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S.C. - Cities and Towns - Pinckneyville

Deserted South Carolina Village Once One of Up-Country's Earliest Settlements

Pinckneyville, The Court House Village for Pinckneyville District, comprising Chester, Union, Spartanburg, Cherokee and York Counties. Established by Act of S. C. Legislature in 1791.

By ARTHUR CORNWALL

One of South Carolina's badly neglected historic spots is located in Union County, in a picturesque bit of country shaded with gigantic oaks and cedars. Here within easy reach of the public highways is the remains of Pinckney.

According to Ramsey, in 1789, the circuit courts of South Carolina were made more beneficial and convenient by being invested with complete original and final jurisdiction. In 1791 it became necessary to make two additional circuit courts, and thus Pinckney and Washington were added to the other seven districts of Beaufort, Charleston, Georgetown, Orangeburg, Camden, Cheraw and Ninety-Six.

(District Formed)

Pinckney district named in honor of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, was formed out of Spartanburg and York and Chester of the Camden district. It is said that General Edward Lacy, of Chester, Baylis Earle and Colonel William Farr were appointed by the state legislature to locate the site for Pinckney Court House. They selected a spot in the northeastern portion of Union County, about sixteen miles from Union, and one mile from Pinckney ferry, where Pacolet river empties into Broad.

The hanging ground was a mile from the village and it is known that one horse thief was hanged there. In 1798, the nine circuit courts having proved inadequate and county courts also unsatisfactory, the judicial system of the state was revised. The nine districts were abolished and circuit courts, beginning with 1800, when the new law went into effect, were held in every county. Thus Union has been the county seat of Union county since 1800.

When the people settled at Pinckney—in old times called Pinckneyville—they laid out the village by a certain plan and named the streets for Charleston streets. In the deed where Elizabeth Bankhead sold nine lots in Pinckneyville to Thomas C. Taylor in 1809 the following streets are mentioned: Meeting, Broad, Water, Trade, etc. It was expected that Pinckney would be a commercial metropolis of upper South Carolina and residences and stores were built accordingly.

(Failed of Great Honor)

It is said that a committee of congressmen visited Pinckneyville, as well as Great Falls (in Chester County,) with a view to establishing the United States Military Academy, and West Point, New York, won only by one vote.

In 1797 there was an act passed by the legislature bestowing a charter on Alexander College, named for the distinguished educator and minister of the gospel, Dr. Joseph Alexander, who was the first pastor of Bullocks Creek church, York county, a short distance on the other side of Broad river. The college was to be located in Pinckneyville, and occupied the attention of Presbytery, but it was not established. There was a

log school house at Pinckneyville. The Eaves family lived near it. There was no church in the village. The people attended Bullock's Creek and Mount Tabor—both Presbyterian churches. The Rev. Robert Y. Russell preached at Mount Tabor about fifty years.

(The McMahan Family)

A sketch of Pinckneyville would be incomplete without mentioning the McMahans. The founder of the family was Daniel McMahan, who was born in Coleraine, Ireland, in 1765. He came to the United States in 1783 and peddled jewelry and such things from Philadelphia to South Carolina. He walked a dozen times to Philadelphia and back with his pack, and when he could afford it, bought a carry-all and horse.

On his thirteenth trip he was robbed of five hundred dollars in gold at Smith's Ford on Broad river, which caused him to have to go walking again. The robber was also a counterfeiter, who lived in a cave on the border of North and South Carolina, so when a possee would come to arrest him in Rutherford county he would run over to South Carolina, and vice versa.

Daniel McMahan settled at Pinckneyville in 1804. In 1813 George Plexico, Capt. William Palmer and Issac J. Foster were appointed by the legislature to appraise and value the public land in Pinckneyville, where the court house and jail were erected, part of which land being occupied by Daniel McMahan. Thomas C. Taylor and Amos Davis. Daniel McMahan bought the court house, which he fitted up for a dwelling. He married Miss Margaret Kinard of Fairfield County.

