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## SUFFERERS IN THE CHARLESTON FIRE OF 1740

By KENNETH SCOTT \*  
*Queensborough Community College*  
*The City University of New York*

On Tuesday, November 18, 1740, Charleston suffered a calamity of major proportions. At two o'clock that afternoon a fire broke out, and sparks carried to a great distance by a brisk northwest wind quickly spread the conflagration. Citizens, aided by crews from ships of the British Navy, the *Phoenix*, *Tartar* and *Spence*, by blowing up and pulling down houses, finally brought the blaze under control about eight o'clock at night. By then, however, the best and most valuable part of the town, the district of shops and warehouses containing goods for the supply of the whole province, had been destroyed. The flames consumed houses from Broad Street and Church Street to Granville's Bastion and all the buildings on the west side of Church Street, from Broad Street to Tradd Street, opposite to Colonel Brewton's, which was saved by blowing up several houses.<sup>1</sup> The number of houses burned was estimated at more than 300, besides storehouses, stables, and several wharfs. Indeed, had it not been high water, all or most of the shipping would also have been destroyed. Damage to merchandise alone, according to one computation, was above £200,000 sterling, and the total loss, by another calculation, was put at not less than £250,000 sterling.<sup>2</sup>

The fortifications of the city, but lately completed, were rendered useless. In Granville's bastion much of the platform and many of the gun carriages were burned, while the guns were dismounted. To afford temporary protection for Charleston, sailing orders were cancelled for two of His Majesty's ships, the *Tartar* and the *Spence*, and for some two weeks all shipping in the harbor was forbidden to sail, while in town a survey was made of the cannon, small arms, and military stores that had escaped the fire.<sup>3</sup>

\* Dr. Scott is the author of *Counterfeiting in Colonial America* (New York, 1957) and a frequent contributor to historical journals and other periodicals.

<sup>1</sup> To obtain a clear concept of the area affected, see the Roberts-Toms map of 1739, "The Ichnography of Charles-Town at High Water." This map is considered "the most exact representation of the town and its dwellings up to that date."

<sup>2</sup> *South-Carolina Gazette* (henceforth cited as *S. C. Gaz.*) Nov. 20, 1740, and J. H. Easterby, ed., *Journal of the Commons House of Assembly Sept. 12 1739-March 26, 1741, Colonial Records of South Carolina* (Columbia, 1952), 408. Henceforth cited as *Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> *S. C. Gaz.*, Nov. 20, 1740, and *Journal*, 1739-1741, 413.

A SKETCH of the HARBOUR.

A Scale of Four Miles.

