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THE ROLE OF SOUTH CAROLINA IN THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

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Successive crises between Britain and her American colonies threatened to disrupt the Empire after 1763. Finally, when Parliament reacted to the Boston Tea Party by passing the Coercive Acts (March-June, 1774), Virginia and Massachusetts took the initiative in calling for a Continental Congress to meet in Philadelphia in September 1774. Twelve colonies, all except Georgia, responded by sending delegates. In Charleston, on July 6-8, 1774, a "General Meeting" of 104 representatives from almost every South Carolina county and parish elected five delegates to the First Continental Congress (Henry Middleton, Christopher Gadsden, Thomas Lynch, John Rutledge, and Edward Rutledge) and drafted official instructions directing these five delegates to cooperate with Congress in the adoption of any legal measures to promote the repeal of the Coercive Acts and the redress of colonial grievances growing out of British taxes, commercial restrictions, and discriminatory laws.¹

A brief survey of the earlier careers of the five South Carolina delegates may explain, to some extent, their actions at the First Continental Congress.² Henry Middleton, the son of Sarah (Amory) and Arthur Middleton, was born in 1717, probably on the family plantation near Charleston. Through inheritance and three marriages, Henry Middleton acquired twenty plantations, totaling about 50,000 acres and 800 slaves. During the three decades before the American Revolution he served as justice of the peace and in both houses of the South Carolina colonial legislature. Henry Middleton had become an increasingly strong critic of British colonial policy after 1763.

Christopher Gadsden, the son of Elizabeth and Thomas Gadsden, was born in Charleston in 1724. After education at an English classical school, Gadsden worked in a Philadelphia counting-house and then served on a British warship. In the late 1740's he returned to Charleston and soon became a successful merchant and planter. From 1757 until the American Revolution he sat in the lower house of the South Carolina

¹ David Duncan Wallace, *South Carolina: A Short History* (Chapel Hill, 1951), pp. 253-254; Worthington C. Ford and others (eds.), *Journals of the Continental Congress* (Washington, 1904-1937), I, 23-24.

² *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1928-1937).

colonial legislature. He vigorously opposed British colonial policy after 1763 and represented his colony at the Stamp Act Congress in New York in 1765. The South Carolina "radicals," the property-owning skilled mechanics who could vote but not hold office, looked to Gadsden for leadership.

Thomas Lynch, the son of Sabina (Vanderhorst) and Thomas Lynch, was born in the parish of St. James Santee in 1727. He inherited extensive rice lands along the Santee River. Lynch often served in the South Carolina colonial legislature and firmly denounced British colonial policy after 1763.

John and Edward Rutledge were, respectively, the oldest and youngest of the seven children of Sarah (Hext) and Dr. John Rutledge. The Rutledge brothers were born in or near Charleston, John in 1739 and Edward in 1749; both studied law at the Middle Temple in London, and both were called to the English bar, John in 1760 and Edward in 1772; both practiced law in South Carolina; both married South Carolina women. From 1761 until the American Revolution John Rutledge was a member of the lower house of the South Carolina colonial legislature and in 1765 he was a delegate at the Stamp Act Congress. Young Edward Rutledge began his political career at the First Continental Congress.

The five South Carolina delegates were obviously similar in many ways. All were born in or near Charleston; all were men of wealth and social prestige; all, except Gadsden, spoke for the conservative planter class; all, except Edward Rutledge, were members of the South Carolina colonial legislature; all criticized British colonial policy after 1763. They varied considerably in age: Henry Middleton was fifty-seven; Christopher Gadsden, fifty; Thomas Lynch, forty-seven; John Rutledge, thirty-five; and Edward Rutledge, twenty-five.

Late in August, 1774, the five South Carolina delegates traveled by sea from Charleston to Philadelphia.³ During the week prior to the opening of Congress a whirl of social events⁴ enabled the representatives of the twelve colonies to become acquainted with each other. On August 29 the South Carolinians joined other delegates and local notables at a tavern supper in honor of the Massachusetts delegation. On August 30 Middleton, Gadsden, Lynch, and Edward Rutledge called at the lodgings of the Massachusetts men. On August 31 the South Carolinians visited Samuel Ward (Rhode Island) in the morning, and Lynch gave

³ Edmund C. Burnett, *The Continental Congress* (New York, 1941), p. 23. Dates refer to 1774 unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Edmund C. Burnett (ed.), *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress* (Washington, 1921-1936), I, 1-5.