The Pinckney property remained in possession of the McMahan family until 1878 when Miss Mary McMahan sold it to the late B. F. Foster. In the deed Miss McMahan reserved the minerals on the land. There is a good mine two or three hundred yards back of the brick store. The court house, as before mentioned, was the residence of the McMahans, and was remodeled in 1871 or 1872. It was a wooden building, and it is said when remodeled made a comfortable home. The old people remembered the beautiful flower yard and summer house with its climbing roses.

(Lived Moral Life)

Daniel McMahan died there in 1846. He and other members of the family were buried at Bullocks creek. A portion of the inscription on Daniel McMahan's tombstone is: "Whose long life was strictly moral, and whose acts of liberality proved him the friend and supporter of Christianity." He left several sons and daughters. Dr. John J. McMahan lived in Fairfield and Dr. Daniel F. McMahan moved to Florida after the house was burned. Dr. D. F. McMahan married Miss Elizabeth Hoey. Miss Frances McMahan married Dr. O. B. Irwine. They lived at Pinckneyville for some years and afterwards moved to Greenville, South Carolina. Miss Mary McMahan spent her last years in Greenville. The Stewart family lived near the McMahans. Some of them moved to Florida.

(In Front of Enemy)

Across the street from Daniel McMahan lived Thomas C. Taylor, another Irishman, who kept the hotel. Records show that these two sons of Erin had several lawsuits about lines and titles to property.

A neighbor had a pair of oxen named "McMahan and Taylor", because he said they would not pull together.

Before Taylor died he requested that his body be buried in front of the McMahan place as Daniel McMahan would have to see his grave every day. The lonely and solitary grave is now almost hidden by undergrowth. The inscription on his tombstone is as follows: "Sacred to the memory of Thomas C. Taylor, who was born in Ireland, 26th of March, 1776 and died in Pinckneyville, South Carolina, 15th of June, 1832 in the 57th year of his age.

"Silent grave, to thee I trust,
This precious part of worthy dust,
Keep it safe, O sacred tomb,
Until a wife shall ask for room."

However, his wife, Elizabeth Taylor, does not rest beside her husband. She moved to Dalla county, Alabama, and in 1839, through her attorney, James Fowler Walker, sold lots in Pinckneyville containing five acres to William McGwan, who was living there at that time. The witnesses to the deed were G. M. Plexico and James H. Alexander. Squire James H. Alexander was a merchant and for years a magistrate of Pinckneyville. Robert Black was another merchant of the village.

(Congressman Joseph Gist)

The Taylor house was occupied by Congressman Joseph Gist before he built his home a mile from the village. The latter place was afterwards the home of the late J. C. Farrar. William F. Gist was a merchant of Pinckneyville in 1805 and in 1821 was one of the Justices of the Quorum for Union district.

Districts have been called counties since 1868. Isaac Going was one of the justices of the quorum in 1828. Judge William Smith lived for a time at Pinckneyville and afterwards moved to Alabama.

An old letter states that Judge Grimke held court at Pinckneyville in 1796. The "Bay's Reports" can be found the case of Ferdinand Hopkins against Allan deGraffenried, Pinckney district, 1798, Judge Bay presided at the trial.

(A Clock Vender)

At one time Thomas E. Suggs, the clock vender, lived in the Taylor house. He came from Waterbury, Connecticut. His clocks had wooden wheels and works, were considered good timepieces, could be placed on the mantel, and were made at the Waterbury Clock factory at Bullocks Creek. In after years Suggs moved to Alabama.

It may not be amiss to mention that Seth Thomas, of Plymouth, Litchfield county, Connecticut, owned six acres of lots in Pinckneyville and sold them to James Fowler Walker in 1847, who afterwards sold them to Dr. W. H. Sims. Doctor Sims owned and lived in the Taylor house for eight of ten years. He sold it to the late B. F. Foster, who lived there before moving to Union.

(House Now in Ruins)

The Taylor house is in ruins. It was a two-story wooden building and was put together with wooden pegs. Part of what was a boarding house has been moved across the street and is used as a barn. The only landmarks left of this almost deserted village are two brick buildings—the old jail and the store—the latter said to have been

built by Daniel McMahan.