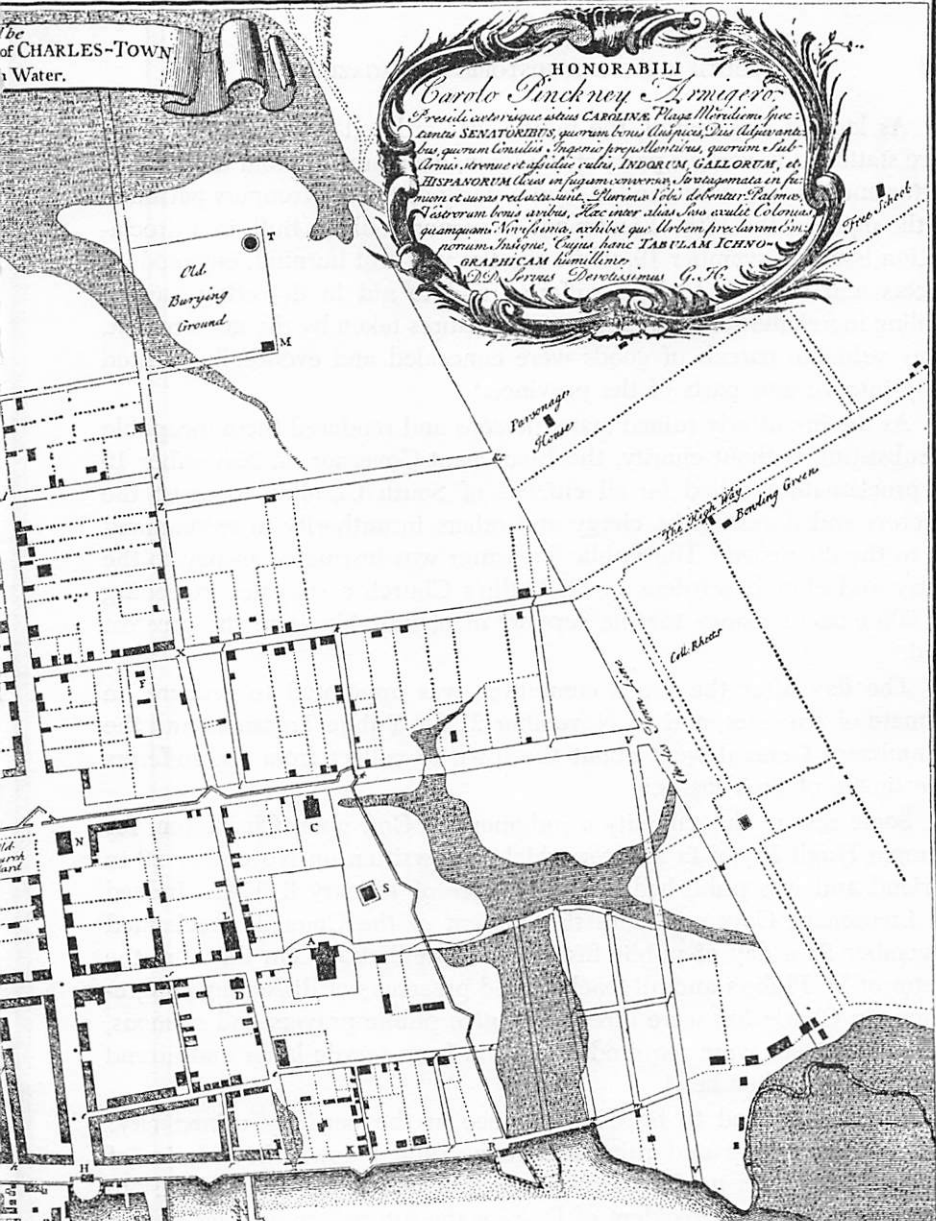


A Scale of 1320 Feet, or 1/4 of a Mile.

A	The Church of England.	I	Guard House below.	P	(Broughtons Battery.	QH	The Bay
B	The Presbyterian.	J	Court House above &	Q	Granvilles Bastion.	PA	Church
C	Meeting Houses	K	Exchange below.	R	Crowns Bastion.	UV	Meeting
D	French D <sup>o</sup>	L	The Custom House.	S	Old Magazine.	WX	King St
E	Anabaptist Meeting.	M	The Theatre.	T	New Magazine.	ax	Johnson
F	Quakers D <sup>o</sup>	N	The Work House.	V	Half Moon & advances	z&c.	Archida
G	Printing House.	O	The New Market.		on the Front Court		
H	The Council Chamber above		The Bay Markets.		Line.		

The Double Lines represent the Circumts as fortified by the Sabuldrants for their defence against the French Spaniards & Indians without it were only a very few Houses & these not thought safe till after the signal Defeat of Indians in the Year 1711, at which time the North West & South sides were dismantled & demolished to enlarge the Town.

As the Streets from the Street putation they are inserted.



HONORABILI  
*Carolo Pinckney Armigero.*  
 Praesidi auctorisque actus CAROLINAE Praeside Moritoni pro:  
 cantu SENATORUM quorum bonis auspicijs Dns Urbanitas  
 has quorum Consulibus Ingenio propevolentibus quorum Sub:  
 Altima severitas et utilitas cultus, INDORUM, GALLORUM, et  
 HISPANORUM Civis in fugam convulsos, in utroque in fa:  
 mion et auras redactos sunt. Quorum Vires debentur Palmas  
 Navorum bonis viribus, Acc inter alias Juss Colonias  
 quamquam Viridissima, exhibet qui Urbem proclarum Cuius  
 notam. Insigne, Cujus hanc TABULAM ICHNO:  
 GRAPHICAM humillimus  
 P. P. Ferrus Perpetuus G. R.

Fac-Simile of the original Map presented to the City Council of Charleston, by Prof. J. E. Hlgard, Superintendent U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey through Capt. C. O'Brien in charge of that office, August, 1884 - Prepared for City Year Book, 1889.

