

THE SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 2007

VOLUME 108 • NUMBER 4



Publication of this issue is made possible in part
by the Frederick Horner Bunting Publication Fund
and by the Post and Courier Foundation

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"THE PRESENT DEFENCELESS STATE OF THE COUNTRY": GUNPOWDER PLOTS IN REVOLUTIONARY SOUTH CAROLINA

PHILIP G. SWAN*

IN SOUTH CAROLINA, THE FIRST YEAR OF THE AMERICAN Revolution was fraught with rumors, both founded and unfounded, concerning the military use of slaves and Indians by both sides against the other. Alongside fears of slave insurrections,¹ many South Carolinians alleged that agents of the Crown and of the Revolution were covertly seeking Native allies by dispensing "presents" of scarce munitions. With the outbreak of war, Indian and white communities competed in an unprecedented way for a very limited supply of gunpowder and ammunition, sparking suspicions, recrimination, and armed conflict. Conceding that the British would be far better able to supply the Indians with "presents" of munitions, the provincial government scrambled to match the largesse of the British as best it could. The preposterousness of the situation, of course, was that a highly feared population was to be kept well armed with a steady supply of firearms and ammunition for fear that the disruption of such a supply would mean certain attack from that same population. The tensions created by this grave quandary would permeate and shape the course of the war in South Carolina from the start of hostilities through the late summer and early fall of 1776.

The tradition of present giving among Native peoples predates the era of colonization and was often misunderstood by Europeans as simply being a means of purchasing the loyalty of a tribe, when, in fact, it was what Joel W. Martin has described as "a complex relational economy."² Indians, as a rule, would only accept gifts as a symbol of ongoing friendship and alliance with others. Trade, in turn, could only be engaged in with allies who showed their good faith through preliminary gift giving.³ The British government initially chose to leave much of the responsibility for Indian presents in the hands of colonial governors, who purchased goods directly from merchants

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¹ For an excellent overview, see Robert A. Olwell, "Domestick Enemies: Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina, May 1775-March 1776," *Journal of Southern History* 55 (February 1989): 21-48.

² Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 28.

³ Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 27.

in England.⁴ The British, like the French, agreed to the fictive nature of paying "tribute" to tribal headmen, if, in doing so, they would forgo allying themselves with a rival European power. As a result, waves of "presents" found their way into Indian settlements in the backcountry, ranging from items that enhanced personal adornment, such as vermilion face paint, jewelry, combs, and mirrors; to metal goods, including kettles, knives, axes, razors, and scissors; to items of apparel, such as hats, shirts, great coats, shoes, stockings, and bolts of whole cloth, along with needles, thread, and buttons; to a steady supply of alcohol. The most crucial gifts of all were ornate trade muskets, gunpowder, and ammunition, which were used by the Indians to wage war, hunt for food, and procure the deerskins used to barter for other items of European manufacture.⁵

The city of Charleston was founded, in part, as a trading center where Indian tribes from the backcountry could come to deposit deerskins in return for European goods. The Creeks and Cherokees rapidly made the acquisition of deerskins their primary economic objective as they became more dependent on European goods. From 1699 through the onset of the Yamassee War in 1715, deerskins were the most valuable export in South Carolina, and the Indians prospered as a result.⁶ When deer-leather prices declined in the 1750s, South Carolina's economy diversified to concentrate on indigo and rice exports, crops that depended on slave labor and had nothing to do with the Indian trade. With little of real value to offer colonial merchants, Charleston approached the Cherokee trade "as a diplomatic rather than an economic necessity."⁷

While many European goods were acquired to enhance status or to make life easier, firearms and ammunition were critical to a tribe's very survival in both warfare and on the hunt. But muskets did not come cheaply, costing roughly sixteen pounds of deerskins a piece.⁸ Yet even as Indian debts mounted, both the Creeks and the Cherokees could not shake their increasing dependence on European goods, a fact that was made humiliatingly clear by colonial officials. Governor James Wright of Georgia asked a restless Creek delegation, "Can you make guns, gunpowder, bullets, glasses, paint and clothing, etc.? You know you cannot make these things . . . and how will your women and children get supplied with clothes, beads, glasses,

⁴ Jack M. Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy, 1760-1775* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 39-42.

⁵ Helen Louise Shaw, "British Administration of the Southern Indians, 1756-1783" (Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1931), 53.

⁶ Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Millwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1983), 143.

⁷ Thomas M. Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Era of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 165.

⁸ Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 122.

scissors and all other things that they now use and cannot do without?"⁹ Governor James Glen of South Carolina was similarly blunt with the Cherokees, asking them to recall their lives before the English came: "Instead of the admirable Fire Arms that you are now plentifully supplied with, your best Arms was bad Bows and wretched Arrows headed with Bills of Birds and Bones of Fishes or at best with sharp Stones." When South Carolina governor William Henry Lyttelton withheld arms from the Cherokees in 1759, the Cherokees threatened war, prompting one sardonic headman to ask if they had "found a mountain of powder? Had their women learned to make clothes and their men to make knives?"¹⁰ As the demand for skins decreased, the cost of acquiring European goods was often beyond the means of tribal resources, thus necessitating their distribution as gifts.

Until the onset of the Seven Years War, South Carolina's governor largely oversaw Indian affairs in the southern colonies and distributed presents as a primary means of influence and control, spending £26,000 between 1732 and 1755 on Indian relations, with much of that set aside for gifts.¹¹ The Indian trade caused a great deal of bitterness and rivalry between the two principal southern colonies, South Carolina and Virginia. South Carolina's officialdom complained to London that, while their legislature had passed laws regulating the Indian trade to maintain peace on the colony's western borders, "yet they are amply provided with all necessarys, even with ammunition from Virginia & Georgia." Such an arrangement "of course renders them less tractable with us, & may terminate in very fatal consequences to us."¹² With inter-colonial conflicts increasing and France aggressively competing for influence among the tribes, the British Board of Trade and Plantations in 1754 decided that it could no longer rely on the policy whims of disparate royal governors and adopted a plan whereby North America would be divided into northern and southern districts, with each district overseen by a single superintendent who would administer treaties, ensure peaceful trade interactions, and dispense presents to the Indians.¹³ Not surprisingly, royal governors resented this breach of their prerogatives, and much ire in South Carolina was focused on the southern

⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁰ Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 139.