The jail is rather interesting. The brick wall of the room is eighteen inches thick and the size of the room is fourteen feet by twenty. It is plastered inside and has two windows and two doors. The shutters and doors are double planked and thick with nails well-clinched. There is a chimney at one end of the room and the two spaces between the fireplace and the walls were planked up and used as dungeons. These two dark cells would be small closets if they had doors. They measure two feet by four feet. It was during that period the act of being put into jail was known as being "put in the jug." This comes from the fact the prisoners were lowered from the floor through a trap door into the completely enclosed cell structure beneath the floor.

(William Buford's Trip)

On May 28, 1801, "The Times" of Charleston, gives an interesting notice of William Buford's trip from his home on Broad river near Pinckney Court House through the Santee canal to Charleston. He passed down Broad river, though the canal at Columbia, down the Congaree river, and Santee canal. He landed in Charleston on Cooper river. Mr. Buford went in his own boat, which was built on his own plantation and loaded with his own cotton. This was a great achievement, and is the first mention of boating in this country.

Mills says Broad river was navigable to the Ninety-nine islands for boats carrying sixty bales of cotton—that the obstruction at Lockhart shoals was overcome by a canal with seven locks executed by the state. Benjamin F. Logan and John McEntin owned a cotton house in Pinckneyville in 1828.

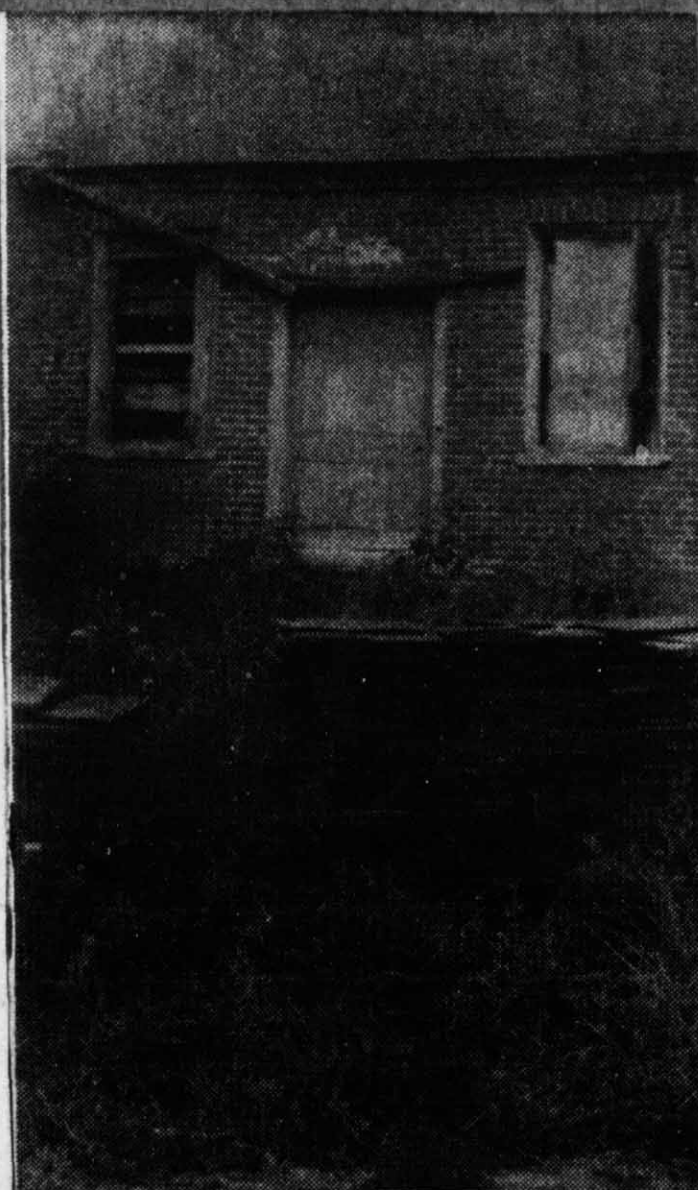
(Days of the Stage Coach)

Stages coaches took the place of trains in those days, and ran rain or shine. They drove four horses every ten miles. They carried the mail as well as passengers and their luggage. The driver would blow one long, distant blast on the York side approaching Pinckney ferry as a warning, and after that a short blast for each passenger so the inn-keeper at Pinckney would know how many guests to expect.