G. S. DeLoe, W. G. Tomes, Sculp.

Street	Ml	Mazzyck Street	H&	Broad Street	nn	Thomas Street
Street	cd	Allens Street	IY	Tradd Street	aw	Lambolls Street
Street	dY	Friends Street	cxz	Queen Street	wU	Smiths Lane
Street	ccc	Union Street	vv	Pinckneys Street	uz	Kynchs Lane
Street	ff	Charles Street	hh	Middle Street	pp	Wraggs Lane
Street	gg	Middle Lane	et	Lady Street	g	Simmons's Ally
			hh	Moors Street	r	Unity Ally
			ll	Shenkinghs Street	s	Dennis's Ally
			mm	Ellerys Street	vv	Middle Ally

Street Houses Stables Coach houses &c. being backyards are omitted to avoid confusion. By a moderate compass are allowed three times the number of those that published according to the Act of Parliament June 9 1752 by B. Roberts and W. G. Tomes.

As looting was feared, the militia was ordered under arms, guards were stationed in various parts of the town, detachments from the *Phenix*, *Tartar* and *Spence* were landed, and a party of twenty troopers patrolled all the night of the 18th. Lieutenant-Governor William Bull, in a proclamation issued November 19, while the fire was still burning, enjoined all officers and subjects to help sufferers and to aid in detecting anyone stealing merchandise. Yet, despite all measures taken by the government, many valuable parcels of goods were concealed and eventually spirited away into various parts of the province.<sup>4</sup>

As the fire utterly ruined many persons and rendered them incapable of subsisting without charity, the Lieutenant-Governor on November 19 by proclamation called on all citizens of South Carolina to assist the sufferers and required the clergy and others in authority to recommend aid to the distressed.<sup>5</sup> The Public Treasurer was instructed to pay to the vestry and church wardens of St. Philip's Church a sum not exceeding £1,500 current money for the support of of individuals in the greatest need.<sup>6</sup>

The day after the fire a committee was appointed to procure an estimate of damages, and on November 21 the Public Treasurer and the Commissary General went about the town to collect from the sufferers an estimate of their losses.<sup>7</sup>

Some saw in the calamity a judgment of God upon Charleston, for example Hugh Bryan in a letter which was written on November 20 to a friend and was published in the *Gazette* of January 8, 1741. Indeed the Lieutenant Governor, with the consent of the Council, proclaimed November 28 a day of public fasting and humiliation. On that day the Rector of St. Philip's and all teachers and preachers of dissenting congregations in Charleston were directed to give public prayers and sermons, while all citizens were required to abstain from servile labor and attend services in the churches.<sup>8</sup>

Much work had to be done at once in the partially ruined city: dangerous chimneys and ruins had to be pulled down; boundaries of squares and streets in the burnt-out section had to be established: "to prevent the like fatal Accident of Fire for the future," an act was passed requiring that houses should henceforth be built of brick or stone; wooden shingles might be used but would have to be replaced later on by fireproof materials; furthermore, if temporary wooden structures were

<sup>4</sup> *S. C. Gaz.*, Nov. 20, 27, 1740.

<sup>5</sup> *S. C. Gaz.*, Nov. 20, 1740.

<sup>6</sup> *Journal*, 1739-1741, 407.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 405, 407.

<sup>8</sup> *S. C. Gaz.*, Nov. 27, 1740.

erected, they must be demolished after five years; to prevent profiteering, prices were regulated for bricks, lime, cypress and pine, and shingles and for the labor of carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, and plasterers; customs duties were remitted on all lumber or bricks that might be imported within the next twelve months; dangerous places of business as of distillers, candle makers, and soap makers were to be removed from certain parts of town.<sup>9</sup>

As has been noted, the £1,500 for immediate relief was paid by the Public Treasurer to the vestry and churchwardens of St. Philip's, and doubtless the appeal of the Lieutenant Governor to the citizens of the province met with a response. In other colonies efforts were made to alleviate suffering in Charleston. Some of the inhabitants of Philadelphia contributed bread and flour, while money was remitted from Barbadoes and a sum collected in Boston was sent to private gentlemen in Charleston for distribution to the destitute. Perhaps such donations led to the announcement made in April, 1741, that the Honorable James Crockatt had ordered £1,000 to be distributed among the sufferers by the late fire.<sup>10</sup>