"a very agreeable dinner" for the Massachusetts delegates in the evening. On September 1 the Massachusetts men called on the South Carolinians in the morning, and the various delegations congregated at a tavern in the evening. On September 2 the South Carolina, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island delegates dined with Thomas Mifflin (Pennsylvania) and then adjourned to a tavern to meet the Virginians. On September 3, again at Mifflin's, the Rutledges and several other delegates enjoyed "an elegant dinner" and "drank sentiments till eleven o'clock."

During this week of conviviality the South Carolinians stimulated considerable comment. Both John Adams (Massachusetts) and Silas Deane (Connecticut) described Henry Middleton as quiet, modest, and reserved.⁵ With evident surprise Silas Deane observed that Christopher Gadsden "leaves all New England Sons of Liberty far behind, for he is for taking up his firelock and marching direct to Boston; nay, he affirmed this morning, that were his wife and all his children in Boston, and they were to perish by the sword, it would not alter his sentiment or proceeding for American liberty."⁶ John Adams was "vastly pleased" with "solid, firm, judicious" Thomas Lynch, and Silas Deane characterized Lynch as forceful, "plain, sensible," and "above ceremony."⁷ In contrast, John Adams regarded John Rutledge as "not very promising," with "no keenness in his eye, no depth in his countenance; nothing of the profound, sagacious, brilliant, or sparkling, in his appearance," a man with an "air of reserve, design, and cunning"; but John Rutledge impressed conservative Joseph Galloway (Pennsylvania) as an "amiable" gentleman who examined both sides of arguments and understood the danger of "rash and imprudent Measures."⁸ Edward Rutledge irritated John Adams with his "most indistinct, inarticulate way" of speaking through his nose; later, Adams criticized the "injudicious" younger Rutledge as a "very affected" speaker and ultimately resorted to ornithology to classify him as "a perfect Bob-o-Lincoln,— a swallow, a sparrow, a peacock; excessively vain, excessively weak, and excessively variable and unsteady, jejune, inane, and puerile."⁹ Silas Deane, however, rated Edward Rutledge "a tolerable speaker."¹⁰ Patrick Henry feared that the Rutledges,

⁵ Charles Francis Adams (ed.), *The Works of John Adams* (Boston, 1850-1856), II, 359; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 18.

⁶ Burnett, *Letters*, I, 18.

⁷ *Works of John Adams*, II, 360; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 1, 18.

⁸ *Works of John Adams*, II, 361, 364; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 2-6.

⁹ *Works of John Adams*, II, 364, 396, 401; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 3, 67, 81.

¹⁰ Burnett, *Letters*, I, 18.

along with conservative John Jay (New York) and Galloway, would "ruin the cause of America."¹¹

The First Continental Congress began sessions on the morning of September 5. The initial problem was the choice of a place of meeting. The Philadelphia carpenters had urged the use of their hall, while the Pennsylvania legislature through Galloway had offered the state house. Deciding to examine both places, the delegates went first to Carpenter's Hall; there Lynch proposed the acceptance of the carpenters' offer without further inspection; James Duane (New York) objected to this rudeness to the Pennsylvania legislature, but the great majority approved Lynch's motion; probably the radical delegates had agreed upon this decision in advance.¹² Lynch then made the nominations that resulted in the unanimous elections of Peyton Randolph (Virginia) as president and of Charles Thomson (Pennsylvania) as secretary; the various delegations then read their credentials and instructions.¹³ After inconclusive debate about rules, Congress adjourned for the day, and conservative Galloway sadly observed that the Virginians and the Carolinians, except John Rutledge, seemed to be "much among the Bostonians."¹⁴

On the second day, September 6, Congress sharply debated the issue of voting procedure. The large colonies favored a method of voting based on population or, as Lynch advocated, population plus property, but the small colonies insisted on one vote for each colony. Congress finally decided on one vote for each colony and thus established an important precedent that would later influence the framers of the Articles of Confederation.¹⁵

On the third day, September 7, with procedural problems now settled, the delegates turned to the consideration of the serious questions that had caused the calling of Congress. Congress appointed two delegates from each colony (Lynch and John Rutledge for South Carolina) to a committee on rights and grievances and one delegate from each colony (Gadsden for South Carolina) to a committee on trade and manufacturing. Congress instructed the committee on rights and grievances to prepare a statement of colonial rights, British violations of these rights, and possible methods for the redress of colonial grievances; Congress

¹¹ *Works of John Adams*, II, 396; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 71.