¹¹ John Richard Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier: A Study of Indian Relations, War, Trade, and Land Problems in the Southern Wilderness, 1754-1775* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1944), 14.

¹² Committee of Commons House of Assembly to Garth, September 5, 1762, Leger and Greenwood Letterbook (Ann Arbor: William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, microfilm), 14.

¹³ John Richard Alden, "The Albany Congress and the Creation of the Indian Superintendencies," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27 (September 1940): 193-210.

superintendent, John Stuart, who would hold the position from 1762 until his death in 1779.

Stuart repeatedly emphasized to the colonial governments that he alone was empowered to disburse presents to the Indians, and he was aggravated when these assertions went largely ignored.¹⁴ Despite Stuart's injunctions, South Carolina continued to apportion funds for presents and entertainment of the Indians, and in 1764 Parliament itself approved £5,000 "for the Purchase of Merchandize to be sent to the Governor of *South Carolina*, as Presents to the *Indians*."¹⁵ A frustrated Stuart wrote to the commander-in-chief, General Thomas Gage, that "it is observed that the sending out large assortments of Goods for Presents to the different Governors to be disposed of by them is a great expense to Government, answers few if any good Purposes, and does not in the least diminish the Expences in the Indian Department, but on the contrary rather tends to increase them."¹⁶ Not only did this practice blatantly undermine the whole rationale of superintendents, but the Indians who received these unauthorized presents "hold no Account of what they receive in this manner, expecting as much from the Superintendents as if nothing had been given them," resulting in a form of present inflation.¹⁷ With an eye on escalating expenses, the Board of Trade, in March 1768, released a report recommending that royal governors once more regulate Indian affairs and that British troops be withdrawn from and royal forts torn down in the backcountry. Superintendents would remain responsible for enforcing land-speculation policies, and despite other cutbacks in Indian administration, the superintendents would continue to "make such presents to the Indians as the nature and extent of the concessions on their part shall appear to require."¹⁸

Like other colonies, South Carolina became ever more resistant to Parliamentary attempts to boost revenue, beginning with the Stamp Act of

¹⁴ J. Russell Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 83.

¹⁵ Public Treasurer of South Carolina, *General Tax Receipts and Payments*, Department of Archives and History, Archives and Publications Division, Records of the Public Treasuries of South Carolina, 1725-1776 (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1968, microfilm), 84, 99, 118-119, 134-135, 152-153; Great Britain, Parliament, *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments Respecting North America, 1754-1783* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1924-1941), 1: 468.

¹⁶ John Stuart to Thomas Gage, July 21, 1767, Lord Shelburne Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, vol. 51, p. 119.

¹⁷ Thomas Gage to William Petty, earl of Shelburne, October 2, 1767, *ibid.*, vol. 51, p. 116-117; John Stuart to Thomas Gage, July 21, 1767, *ibid.*, vol. 51, p. 119.

¹⁸ Samuel Eliot Morison, ed., *Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution, 1764-1788, and the Formation of the Federal Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 65.

1765. As relations with Britain worsened, the white population of South Carolina became increasingly divided in how best to respond, but a common fear gave all white residents pause: that a divided white population would invite a slave rebellion or an Indian massacre, or even a terrifying combination of the two.¹⁹ Robert M. Weir has described pre-revolutionary South Carolina as having an atmosphere that “approached that of a garrison state” and notes that “panics over insurrection often coincided with political turmoil in the white community.”²⁰ With British regulars withdrawn from the interior and their fortresses and powder magazines now emptied, colonists in the backcountry felt especially vulnerable as tensions with the Crown grew. A fear of Indian attack spurred South Carolina’s Commons House of Assembly in August 1774 to apply to Lieutenant Governor William Bull for arms and ammunition to be sent to the backcountry, asking him to consider “the precarious situation of this Colony in regard to Indian affairs, and the necessity there may be for the Inhabitants of the back parts, to arm themselves for their protection and defence, against that cruel people.”²¹ The request was pointedly denied.

In January 1775, a provincial assembly for South Carolina was called in reaction to the resolutions of the First Continental Congress.²² The assembly promulgated a resolution encouraging South Carolinians to take up arms, “the Necessity of which must strike every one who considers the present defenceless State of the Country, ever subject to Incursions by Indians &c.”²³ That February, the *South-Carolina Gazette* decried a royal proclamation banning the exportation of arms and ammunition to America during the course of the ongoing rebellion. By such an action, the people of South Carolina were “cruelly exposed, and deprived of the necessary Means of defence against Indians and domestic Enemies, as well as foreign Powers.”²⁴ “Domestic Enemies” was code for slaves, who many feared would “be worked upon, by the insidious offer of freedom, to slay their masters.”²⁵

General Gage and the newly installed secretary for the colonies, Lord George Germain, both agreed that giving presents to the Indians would be

¹⁹ Marc Egnal, *A Mighty Empire: The Origins of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 318.

²⁰ Robert M. Weir, “‘The Harmony We Were Famous For’: An Interpretation of Pre-Revolutionary South Carolina Politics,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 26 (October 1969): 483.

²¹ John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, from Its Commencement to the Year 1776* (New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1969), 1: 139.

²² Egnal, *Mighty Empire*, 319.

²³ *South-Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), January 23, 1775.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, February 6, 1775.

²⁵ David Ramsay, *The History of South-Carolina, from Its First Settlement in 1670, to the Year 1808* (Newberry, S.C.: W. J. Duffie, 1858), 2: 133.

crucial in winning and maintaining them as allies in the impending conflict. Stuart was given £5,100 for presents in 1775 and £7,000 in 1776, more than in previous years, but only slightly.²⁶ The British continued to hand out muskets to Indians as presents, which only fanned the flames of paranoia among beleaguered South Carolinians that a British-led Indian massacre was in the works. In May 1775, John Stuart met with a party of Catawbans in Charleston, where muskets were handed out as gifts.²⁷ A breathless *South-Carolina Gazette* that same month reported that the royal government had arranged for “seventy-eight thousand guns and bayonets, to be sent to America, to put into the hands of N*****s [Negroes], the Roman Catholics, the Indians and Canadians.”²⁸