It was felt, however, that private charity would be inadequate, so on November 20 it was proposed that the King's favor and relief be sought. To this end a petition was prepared on November 21 by the Council and Assembly. In it were recited not only the enormous losses from the fire but other past difficulties: the colony had not fully recovered from the bloody Indian War of 1715; heavy taxes had been imposed for the unfortunate attempt of South Carolina to take St. Augustine and for defense against the danger of a Spanish invasion; smallpox had raged in 1738 and malignant fever had taken a heavy toll in Charleston in 1739. The petition was promptly dispatched to Peregrine Fury, Esquire, Agent for the Colony in Great Britain.<sup>11</sup>

On February 5, 1741, the petition from South Carolina was laid before the House of Commons in London, with the recommendation from King George that the House act as it saw fit. At this it was ordered that the document be referred to a committee of the whole House. After a number of occasions on which the matter was put over, the House resolved itself into a committee on March 24 and the following day reported that some provision should be made. On April 14 a committee

<sup>9</sup> *Journal 1739-1741*, 412, 413, 416, 418, 419, 442-445, 458; *S. C. Gaz.*, Postscript to No. 357.

<sup>10</sup> J. H. Easterby, ed., *Journal . . . May 18, 1741-July 10, 1742* (Columbia, 1953), 3, 7, 8, 543, 544; J. H. Easterby, ed., *Journal . . . Sept. 14, 1742-Jan. 27, 1744* (Columbia, 1954), 107; *S. C. Gaz.*, April 9, 1741.

<sup>11</sup> *Journal 1739-1741*, 407, 408, 411.

recommended that £20,000 be granted, and this sum was voted the same day.<sup>12</sup>

Letters and papers from Peregrine Fury in London, as well as the record of some votes of Parliament, were laid before the South Carolina Assembly on June 26, 1741,<sup>13</sup> but it was not until August 21, 1741, that the *South-Carolina Gazette* announced that Parliament had voted £20,000 sterling "for the Relief of the Fire-Sufferers of this Town." A committee consisting of the Chief Justice, the Attorney General, Andrew Rutledge, David Hext, and Mr. Champneys was appointed on October 28, 1741, by the Lower House to look into the losses of the sufferers, while the next day the Upper House chose for the same purpose a committee of John Hammerton, John Colleton, Joseph Blake, William Middleton, or any two of them. No losses made good through insurance were to be allowed.<sup>14</sup>

*The South-Carolina Gazette* of Saturday, November 7, 1741, carried an advertisement of a joint committee, whose members were given as Benjamin Whitaker, James Abercromby, Andrew Rutledge, David Hext, Joseph Wragg, John Hammerton, Joseph Blake, and William Middleton. Each sufferer was directed to submit a schedule of loss; the committee would study the same and apportion the sum to be granted each person. The Committee's report would then be given to the Lieutenant Governor, who in turn would send it to the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury and the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantation. Accounts were to be handed in by December 1, 1741, at the office of John Dart, Commissary General of South Carolina. Thenceforth the Committee would meet every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday in the next two weeks at the house of Charles Shephard in Broad Street to interrogate each claimant under oath. Since by December 19 several persons who gave in accounts had not appeared to be questioned and since several might not have handed in claims, it was announced that the Committee would meet at Mr. Shephard's on Wednesday, January 20, 1742, and continue to sit the two following days, after which no accounts would be received.<sup>15</sup>

The Chief Justice informed the House on January 27, 1742, that the Committee had received the accounts of the sufferers, and the House

<sup>12</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons* XXIII, 633, 634, 648, 655, 666, 673, 677, 681, 684, 694, 695, 706.

<sup>13</sup> *Journal 1741-1742*, 71.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 264, 266, 269.

<sup>15</sup> *S. C. Gaz.*, Dec. 19, 1741, 2.



authorized the Committee to secure the services of a clerk, a post which was then filled by Samuel Prioleau, Jr.<sup>16</sup>

Thanks to the efforts of Mr. Prioleau and the Committee, the report on the losses had been prepared by May 26, 1742, and on June 3 an address of thanks to the King was voted by Council and Assembly. It read in part: "It is to that Bounty that some of the unhappy Sufferers already owe their Re-settlement and Re-establishment in Charles Town, and without it many poor Families might have suffered through Misery and Want. Such then, may it please your Majesty, are the Effects of so gracious a Donation, which has afforded immediate Relief to those who stood in need of it, and future and lasting Advantages to their Posterity."<sup>17</sup>

