the identity of its occupants and the exact nature of its function are unknown, ceramics and other materials associated with the structure suggest that a combined residence and business once occupied this location. If such a building stored British supplies, it may well have been destroyed during the evacuation.<sup>35</sup>

The footing of a second structure appeared approximately 150 feet north of the southern line of the town palisade (figure 3). A sample unit uncovered the corner of a wall trench containing brick and mortar rubble. Here again, the presence a great deal of charcoal in the foundation's interior revealed the presence of fire. Immediately to the west, exploratory trenches encountered additional portions of the brick foundation associated with brickbats and mortar rubble as well as charcoal. An analysis of ceramics and other materials recovered led to the conclusion that this too was probably a mixed-use building occupied during the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup>

The extensive destruction evident in the sample excavations on the east side of Broad Street may have resulted from the burning of additional buildings as well. A complex of barracks occupied the southeastern portion of Camden just behind the buildings along Broad Street, and the army is likely to have destroyed them during the evacuation. Widespread concentrations of melted glass offered further proof that fire was more widespread in this part of the town. Near the burned structures, the excavations uncovered a cache of military equipment that lay buried in a pit adjacent to the southern palisade wall, almost certainly materiel abandoned by the British deliber-

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 97–100, 114–115.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis, *Camden: A Frontier Town*, 122.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

ately in the southeastern portion of Camden (figure 3). The rectangular pit had been carefully dug and contained a cache of Brown Bess muskets, the standard British service arm during the American Revolution, along with several bayonets, various gun parts, musket balls, and gunflints as well as a concentration of other artifacts dating from the time of the occupation.<sup>37</sup> Such evidence that the British consciously hid or destroyed arms and equipment that could not be removed to prevent its capture by the enemy reflected the urgency imposed by army's the rapid evacuation of Camden.

Archaeological remains from the east side of Camden show that this part of town suffered far more fire damage than the other areas examined. Although the presence of modern structures restricted the excavations to a small portion of the settlement east of Broad Street and obscured the actual extent of the conflagration, the extensive evidence of fire and the widespread destruction of property found here nevertheless point out the uneven nature of the damage in Camden.

The results of archaeological excavations at Camden provide crucial information regarding the short-term event that ended the town's Revolutionary War occupation. The material record clearly supports accounts that British and loyalist troops destroyed only a portion of the settlement during their hasty departure. A comparison of burned areas within the layout of structures on the 1781 map of the fortified town reveals that the destruction was selective and confined to specific areas. The distribution of burned material indicates that the fires on the west side of Broad Street occurred only at the periphery of settlement nearer the surrounding palisade wall, in areas occupied by several sets of barracks. Although the barracks were ordered burned, the limited spatial extent of burning implies that even their destruction may not have been complete. Nearly all of the substantial buildings on this side of town, including the Kershaw-Chesnut store and the brewhouse situated south of Meeting Street, seem to have escaped the torch entirely and survived well into the postwar period. Only one civilian building near the northern end of Broad Street may possibly have fallen victim to fire.

In contrast, the evidence for extensive destruction in the southeastern part of Camden shows that this area was heavily damaged during the evacuation. Here, the conflagration consumed at least two structures along Broad Street as well as the barracks. The disposal and destruction of military equipment close by further points to the army having stored supplies in the vicinity. Unfortunately, the presence of modern construction prohibited

<sup>37</sup> Harold L. Peterson, *Arms and Armor in Colonial America, 1526–1783* (New York: Bramhall House, 1956), 165–168; Robert N. Strickland, "Camden Revolutionary War Fortifications (38KE1): The 1969–70 Excavations," *Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology Notebook* 3 (May–June 1971): 65, 69.

additional archaeological investigations on the east side of Camden, so the war's impact on this portion of the town presently remains unclear. The limited burning west of Broad Street and the confinement of more widespread fire to the eastern part of the town, however, supports the view that destruction associated with the British evacuation was strategic and affected only those portions of Camden that were of value to the military.

Archaeological work elsewhere around Camden established that buildings on the town's west side were not the only structures to survive this traumatic event. A near absence of burning in the fortifications echoed George Washington's statement a decade later that the "British works" were still visible.<sup>38</sup> The postmolds and timber fragments in the footing trench of the town palisade showed no evidence of fire, signifying that some portions of the wall were pulled out while others were left to decay in place. Beyond the palisade, excavations at the magazine southeast of the town uncovered no sign of burning, and only a limited amount of charred material was present in the ditch at the northeastern redoubt. At Joseph Kershaw's mansion, laborers apparently dismantled the surrounding palisade and subsequently sank a well through a portion of the exposed trench.<sup>39</sup> Among the British outworks, only the redoubt containing the jail exhibited evidence of extensive burning.<sup>40</sup>

While the archaeological record bears testimony to the deliberate torching of structures and the disposal of materiel during the British army's hurried withdrawal from Camden, it also confirms that much of the town was left intact when the seat of war moved toward the coast. These findings paint a picture of a post-occupation settlement that more closely resembles contemporary eyewitness accounts than the depictions in nineteenth-century literature. The survival of much of the town and its immediate reoccupation had important implications for its postwar development. Camden remained a focus of trade and commerce following the Revolution and began a slow but steady growth. The resurrection of state government brought the return of administrative functions, and the town became the

<sup>38</sup> George Washington observed that the "British works" at Camden were still visible during his visit in 1791. Jackson and Twohig, *Diaries of George Washington*, 6: 148. Alan Calmes, *Report of Excavations at the Revolutionary War Period Fortifications at Camden, South Carolina* (Camden, S.C.: Camden District Heritage Foundation, 1968), 3-5, 6-11, 17-19; Strickland, "Camden Revolutionary War Fortifications," 57-64, 66-68; Lewis, *Camden: Historical Archaeology*, 72-74, 86-93, 124-126; Lewis, *Archaeological Investigations at the Kershaw House, Camden (38KE1), Kershaw County, South Carolina*, Research Manuscript Series, no. 78 (Columbia: Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, 1975), 16-21; Lewis, *Camden: A Frontier Town*, 43-48.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis, *Archaeological Investigations*, 25-28.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis, "Camden Jail and Market Site," 31.

seat of newly created Kershaw County in 1791. By the mid 1790s, Camden was South Carolina's third largest urban area, behind only Charleston and Georgetown. But as the town expanded northward in the cotton economy of the new century, its residents gradually abandoned the original town site for higher ground farther from the river. The settlement that escaped destruction at the hands of an occupying army succumbed to its residents' desire for a perceived healthier environment and was put to agricultural use. Although this migration finally obliterated the Camden that survived the Revolution, it saved its remains to yield future knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Camden's economic growth in the postwar period is examined in Schulz, "Rise and Decline of Camden," chaps. 3 and 4; Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, vol. 2, *Nineteenth Century* (Columbia, S.C.: State Co., 1926), 14–27; Inabinet and Inabinet, *History of Kershaw County*, 113–116. The process of reestablishing the system of courts in the backcountry is discussed in Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of 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), 135–142. Kirkland and Kennedy, *Historic Camden*, 2: 251–254, and Inabinet and Inabinet, *History of Kershaw County*, 87–91, examine the development of the court system in relation to Camden and Kershaw County. Camden's relative size was reported by Jedidiah Morse, *The American Gazetteer* (Boston: S. Hall and Thomas and Andrews, 1797). Its northward shift and the abandonment of the old town site was noted by contemporary observers. See Alexander, "Camden Fifty Years Ago." The northward expansion from 1795 to 1819 is shown graphically in Schulz, "Rise and Decline of Camden," figs. 6, 7, and 8.