On June 1, 1775, the Provincial Congress of South Carolina met for the first time in order to address the vulnerability of Charleston to attack from the sea by the Royal Navy, to debate the merits of resisting British authority “by the law of arms” in the event that “reason and justice” proved unfruitful, and “because, there are just grounds, to apprehend an insurrection of the slaves, and hostilities from the Indians, instigated by the tools of a wicked Administration.”²⁹ The next day, the Provincial Congress heard testimony from a witness who reported that he had been told “a number of arms was sent over [by the British] to be distributed amongst the Negroes, Roman Catholics, and Indians.”³⁰ At the same time, false rumors were spreading that John Stuart had ordered the Cherokees to fall upon frontier settlements, resulting in the massacre of thirty-four families, and that he had betrayed the garrison at Fort Loudon (in present-day East Tennessee) for profit during the Cherokee War of 1760, resulting in the massacre of the garrison.³¹ Taking these and other charges at face value, the Committee of Intelligence of the Provincial Congress formally charged John Stuart with “attempting to incite the Indians to hostilities” and seized his house and property “as a security for the good Behaviour of the Indians in the Southern Department.”³² Stuart fled to the safety of Florida, leaving his wife and estate behind in South Carolina. Stuart suspected the revolutionary leaders of using these accusations to gather support for their cause, for “as nothing can

²⁶ Great Britain, Public Record Office, Colonial Office 5: 77, 203 (n.d.).

²⁷ Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire*, 159-160.

²⁸ Olwell, “Domestick Enemies,” 30.

²⁹ Henry Laurens to John Laurens, May 30, 1775, in George C. Rogers, Jr., et al., eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968-2003), 10: 160; Drayton, *Memoirs*, 1: 253.

³⁰ Drayton, *Memoirs*, 1: 300.

³¹ John Stuart to the Committee of Intelligence, July 18, 1775, in *Extracts of Letters, &c. Published by Order of Congress* (Charleston, S.C.: Peter Timothy, 1776), 6.

³² William E. Hemphill and Wylma A. Wates, eds., *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina, 1775-1776* (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1960), 64; Colonial Office 5: 76, 161 (June 29, 1775).

be more alarming to the Carolinians than the Idea of an attack from Indians and Negroes, the Leaders of the disaffected Party easily carried into execution their plan of arming the people and giving such a turn to their Disposition as might favour their views."³³

On July 12, 1775, with the war less than three months old, the Continental Congress in Philadelphia asserted that Whitehall "will spare no pains to excite the several nations of Indians to take up arms against these colonies." Conceding that "the Indians depend on the colonists for arms, ammunition, and clothing, which are become necessary to their subsistence," and attempting to counter the influence of the British superintendents, Congress adopted a system of Indian administration based loosely on the British model. Congress set about dividing the colonies into northern, middle, and southern departments, with five commissioners appointed to the southern and three to the other two departments, respectively. The southern department would receive ten thousand dollars "for defraying the expense of treaties and presents to the Indians," while each of the other two departments received the oddly specific sum of \$6,666.³⁴ South Carolina was to have three commissioners, who would be nominated by the South Carolina Council of Safety and appointed by the Provincial Congress.³⁵

The Provincial Congress of South Carolina appointed Edward Wilkinson as a delegate to the Cherokees because of his long-term trading relationship with the tribe.³⁶ Leading the delegation to the Creeks was George Galphin, who had become a wealthy man working for thirty years as a trader among the Lower Creek and who had come to know several of their chiefs.³⁷ Robert Rae, an associate of Galphin, was the third commissioner, although he would not play as prominent a role as either Wilkinson or Galphin.³⁸ With his intimate knowledge of the Creeks, Galphin fully understood the significance of presents in creating and maintaining alliances with the Indians and, accordingly, told the Creeks that "we always sent our Traders with goods into your nation to supply the wants of your women & children. But now Our King wants to make us poor if he can and has tried to distress us by stopping our Ships and preventing any goods and ammunition being sent us." Fortunately for the Creeks, the Americans had "plenty of ammunition,

³³ John Stuart to Lord Dartmouth, Colonial Office 5: 76, 150 (July 21, 1775).

³⁴ *Journals of the American Congress from 1774 to 1788* (Washington, D.C.: Way and Gideon, 1823), 1: 113.

³⁵ Shaw, *British Administration*, 94.

³⁶ Hemphill and Wates, *Extracts from the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina*, 64.

³⁷ Shaw, *British Administration*, 88.

³⁸ James H. O'Donnell, *Southern Indians in the American Revolution* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 24.

and can make our own Cloaths here."³⁹ If the Creeks threw their lot in with the revolutionaries, they would not want, he said.

On June 27, word of Lexington and Concord arrived in Charleston.⁴⁰ Many South Carolinians on both sides of the conflict were now certain Stuart would return from Florida with a contingent of British regulars that would rendezvous with a force made up of Loyalists and Indians jointly led by Stuart's brother Henry and Alexander Cameron, Stuart's deputy to the Cherokees. That army would then march east from the backcountry, while the Royal Navy attacked from the coast.⁴¹ With the white populace "greatly apprehensive of instigated insurrections of slaves, and depredations from Indians," the South Carolina Council of Safety proceeded to call for two regiments of foot and one regiment of rangers as a civil-defense force.⁴² The dearth of munitions in the backcountry led to widespread feelings of anxiety and vulnerability. One acquaintance of Henry Laurens, the newly elected president of the Provincial Congress, wrote that "there is here all the Appearance of an hellish Plott. And the Friends of America have no Ammunition and may be surprised without Remedy."⁴³ The Reverend William Tennent warned Laurens that the Council of Safety needed to monitor the coast for British supply ships, for "if you do not keep a look out . . . the Savages will receive Ammunition by Waggon from Town . . . or from Dorchester from on board the Fleet; they have no doubt of a supply"⁴⁴

To counteract the influence of royal agents, the South Carolina Council of Safety sent William Henry Drayton and the Reverend Tennent into the interior "to explain to the people at large the nature of the unhappy public disputes between Great Britain and the American Colonies."⁴⁵ When Drayton tried to bring the Cherokees into the revolutionary fold, their head men insisted that "nothing, could in the least degree satisfy them, but a promise of some ammunition."⁴⁶ Many of the white people Tennent spoke with were terrified of Indian massacres, and these fears were fed by rumors

³⁹ George Galphin speech to the Creek, Colonial Office 5: 77, 195 (n.d.).

⁴⁰ James Wright to Thomas Gage, June 27, 1775, in R. W. Gibbes, ed., *Documentary History of the American Revolution: Consisting of Letters and Papers Relating to the Contest for Liberty, Chiefly in South Carolina, from Originals in the Possession of the Editor, and Other Sources* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1855), 1: 99-100.