Happily the report of the Committee of the Council, dated June 3, 1742, and submitted to the Lieutenant Governor has been preserved in the British Public Record Office. It gives the names of the sufferers from the fire who handed in accounts, lists the amount of each loss both in local currency and in sterling and the sum granted (in each case approximately one third of the loss). Below are given the names and loss of each person valued in sterling (with the omission of shillings and pence):<sup>18</sup>

1. Austin, George	£ 188	19. Boneau, Anthony	214.
2. Audeburt, Moses	51	20. Bedon, Henry	237.
3. Allen, John	794.	21. Bennet, Ann	17.
4. Axson, Jacob	15.	22. Brewton, Robert	130.
5. Austin, Robert	1071.	23. Crokatt, Michie	213.
6. Atkin, John and Edmond	307.	24. Calvett, Peter	74.
7. Bee, John	1000.	25. Carwithen, William	194.
8. Brisbane, William	403.	26. Cooper, Thomas	651.
9. Beale, Othniel	1291.	27. Cart, John	32.
10. Bedon, Stephen, Junior	189.	28. Cartwright, Sarah	11.
11. Bassett, Mary	238.	29. Capers, Thomas	71.
12. Ballantine, John, Jr.	32.	30. Crawford, Daniel	194.
13. Bull, John	64.	31. Cleland, Wallace and Fleming	508.
14. Baker, Richard	171.	32. Clarke, Lydia	130.
15. Boone, Ann	628.	33. Dart, John	690.
16. Bee, Martha and daughter	38.	34. Dill, Elizabeth	71.
17. Brewton, Miles	213.	35. Ducatt, George	41.
18. Boone, Thomas	85.		

<sup>16</sup> *Journal 1741-1742*, 560.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 352, 528, 534, 535, 540, 541.

<sup>18</sup> C.O. 5/368, 153-155. Unpublished Crown Copyright material in the Public Report Office has been reproduced by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

36. Dale, Thomas	70.	76. Hill, Richard	436.
37. Dalbiac, Catherine	121.	77. Holmes, Francis	315.
38. Deas, David	22.	78. Horry, Martha, Estate of	61.
39. Deveaux, Andrew	100.	79. Hopton, William	71.
40. Dalton, James	73.	80. Holmes, Isaac and Maj. Willson's Estate	548.
41. Delmestre, Peter	98.	81. Hiskett, George	46.
42. Douxsaint, Paul	209.	82. Hepworth, Ann and Ann Barksdale	214.
43. Elliott, Barnard	1000.	83. Joor, Catherine	253.
44. Eveleigh, Samuel and George	2994.	84. Johnson, John	56.
45. Elliott, Esther	11.	85. Jenys, Elizabeth	771.
46. Elliott, William	915.	86. Johnston, Robert	171.
47. Elliott, Thomas, the Estate of	363.	87. Jenys, Thomas	497.
48. Elliott, Thomas	1328.	88. Jones, Samuel	32.
49. Evance, Branfill	431.	89. Jenkins, Elizabeth	85.
50. Ellis, Mary	51.	90. Kilpatrick, James	144.
51. Fraser, John	505.	91. Keys, John	228.
52. Fairchild, John	71.	92. Knight, Abraham	84.
53. Fisher, Deborah	25.	93. Laurens, Esther	40.
54. Fenwicke, John	956.	94. Legere, Peter	81.
55. Fley, Elizabeth	82.	95. Lasserre, Elizabeth	164.
56. Fowler, James and Edward	683.	96. Lennox, James	27.
57. Fidling, Elizabeth	171.	97. Le Brassueur, Ann	457.
58. Goven, Hellen	55.	98. Lloyd, Thomas	1342.
59. Grimke, Frederick	111.	99. Lewis, Isaac	357.
60. Gates, Thomas, his Estate	207.	100. Legare, Thomas	39.
61. Godin, Benjamin	797.	101. Lamboll, Thomas and Smith's Estate	900.
62. Guigniard, Gabriel	92.	102. Motte, Jacob	1827.
63. Garden, Alexander for David Guerard	1142.	103. Murdoch, John	37.
64. Golightly, Culcheth	67.	104. Mathewes, John	114.
65. Gracia, Francis	285.	105. Mackay, William	47.
66. Guy, William	171.	106. Maine, Mary	52.
67. Hill and Guerard	32.	107. Mazyck, Isaac and his Father's Estate	133.
68. Huger, Daniel	714.	108. Mitchell, Moses	112.
69. Horry, Peter, Estate of	176.	109. McKay, Deborah	26.
70. Holmes, Isaac	89.	110. Mountriff, John	5.
71. Haynes, Nicholas	50.	111. McCall, John	948.
72. Harvey, John	257.	112. Morrison, Jullianna	18.
73. Hall, Christopher, James Osmond for	92.	113. Mathewes, Anthony	309.
74. Holmes, Elizabeth	605.	114. Milner, Jeremiah, Estate of	90.
75. Haughton and Webb	1363.	115. Mongin, David	124.