¹² Burnett, *Letters*, I, 8; Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, pp. 33-34.

¹³ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, I, 14; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 6-8.

¹⁴ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, I, 24; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 9.

¹⁵ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, I, 25; *Works of John Adams*, II, 367; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 14-15; Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, p. 38.

instructed the committee on trade and manufacturing to draft a report on British laws which unduly restricted colonial trade and manufacturing.¹⁶ After declining the honor himself, Lynch made the nomination that led to the choice of Stephen Hopkins (Rhode Island) as chairman of the committee on rights and grievances.¹⁷

These two important committees worked slowly. During the discussions of the committee on rights and grievances John Rutledge argued that colonial rights should be based on the British constitution and the colonial charters, not on natural law, but Congress finally decided to use natural law as well as the British constitution and the colonial charters as the foundations of colonial rights.¹⁸ During the discussions of the committee on trade and manufacturing Gadsden strenuously denied the power of Parliament to regulate colonial commerce.¹⁹ On September 17 the committee on trade and manufacturing submitted a report which Congress read and then referred to the committee on rights and grievances; that committee brought in a report on rights on September 22 and a report on grievances on September 24.²⁰ Congress then debated these committee reports. Gadsden, Lynch, and Edward Rutledge called for such strong measures as nonimportation and nonexportation, but John Rutledge warned of the need for caution in dealing with Britain.²¹ Gadsden eloquently declared: "I am for being ready, but I am not for the sword. The only way to prevent the sword from being used, is to have it ready . . . Boston and New England can't hold out. The country will be deluged in blood, if we don't act with spirit. Don't let America look at this mountain and *let* it bring forth a mouse."²² Finally, on October 12, a committee of five (not including any South Carolinians) reported a plan, later known as the Continental Association, for nonimportation, nonexportation, and nonconsumption.²³ Gadsden supported the Continental Association without qualification, but the other South Carolinians insisted that, unless rice and indigo were excepted from nonexportation, South Carolina would be ruined; when their plea went unheeded, Mid-

¹⁶ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, I, 27-29.

¹⁷ Burnett, *Letters*, I, 15-17.

¹⁸ *Works of John Adams*, II, 370-371, Burnett, *Letters*, I, 20-22, 44.

¹⁹ Burnett, *Letters*, I, 30, 63-64.

²⁰ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, I, 39-40; Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, pp. 41-43.

²¹ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, I, 43, 51-53; *Works of John Adams*, II, 382-386; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 48-50.

²² Burnett, *Letters*, I, 48-50.

²³ *Ibid.*, I, 63-64.

dleton, Lynch, and the Rutledges dramatically walked out of Congress. For the sake of unity, Congress then compromised and agreed to the exception of rice but not indigo; consequently, on October 20, all five South Carolinians joined the other delegates in signing the Continental Association.²⁴

In the meanwhile, on September 28, Joseph Galloway made an effort to preserve the British Empire by introducing his Plan of Union. The Galloway Plan featured a colonial president-general appointed by the Crown, a colonial grand council of representatives elected by the various colonial assemblies, and a veto power by both the colonial grand council and the British Parliament over imperial regulations which affected the American colonies. Edward Rutledge praised the Galloway Plan as almost "perfect." Congress, however, demonstrated its growing radicalism by ordering on October 22 that the entire discussion of the Galloway Plan be expunged from the official records.²⁵

Congress also ordered the preparation of several addresses and letters. On October 1 Congress named a committee of five, including John Rutledge, to draft an address to the King. On October 7 Congress established a committee of three, including Lynch, to write a letter to General Thomas Gage in Boston. These two committees carried out their assignments, and Congress approved both the letter to Gage (October 11) and the address to the King (October 25).²⁶

After Peyton Randolph was forced to retire because of "indisposition," Congress on October 22 elected Henry Middleton to act as president. In this capacity Middleton signed an address to the people of St. John's (October 22), a letter to the colonial agents in London (October 26), an address to the people of Quebec (October 26), and an address to the King (October 26).²⁷

Having resolved that, if Britain failed to redress colonial grievances, another Congress should assemble in Philadelphia in the following May, the First Continental Congress concluded its sessions on October 26. On October 27, with Middleton carrying two letters from Congress to Georgia leaders, the South Carolinians departed for home.²⁸

Edward Rutledge expressed the opinion that, with the exception of "violent" and "wrong-headed" Gadsden, the "prudent" South Carolina

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 85-87.