⁴¹ David Ramsay, *The History of the Revolution of South-Carolina, from a British Province to an Independent State* (Trenton, N.J.: Isaac Collins, 1785), 1: 155.

⁴² Drayton, *Memoirs*, 2: 10.

⁴³ William Tennent to Henry Laurens, August 20, 1775, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 10: 339.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁴⁵ Extract from the Minutes of the Council of Safety, July 23, 1775, Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution*, 1: 106.

⁴⁶ Drayton, *Memoirs*, 2: 109.

that Loyalists would prevail "upon the Savages to join their Army & that the rest of the Inhabitants will be forced to join them, to save their Families from a Massacre."⁴⁷ There were rumors that Loyalist bands were being sent to seize powder and ammunition from Fort Charlotte (on the Savannah River in present-day McCormick County), that the Loyalists "had a body of Indians that was ready to fall on the country when Cameron got orders from the Governor," and that seven or eight Royal Navy ships were standing off of Charleston in readiness for an invasion of the town.⁴⁸

As the tense summer of 1775 drew to a close and another hunting season approached, backcountry appeals for munitions as a means of self-defense contended with rival claims by Indian hunters. Without powder or ammunition, the Indians could not hunt, which meant both a drastic shortage of food and an inability to gather the hides needed to purchase European goods from colonial traders.⁴⁹ Stuart received word from "his Children" that they were "setting and smoaking in the Hot-houses, without Cloath to keep them warm, or meat to eat."⁵⁰ That July, the Provincial Congress of Georgia sent two thousand pounds of gunpowder to the Creeks "as a Present from the People," forcefully emphasizing that "it is not from the King or from Government or from the Superintendent or from the Traders but from the People of the Province."⁵¹ The Creeks were not terribly impressed by this largesse of the people, knowing that much more remained in Savannah and that several Creek towns still had to go without.⁵²

In the first year of the Revolutionary War, Loyalists may have outnumbered revolutionaries in the backcountry by as much as two to one, but they were just as poorly supplied with munitions, leading one Loyalist to complain that their supply of powder was so low that "when it came to be divided, they had only two rounds a man. . . . These circumstances inflames the back settlers, who only want ammunition to do themselves justice."⁵³ Nevertheless, Loyalists who understood the direness of the Indian situation asked Stuart to "make up to them in presents, what they should loose by

⁴⁷ William Tennent to Council of Safety, September 1, 1775, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 10: 359.

⁴⁸ Edward Morrow's Affidavit Concerning Powder from Fort Charlotte, September 9, 1775, Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution*, 1: 167-168.

⁴⁹ Shaw, "British Administration of the Southern Indians," 89-90.

⁵⁰ Speech of Cherokee Chief to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 85 (November 8, 1775).

⁵¹ *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society* (Savannah: Morning News Office, 1873), 3: 212.

⁵² O'Donnell, *Southern Indians*, 19.

⁵³ Frederick-George Mulcaster to James Grant, September 29, 1775, *Extracts of Letters, &c.*, 11.

their winter's hunt."⁵⁴ "To preserve peace, and attach the Indians to his Majesty's interest," Stuart sent fifty pack horses loaded with wool, gunpowder, and two thousand pounds of ammunition to the interior tribes "that there will be no want of ammunition, and as for other goods, they will be well supplied with them."⁵⁵

Revolutionary officials were certainly aware of how crucial it was to keep the Indians well supplied with powder and ammunition, with Henry Laurens noting how the Cherokees "pathetically lament the Scarcity of Gunn Powder & Bullets."⁵⁶ Despite the obvious disparity in resources, George Galphin believed that if the revolutionaries could "supply the Creeks with Ammunition and Goods it would not be in Mr. Stuarts Power to influence them to act against us."⁵⁷ Galphin, knowing that the Creeks and Cherokees would soon grow impatient with empty promises, argued for a timely supply of ammunition and other goods, for "there will be no putng them of any Longer if thy finde we tell them Lys thy will not belive a talke that is Sent them."⁵⁸ After a tentative agreement was reached between Georgia and South Carolina, whereby the former would supply gunpowder to the Creeks and the latter would supply the Cherokees, the South Carolina Council of Safety sent one thousand pounds of powder and two thousand pounds of ammunition to the Cherokees, for "common sense and common honesty dictate, that if there is a probability that, by a present of a small quantity of ammunition, the Indians can be kept in peace, that present ought not to be withheld, at the hazard of inducing an Indian war—involving the colony in immense expence—breaking up whole settlements—and unnecessarily sacrificing a number of lives."⁵⁹ Unfortunately, as Georgia had found with the Creeks, South Carolina's gift of ammunition and powder to the Cherokees was insufficient, and Galphin reported that the Cherokees "beg'd verry hard for 500 weight more"⁶⁰

The Council of Safety told Galphin that a growing fear of attack on Charleston from the sea had necessitated devoting what powder and ammunition there was to defending against this impending onslaught and that "in the mean time we must of necessity trust to Rum & good words for

⁵⁴ Frederick-George Mulcaster to James Grant, October 4, 1775, *ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁵ John Stuart to David Taitt, August 29, 1775, Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 158-159.

⁵⁶ Henry Laurens to John Laurens, August 20, 1775, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 10: 325.

⁵⁷ William Tennent to Henry Laurens, August 20, 1775, *ibid.*, 340; Council of Safety to Georgia Council of Safety, July 24, 1775, *ibid.*, 243-244.

⁵⁸ George Galphin to Council of Safety, October 15, 1775, *ibid.*, 467-468.

⁵⁹ O'Donnell, *Southern Indians*, 21; Ramsay, *History of South-Carolina*, 1: 76.

⁶⁰ George Galphin to Council of Safety, December 9, 1775, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 10: 557-558.