It had been recorded from good authority that the chickens became so accustomed to being chased immediately after the stage horn's daily blast that they would run for their lives when they heard it.

Time has made many changes in Pinckney since those good old days. After the Court House was moved to Union and the tide of travel changed when railroads took the place of stage coaches through the country, Pinckney went into a decline from which it never recovered. From a once thriving village it is left to a lone fate.

However, those interested in history should make a special effort to drive over to Old Pinckneyville. Turn right at Robat and you'll end up in Pinckneyville. Be sure to watch the signs, as you may pass Pinckneyville and never know it.



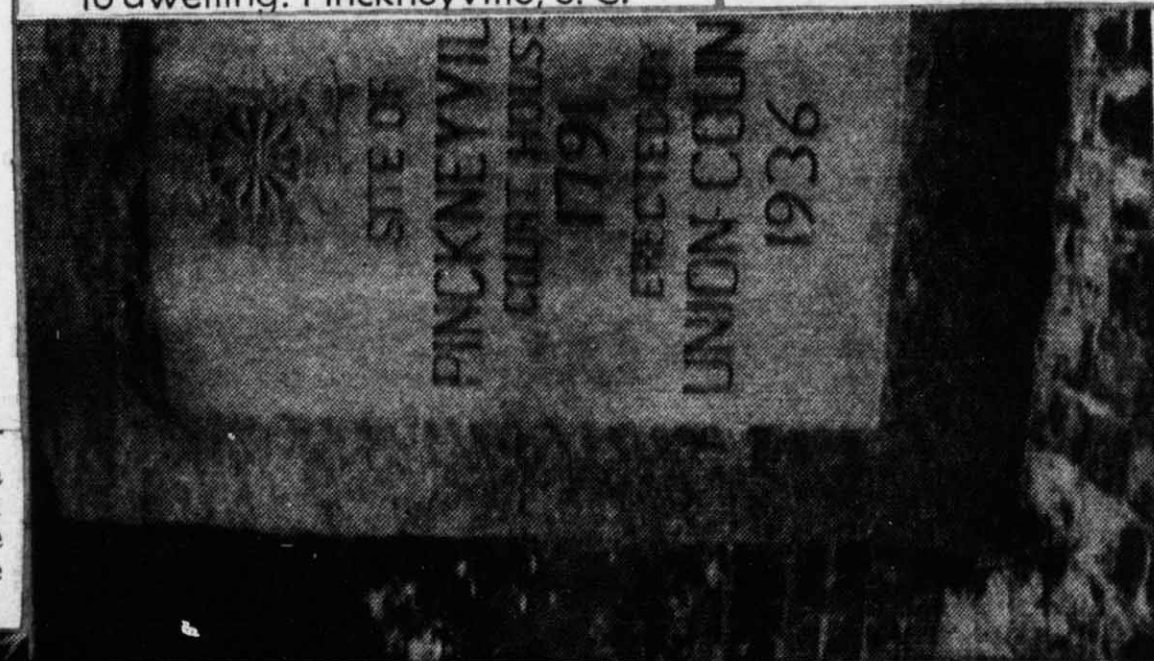
Ruins of Old Jail converted to dwelling. Pinckneyville, S. C.