²⁵ *Works of John Adams*, II, 390; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 54.

²⁶ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, I, 53, 57-58, 60-61.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 102-105, 113, 121.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 122; Burnett, *Letters*, I, 82.

delegates had done good work in the First Continental Congress.²⁹ His opinion, though unfair to Gadsden, was essentially correct. As both guests and hosts, they had been prominent in the social activities in Philadelphia. Their frequent contacts with the Massachusetts men were striking, and they had stimulated both favorable and unfavorable comments by other delegates.

Thomas Lynch had taken the initiative in the choice of Carpenter's Hall and had made the nominations that resulted in the elections of Randolph as president, Thomson as secretary, and Hopkins as chairman of the committee on rights and grievances. South Carolina had been represented on the committee on rights and grievances (Lynch and John Rutledge), the committee on trade and manufacturing (Gadsden), the committee on the address to the King (John Rutledge), and the committee on the letter to General Gage (Lynch). The South Carolinians had been outspoken in the debates on voting procedure, colonial rights and grievances, and the Galloway Plan of Union. Four South Carolinians had temporarily withdrawn from Congress in order to force the exception of rice into the nonexportation section of the Continental Association and had thus set a precedent for South Carolina's later typical technique of walking out on excessive centralization of power.

Henry Middleton, who acted as president during the closing days, seemingly maintained a neutral position in Congress. Christopher Gadsden, who broke with his fellow South Carolinians on the issue of the exception of rice in the Continental Association, strongly and consistently supported Massachusetts and the cause of American liberty. Thomas Lynch apparently acted as a Southern "voice" for the Massachusetts point of view. The Rutledges, especially John, generally agreed with the conservative outlook of the Pennsylvania and New York delegates. Though limited by their official instructions, their knowledge of prevailing opinions "back home," and their personal social and economic convictions and interests, the South Carolina delegates, both individually and collectively, had played significant roles in the First Continental Congress.

²⁹ Burnett, *Letters*, I, 84.

LETTERS FROM RUSSIA 1802-1805

Edited by GEORGE C. ROGERS, JR.

(Continued from January)

[J. Allen Smith to Rufus King. Moscow, April 20, 1803.]

Dear Sir

You will probably be surprised to find that I have made so little progress on my journey, but I found it difficult to leave Petersburg: the marks of friendship and attention which I received in that city were far beyond what I expected or deserved. I should say no more on this subject if I did not think that they were in many instances directed rather to the country to which I belong than to myself. At the fetes of the Court I was put on a footing with the foreign ministers, and often as an American Traveller I found myself more favoured than if I had had a diplomatic character. The Empress Mother¹ shewed me the different establishments which are under her protection, gave me a ring as a mark of her esteem, wrote to me on my departure and gave me letters for Moscow. The Emperor invited me to dine with him *en famille* placed me next to him, and conversed with me some time respecting America and France. To facilitate my journey through the Countries belonging to and dependent on his empire, he has kindly given me a Feldgager or under officer to accompany me. I could not avoid his having his expences defrayed, and was told that his advancement depended on the letter which I should give him on his return. To the Chancellor Worontzof, and to Count Kotchoubey I am particularly indebted—they furnished me with letters for the different governments through which I shall pass; in a word, Petersburg has acquired claims on my gratitude which I can never repay, and on every occasion I had the satisfaction of perceiving the respect and consideration in which our Country was held.

There is much to be said of Russia, but the subject is too long and too interesting for a letter, it will be an inexhaustible source of conversation when I shall again have the pleasure of seeing you. On her councils and on the energy of Great Britain and America may depend the safety of the World.

The Emperor is penetrated with the desire of promoting the happiness of his country, but I doubt whether his arm has yet the nerve which

¹ Sophia Dorothea of Wurtemberg was the second wife of the Emperor Paul I and the mother of Alexander I. In Russia she was known as Maria Feodorovna