Soothing until we can Satisfy the further demands of our Red friends."⁶¹ In December Galphin reported that the Cherokees had met with Stuart "to get Amunition and presents, I am afraid they will think but little of our presents, they will get so much from Mr. Stuart for it will be a hard matter to get goods, We must provide a good Quantity of Rum for without the Goods wou'd be nothing."⁶² Stuart confirmed the ineffectual nature of his competitors' supply of presents, writing the secretary of state for the colonies, Lord Dartmouth, that gunpowder distributed to the Creeks on the part of the Americans was "insufficient to supply their wants and I have the pleasure to acquaint your Lordship that they paid much more attention to my message in Consequence."⁶³ Despite a distressing lack of resources, Galphin somehow managed to arrange a congress with the Cherokees at Fort Charlotte scheduled for April 16, 1776, and with the Creeks at Augusta on May 1, where "large Presents are to be made them and everything done to promote peace &ca."⁶⁴

A critically low supply of powder and ammunition led to numerous seizures in the backcountry by both revolutionary and Loyalist forces.⁶⁵ Sir James Wright, the royal governor of Georgia, wrote that in Savannah a British ship carrying 250 barrels of gunpowder, which were to be parceled out both to traders and as presents for the Indians, was "seized upon and taken out by the Liberty People here and brought up to town in Great Triumph, and is Forcibly kept from Mr. Stuart and the owners, who meant to send it into the Indian Country."⁶⁶ When representatives from the Creeks arrived in St. Augustine to ask Stuart for a stopgap supply of powder, he reassured them that he would provide enough powder and ammunition "to enable you to hunt and pay your debts, or to defend yourselves against your enemies."⁶⁷ As the Creek envoys returned with their supply of powder and ammunition, they were seized by a revolutionary contingent, which took both the munitions and Stuart's correspondence with the tribe, providing a

⁶¹ Council of Safety to George Galphin, December 18, 1775, *ibid.*, 572.

⁶² George Galphin to Council of Safety, December 9, 1775, *ibid.*, 557-558.

⁶³ John Stuart to Lord Dartmouth, Colonial Office 5: 76, 183 (October 25, 1775).

⁶⁴ James Wright to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 42 (December 4, 1775).

⁶⁵ Council of Safety to Richard Pearis, October 24, 1775, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 10: 502.

⁶⁶ Drayton, *Memoirs*, 1: 350; *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*, 3: 212. Stuart admitted his chagrin at this seizure, "as the Indians were in such want of Ammunition, and will enable the malcontents to send in their agents full handed it is a disappointment to me as I intended sending a large supply to all my Deputies to keep up their Influence and weight when there may be great Occasion for an Exertion of them." John Stuart to Lord Dartmouth, Colonial Office 5: 76, 150-151 (July 21, 1775).

⁶⁷ Gibbes, *Documentary History*, 161-162.

wealth of intelligence and propaganda, as well as much needed materiel for the rebel magazines.⁶⁸

In Charleston, on August 3, 1775, a British ordinance ship was seized by twenty-six armed men, and 111 barrels of powder were removed on the direct orders of Henry Laurens.⁶⁹ In autumn of that year, a ship arriving in St. Augustine from London with military supplies for the British army and ammunition and presents for the Indians was seized by order of the South Carolina Council of Safety. The seizure yielded seventeen thousand pounds of gunpowder, half of which was left behind because of the logistical difficulty in moving such an enormous load.⁷⁰

Loyalist bands were no less active in their seizures of enemy munitions. On July 12, the South Carolina Council of Safety had arms and ammunition stored at Fort Charlotte confiscated and transferred to the town of Ninety Six for safekeeping.⁷¹ When the revolutionaries arrived in Ninety Six, they were met by a force of two hundred "disaffected People from Over the River" and a Loyalist ranger troop led by Moses Kirkland. Kirkland and his Loyalist posse arrested the revolutionary leader and seized the materiel in the king's name.⁷² By far the most significant seizure of powder and ammunition came in October 1775, sparking the first real battle of the American Revolution in South Carolina. That month, a party of revolutionary rangers ventured into the interior with one thousand pounds of gunpowder and ammunition from Henry Laurens and the Council of Safety meant for the Cherokees. The party was stopped by a group of concerned backcountry residents who feared that the Indians might, in turn, use the powder to attack defenseless frontier settlers. Laurens quickly intervened, assuring them that after "long and mature deliberation," it had been decided that placating the Cherokees with a limited supply of powder was preferable to antagonizing them with no supply at all.⁷³ Appeasing the anxious crowd with Laurens's reassurances, the rangers proceeded with their shipment, only to be intercepted by a Loyalist militia of sixty men near Mine Creek (in present-day Saluda County) under the command of Patrick

⁶⁸ Shaw, "British Administration," 89-90.

⁶⁹ Patrick Tonyn to General Gage, September 14, 1775, *Extracts of Letters, &c.*, 19-20.

⁷⁰ William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, So Far as It Related to the States of North and South Carolina, and Georgia* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 1: 78-79.

⁷¹ Jerrilyn G. Marston, *King and Congress: The Transfer of Political Legitimacy, 1774-1776* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 266.

⁷² David J. Toscano, Ronald M. McCarthy, and Walter H. Conser, Jr., "A Shift in Strategy: The Organization of Military Struggle," in Walter H. Conser, Jr., et al., eds., *Resistance, Politics, and the American Struggle for Independence 1765-1775* (Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner Publishers, 1986), 445.

⁷³ O'Donnell, *Southern Indians*, 26.

Cunningham and John Bowman. Echoing the fears of the previous party, Cunningham ordered the wagons to stop, "in his majesty's name, as I understand you have ammunition for the Indians to kill us."⁷⁴ Cunningham's accusations carried extra weight because they were supported by a sworn statement of Captain Richard Pearis, who had been until that time employed as an Indian agent by the Provincial Congress. In his affidavit, Pearis claimed that the powder seized by Cunningham was, indeed, being sent to the Cherokees with the express purpose "to cut off all who were considered as disaffected persons, or King's men, as they called themselves."⁷⁵

The Provincial Congress passed a resolution condemning the seizure and sent the Camden militia under Colonel Richard Richardson to pursue the Loyalist militias and retake the powder. The Loyalists withdrew to the Cherokee settlements and vainly attempted to enlist them in their cause. Cunningham was captured in early November and the rest of his force was gradually captured or killed by Richardson, striking a crippling blow to the growing Loyalist cause in South Carolina.⁷⁶ The Provincial Congress sent out word to the Cherokees that "as soon as the powder and lead, or any part of it, is retaken, it will be forwarded to them without delay."⁷⁷ In the meantime, a party of Cherokee went to Augusta and were given a paltry six hundred pounds of gunpowder and ammunition that had escaped capture by Cunningham, a gravely disappointing amount given the two thousand pounds they had originally been promised.⁷⁸

The Creeks and the Cherokees were both angry and anxious over the seized ammunition and told Cameron that "if ammunition could be got soon things might remain quiet among them, but if they could not be supplied they could not answer for what their young people might do."⁷⁹ Stuart, in a bid to stave off violence, sent to Mobile for four hundred pounds of powder.⁸⁰ In a bid to outflank Stuart, William Henry Drayton gave a formal address to the Cherokee Nation, telling them that in cutting off munitions to rebellious colonists, the Crown had "greedily seized the ammunition that was intended for your hunting." To show their good intentions, the Americans would make a "present" of some of the ammunition

⁷⁴ Moultrie, *Memoirs*, 1: 97-98.