116. Moody, Joseph	51.	145. Shute, Joseph	568.
117. Milner, John	154.	146. Shaw, Peter	71.
118. Mathewes, Lois	585.	147. Stone, John	308.
119. Mathewes, James	1018.	148. Scott, John Gunsmith	131.
120. Mathewes, William	109.	149. Saultus, Henry	100.
121. Norton, Ann	45.	150. Simmons, Smith and Comp.	516.
122. Norton, Gideon	38.	151. Savage, Benjamin	134.
123. Neufeuille, John	120.	152. Stoughtenburgh, Sarah and children	358.
124. Osmond, James	646.	153. Sym, William	20.
125. O'Neale, Charles	23.	154. Scott, William	133.
126. Pringle, Robert	434.	155. Stead, Benjamin and Comp.	294.
127. Prue, Joseph	23.	156. Stevens, William	43.
128. Pender, Sarah	144.	157. Smith, Elizabeth	42.
129. Portall, Mary	105.	158. Smith, Alexander	116.
130. Poinsett, Joel	439.	159. Stoll, Justinus	32.
131. Pagett, John	142.	160. Tailfer, Patrick	17.
132. Pinckney, Charles	328.	161. Villepontoux, Peter	163.
133. Pichard, Charles Jacob	59.	162. Van Velsyn, Garret	244.
134. Pinckney, William	406.	163. Woodrop, William	1088.
135. Paris, James	20.	164. Watsons, Mary	410.
136. Penefeather, John	46.	165. Woolford, Jacob	180.
137. Reid, James	738.	166. Warham, Charles	142.
138. Roper, William	310.	167. Wright, John, Estate of	428.
139. Randall, William	425.	168. Wright, James	97.
140. Rigg, Alexander	320.	169. Wright, Thomas	42.
141. Rigden, William	9.	170. Watsons and McKinzie	1300.
142. Seaman, George	5330.	171. Yeomans, William	1351.
143. Stone, William	1839.		
144. Schermerhorn, Arnout	72.		

MIDDLETON CORRESPONDENCE, 1861-1865

Edited by ISABELLA MIDDLETON LELAND

(Continued from July)

*Harriott Middleton to Susan Middleton, Columbia*

Flat Rock Oct. 4th

. . . There was another horse theft in the neighbourhood last night. Cousin Mattie lost her horses and a mule. It is said that several men were engaged in it. Some stoned away several very fierce dogs that she keeps, whilst the others carried off the horses. Our turn must come soon, and it worries us, for our daily bread depends on them. We have to send for food, to send to the mill, and bring horse feed, in the cart. How we should make out I cannot conceive. Two soldiers were seen near the stable twice the same night, and were making very suspicious inquiries of one of Mr. Baring's negroes. And there is nothing to be done. It is said that the magistrates are afraid of taking any measures to prevent the robberies, for fear that their own will be taken, and hitherto only the horses of the Low country people have been taken. I suppose I have mentioned how many people have lost theirs. About ten days ago there was a great excitement in the neighbourhood. A raid was feared, and the story goes that Mrs. Cuthbert bought a pair of mules to escape with, and packed up all her valuables so as to go off at a moment's warning! She then seated herself by the roadside and wept! Mrs. Trenholm passed by in her carriage, and stopped to inquire the cause of distress. "Oh said she, in her cheerful kindly manner—it has not come to weeping yet," and she took her in and carried her to drive, which somewhat reassured her. Jones, the notorious Union man, who is said to have been within the Yankee lines, and to have made arrangements for a raid here, to destroy secessionist property, has been arrested and carried to Richmond in irons . . .

*Susan to Harriott, Flat Rock*

Columbia—Monday [Oct. 5]

. . . The three torpedo-boats are again ready for action, and to go out the first dark night—there has been too much moonlight lately for them to venture. I am getting a little more faith in them since hearing that Dr. Ravenel has had a hand in the undertaking. He is so clever, and yet not impractical and visionary. . . .