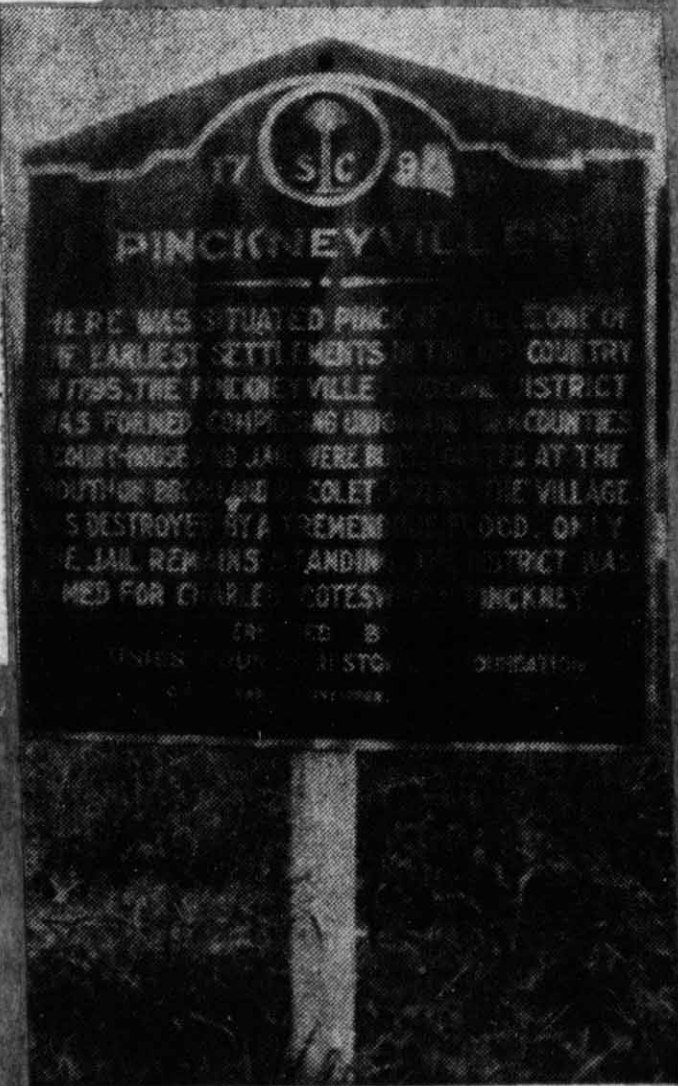
Another view of Old Jail which was converted to a dwelling



Rear view of another house at Pinckneyville, S. C.



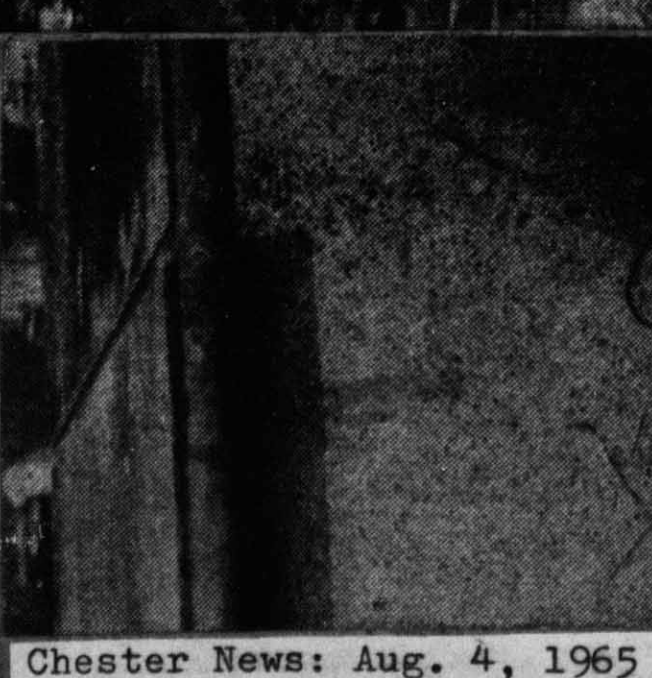
Marker erected by Union County Pinckneyville, S. C.



Pinckneyville, S. C. Marker on grounds.



Entrance to the Cellar in Old Jail Pinckneyville, S. C.



Tombs of Daniel McMahan, (1764-1846) and his wife, Margaret Kincaid (1780-1821) McMahan in Bullock's Creek Presbyterian Church Cemetery in York County.