⁷⁵ Drayton, *Memoirs*, 2: 116.

⁷⁶ Hemphill and Wates, *Extracts from the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina*, 101-102; Robert M. Weir, "A Most Important Epoch": *The Coming of the Revolution in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 66-67.

⁷⁷ Hemphill and Wates, *Extracts from the Provincial Congresses of South Carolina*, 107.

⁷⁸ Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 81-83 (November 8, 1775).

⁷⁹ Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 76, 177 (August 1, 1775).

⁸⁰ Shaw, *British Administration*, 90.

that was to have originally been sold to the Indians, but unfortunately, because the "Great King has so ordered it, that we cannot get much for ourselves; and we expect to fight our enemies, therefore we cannot afford to give you much of what we have."⁸¹ Drayton must have known that such a half measure would be met with great disapproval by the Cherokees. Stuart, in turn, told them that "their want of Trade and ammunition is entirely owing to the bad Designs of the Rebels. That in espousing their party the Indians must continue poor and deprived of the means of subsistence; Whereas by attaching themselves to the King's Interest They will find plenty of all necessaries pouring in upon them from Pensacola & St. Augustine."⁸²

Tribes like the Cherokee were frustrated and somewhat baffled by the nascent revolution, "a Distemper among them which has seized the whole from Boston to Georgia, and they are now all mad"⁸³ The Creeks expressed great discontent with the lack of munitions from both parties in the struggle, with neither side adequately providing for either the hunt or their ongoing clashes with the Choctaws.⁸⁴ By November 1775, the Cherokees were losing patience, complaining that "our Closest Brothers sent Us several Talks, they promised us Ammunition, and after we waited for Five moons, They tell us now, that we have none to get—They have told us nothing from the beginning but lies."⁸⁵ Stuart concurred with these sentiments, telling the Creek that many of the people of Georgia and Carolina "are become mad and blind. They endeavour to make you poor by stealing your ammunition and stopping your Trade . . . They sent you a handful of your own Powder, not enough to kill Bear or Deer to feed your Children." Stuart was so moved by their plight that when he "saw my Children naked and hungry . . . I could not be happy. I could not sleep."⁸⁶

By late July 1775, the royal government had begun discreetly advocating the use of Indians to suppress rebellious colonists in the northern colonies, making use of old ties to the Six Nations and a steady supply of

⁸¹ William Henry Drayton's Talk to the Cherokee Indians, September 25, 1775, in A. S. Salley, Jr., ed., *Documents Relating to the History of South Carolina during the Revolutionary War* (Columbia: Printed for the Historical Commission of South Carolina by the State Company, 1908), 19-20.

⁸² John Stuart to Henry Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 76, 189 (October 24, 1775).

⁸³ Speech of Cherokee Chief to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 85 (November 8, 1775).

⁸⁴ David H. Corkran, *The Creek Frontier: 1540-1783* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 292.

⁸⁵ Speech of Cherokee Chief to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 85 (November 8, 1775).

⁸⁶ John Stuart Speech to Lower Creek, Colonial Office 5: 77, 24 (December 4, 1775).

presents. Lord Dartmouth, the secretary of state for the colonies, argued that such a step was warranted, because the revolutionaries themselves were utilizing Indian recruits in New England. Writing Guy Johnson, Stuart's colleague to the north, Dartmouth directed that "you do lose no time in taking such steps as may induce them to take up the Hatchet against His Majesty's Rebellious subjects in America, and to engage them in His Majesty's Service upon such plan as shall be suggested to you by General Gage to whom this Letter is sent accompanied with a large assortment of Goods for presents to them upon this important occasion."⁸⁷ Gage duly wrote to Stuart in September, ordering him to actively encourage the Indians to "take arms against his Majesty's Enemies, and to distress them all in their power for no terms is now to be kept with them . . . no time should be lost to distress a people who have acted so wantonly rebellious."⁸⁸ Stuart told Gage that he would pay "the strictest attention to your commands . . . NOTHING IN MY POWER shall be neglected to forward the interest of government," but that getting enough munitions and other goods "for engaging the Indians firmly in his Majesty's interest" was not going to be simple, logistically or financially.⁸⁹

Stuart invited the Creeks to talks to be held in the spring of 1776 and sent his brother Henry off to speak with both the Creeks and Cherokees with "a considerable supply of Ammunition to strengthen his hands." In preparation for his spring meetings, Stuart "ordered out a considerable supply of Arms Amuniton &c. From England."⁹⁰ Stuart's agents would distribute two thousand pounds of gunpowder to the Creeks, and for an upcoming meeting in March at Pensacola with various tribes, Stuart had already made arrangements for £2,625 worth of "presents arms ammunition & Provisions as will be absolutely necessary."⁹¹ For now, Stuart had instructed his agents to tell the Indians to hold off on any attacks until they had orders from him.

While Stuart's distribution network went to work with admirable efficiency, George Galphin was increasingly concerned about the lack of commitment he was getting from the provincial government. Galphin wrote frantically to Henry Laurens that "it will be veyre hard to keep the Indian peasuble when thy find the trade is Stopt from them_I Hadley no what to Say to them when we meet them as we give them all the ashurens that Cood be that thy Should be Seplyd."⁹² The Georgia legislature refused Galphin's entreaties, telling him that they did not think "it would be proper

⁸⁷ Lord Dartmouth to Guy Johnson, Colonial Office 5: 76, 124 (July 24, 1775).

⁸⁸ Thomas Gage to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 76, 187 (September 12, 1775).

⁸⁹ John Stuart to Thomas Gage, October 3, 1775, *Extracts of Letters, &c.*, 7-8.

⁹⁰ John Stuart to Henry Clinton, Colonial Office 5: 77, 107-110 (March 15, 1776).

⁹¹ John Stuart to Thomas Gage, Colonial Office 5: 77, 52 (October 24, 1775).

⁹² George Galphin to Henry Laurens, March 13, 1776, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 10: 157.

to supply the Creeks at present with any Quantity of gunpowder in the Method of Trade and Barter. Our Colonies have not such Stocks of this Article as to allow us to furnish them as usual, neither do we think, if we were able, that it, would be politic to do so at this Juncture, perhaps it would be putting Arms into their Hands, which they might be influenced to use against the Colonies."⁹³ Galphin grew so frustrated that he threatened to resign his commission. This threat finally moved the South Carolina Council of Safety to cancel a shipment of one thousand pounds of gunpowder that was to have been sent to the North Carolina Provincial Congress, on the grounds that "without the article of Gun powder it will be impossible to keep the Indians quiet & that unless he [Galphin] is Supplied he must & would resign his Commission."⁹⁴

The spring of 1776 brought with it a palpable sense of menace in South Carolina, with attacks on Charleston by the Royal Navy and on the backcountry by Indians weighing on the minds of Loyalists and revolutionaries alike. While Henry Stuart journeyed north from Mobile with five thousand pounds of ammunition and powder for the Cherokees that required a train of twenty-one horses to carry, John Stuart, in talks with British general Henry Clinton and the Royal Navy's Sir Peter Parker, was preparing for a spring campaign that would bring British forces north from West Florida to join the Creek, Chickasaw, and Cherokee Nations in a conquest of the North Carolina and Virginia frontiers.⁹⁵ As always, enlisting Indian allies would not come cheaply, with the Chickasaw alone asking for three thousand pounds of powder and an equivalent amount of ammunition. But Stuart had every reason to be confident in the success of this endeavor, with one informant writing in June that "all the Indians in the Lower Towns where I am appointed to reside are firmly attached to his Majesty and ready and willing to act in his Behalf when Call'd upon."⁹⁶

In April and May 1776, George Galphin met with the Cherokees at Fort Charlotte and the Creeks at Augusta, where he had "some presents to give them Rum amision & same Goods."⁹⁷ At Augusta, Galphin accomplished little beyond sending home a rum soaked delegation of Creeks with vague and unfounded promises of munitions that were supposedly being deliv-

⁹³ Council of Safety to Georgia Council of Safety, July 24, 1775, *ibid.*, 243.

⁹⁴ Henry Laurens to North Carolina Provincial Congress, February 14, 1776, *ibid.*, 11: 103.

⁹⁵ O'Donnell, *Southern Indians*, 36; Carl Berger, *Broadsides and Bayonets* (San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1976), 79.

⁹⁶ Henry Stuart to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 145-147 (May 7, 1776), and Hugh Hamilton to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 154 (June 7, 1776).

⁹⁷ George Galphin to Thomas Graholt, Colonial Office 5: 77, 135 (March 13, 1776).

ered to the provincial government from France and Spain.⁹⁸ Galphin implored the Creeks to remain neutral, but he reported to the Council of Safety that it was unclear how long the Creeks would remain peaceable "when they finde no ammision going amonge them there is verey Littill ammision in these backe parts."⁹⁹ Henry Stuart gleefully wrote to his brother that the meeting at Fort Charlotte with the Cherokees was equally unpropitious, that he had been told by "all the principal Headmen from the different Parts of the Nation" that "it was the want of Ammunition that induced them, but that they believed the Talks of the people who invited them made no Impression on them."¹⁰⁰ Cameron concurred with Stuart's assessment, having been told that a delegation made up largely of women and children had gone "hearing that they were to receive a great Quantity of ammunition and other presents . . . but it seems they fell much short of their Expectation, and I am informed some Returned Dissatisfied."¹⁰¹ Henry Stuart was adamant that "the Indians who went to Fort Charlotte never would have gone if they had been properly Supplied I therefore Conceive that Expencc must not be spard at this time, the Sum necessary to Support 3 Regiments of Foot would Effectually bind all the Indians of our Department to our Interest, and If they should be drawn away from us, we may find that Ten Regiments will do but little against them."¹⁰² According to Stuart, all the "Competition of the Rebels" was achieving was an unfortunate inflation in the price of ammunition and gifts for the Indians.¹⁰³

Royal Navy ships appeared off the coast of South Carolina in May and attacked Charleston on June 28. After meeting surprisingly effective resistance from the Americans at Sullivan's Island, the British limped back to New York, with the city still held by the provincial government and any further plans for a southern campaign laid aside. Three days later some Cherokees, led by Dragging Canoe, attacked two backcountry households, killing five adults, six children, and five slaves.¹⁰⁴ On July 15, a force made up of ninety Indians and 120 Loyalists disguised as Indians attacked Fort Lindley, near Rayburn's Creek (present-day Laurens County). The attack

⁹⁸ Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 45; Corkran, *Creek Frontier*, 297.

⁹⁹ George Galphin to the Council of Safety, May 26, 1776, Salley, *Documents Relating to the History of South Carolina*, 43.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Stuart to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 145-147 (May 7, 1776).

¹⁰¹ Alexander Cameron to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 140 (May 7, 1776).

¹⁰² Henry Stuart to John Stuart, Colonial Office 5: 77, 145-147 (May 7, 1776).

¹⁰³ John Stuart to Henry Clinton, Colonial Office 5: 77, 107-110 (March 15, 1776).

¹⁰⁴ Chapman J. Milling, *Red Carolinians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 314-315.

failed and ten of the Loyalists were taken prisoner and sent to Ninety Six to be detained.¹⁰⁵ There is no evidence that either of these attacks were coordinated with the British. Rather, the Cherokees seem to have been motivated by land encroachments on the Holston and Nolichucky Rivers in present-day eastern Tennessee, while the Loyalists may simply have wanted to attack their revolutionary enemies in an unconventional and potentially terrifying way. Ironically, if these attacks had been launched in conjunction with forces led by Stuart, there would have been a great likelihood of success, and the entire course of the war could have been affected. Instead, indiscriminate attacks on both revolutionary and Loyalist households served to enrage a broad swath of the population. Many Loyalists were outraged by the Indian attacks, and one revolutionary reported that "a number of the heads of the Tories in this province, when they heard of the breaking out of the Indians, wrote to our governor and told him they never dreamt the King would descend to such lawless and diabolical designs; that they were now willing to do everything in their power to assist their brethren in America. These are men of influence on the frontiers, and will be very useful against the Indians."¹⁰⁶ David Ramsay, a firsthand witness, confirms in his history of South Carolina that "before this event some well-meaning people could not see the justice or propriety of contending with their formerly protecting parent-state; but Indian cruelties, excited by royal artifices, soon extinguished all their predilection for the country of their forefathers."¹⁰⁷

Both Loyalists and revolutionaries attacked Cherokee settlements with a vengeance. William Henry Drayton wanted to annihilate the Cherokees once and for all, expecting American forces to "cut up every Indian cornfield, and burn every Indian town, and that every Indian taken shall be the slave and property of the taker; that the nation be extirpated, and the lands become the property of the public."¹⁰⁸ Militias from Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia all converged on Cherokee settlements and burned several villages. After engaging in several fierce skirmishes, the Cherokees fled to West Florida and the protection of John Stuart, or simply surrendered to the Americans, realizing the hopelessness of the situation. Attributing the war to Indian rashness, Stuart and the British did nothing to assist the beleaguered Cherokee, spurring Edmund Burke to thunder in Parliament that the Cherokees had been "bribed and betrayed into war" by British disingenuousness.¹⁰⁹ In making peace with the Ameri-

¹⁰⁵ Drayton, *Memoirs*, 2: 368.

¹⁰⁶ Berger, *Broadsides and Bayonets*, 80.

¹⁰⁷ Ramsay, *History of the Revolution of South-Carolina*, 1: 160.

¹⁰⁸ Egnal, *Mighty Empire*, 326.

¹⁰⁹ Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*, 198.

cans, the Cherokees ceded much of their lands in South Carolina, paving the way for still more backcountry settlements. As displaced Cherokees filed into West Florida in late 1776 seeking his assistance, Stuart did what he could to counter the influence of the American agents. Until his death in 1779, Stuart strove to bring about peace between the Creeks and Choctaws, while continuing to provide the Indians with arms, ammunition, and presents, sent to Pensacola by the Lords Commissioner of the Treasury. With the resounding defeat of both the Royal Navy and the Cherokees, South Carolina would remain largely peaceful until the return of the British in 1780.¹¹⁰

While both sides in the American Revolution continued to supply the Indians with presents, the centrality of the issue in South Carolina largely waned with the defeat of the Cherokees in the summer of 1776. Despite the relative brevity of the issue's importance, especially in light of the rapid defeat of the Cherokees and John Stuart's plans for a joint attack, the incidents outlined in this article have several significant implications for our understanding of the early years of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina. First, despite mitigating evidence, presents of firearms and ammunition for Indians was rapidly embraced as a highly politicized example of each adversary's nefarious plans to subjugate the other by any means necessary. Second, tribes like the Cherokees, Creeks, and Choctaws revealed their astute understanding of the white psyche by playing on the sympathies and fears of both sides in order to maximize the much-needed material goods they might receive in a time of great uncertainty. Third, the inability of provincial governments in both South Carolina and Georgia to provide these goods without a supply from England underscored their lack of manufacturing prowess and accentuated the economic costs of a break with the mother country in a very real way. When revolutionaries sought to rectify the unbalance by seizing supplies from colonial stockpiles and shipments from the Crown, it brought them into armed conflict with Loyalists for the first time. Finally, when the Cherokees attacked in the summer of 1776, presumably at the prompting of the British, many of those same Loyalists felt betrayed enough to join the revolutionaries in a counter-attack that neutralized the Cherokee threat and tipped the scales in the revolutionaries' favor. After the first tumultuous year of the war, it is not difficult to imagine that, in the hearts and minds of many South Carolinians, such perfidy was akin to a previously beloved parent coldly turning her back on her child, leaving it to the wolves.

¹¹⁰ Ramsay, *History of the Revolution of South-Carolina*, 1: 157-159.

BOOK REVIEWS

A Talent for Living: Josephine Pinckney and the Charleston Literary Tradition. By Barbara L. Bellows. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006. Pp. xvi, 301; \$45, cloth.)

In writing *A Talent for Living*, historian Barbara Bellows has recovered the life of Charleston author Josephine Pinckney, who, while a writer of national renown for a period in the 1930s and 1940s, has since fallen into obscurity. Bellows recreates with ease Pinckney's personal and professional history as well as the local literary and cultural scene, such as the Poetry Society of South Carolina and the Society for the Preservation of Negro Spirituals, in which she was a central player. Bellows seeks to achieve what Pinckney chased after her entire life: serious recognition of the work of this talented and inexplicably overlooked southern writer.

The Josephine Pinckney we meet in Bellows's pages is a compelling paradox. Pinckney lived her life both buttressed and burdened by the weight of her vaunted ancestry and the pressure to live in the new, modern world according to what she called "the Code": always do well and right; be duty-bound to family, obligation, and tradition; and behave as a Pinckney should (p. 6). At once confident and fragile, locally—yet nationally—oriented, in search of intimacy and decidedly alone, Pinckney embodies for Bellows some of the struggles of privileged southern womanhood attuned to the call of an evolving American culture. Not surprisingly, attempting to accommodate the competing claims of these two worlds, the past and the future, the lady and the woman, Pinckney battled depression most of her adult life. Her state only worsened at times when her intense literary ambitions—what Bellows describes as her "lust for fame"—went unfulfilled. Recognition arrived after the Second World War with the publication of her acclaimed comedy of manners, *Three O'Clock Dinner*, in this reviewer's opinion, the sharpest literary product from the Charleston scene.

Like her subject matter, Bellows walks a contradictory tightrope in this volume. Her narrative tone belies a kind of "push-pull" between scholarly distance from and personal identification with Pinckney and her hometown (which also happens to be Bellows's). When she is at her best, Bellows depicts Pinckney as a multi-dimensional woman, warts and all, backed up by solid research. Bellows describes in detail Pinckney's competitive fears and fuming jealousy when, despite the high quality of her creations, male colleagues such as DuBose Heyward and Hervey Allen received literary accolades; Pinckney was left to applaud their good fortune and try harder. The reader feels her frustration and understands Pinckney to be a flawed and creditable human being. Bellows also underscores the fact that Pinckney evinced a rare willingness to grapple with some of the more troubling