

# Started as social center, Pinckneyville became dead town

**S**outh Carolina's first legislature following the Revolutionary War created counties that began operating in 1785.

Each county had a courthouse, but circuit courts that would act as appeals courts were also needed. In 1791 new district courts were established.

One of the new courts was named Pinckneyville District in honor of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a native Charlestonian active in national politics. Pinckneyville tried

**Louise Pettus**



**NEARBY HISTORY**

cases from the counties of York, Chester, Spartanburg and Union.

The site was mandated as one mile from Pinckney Ferry where the Pacolet River empties into the Broad River. Construction had hardly begun before the river flooded the area. The town was moved to higher ground.

One mile from the town was the "Hanging Ground." At least one horse thief was hanged there.

The state Legislature intended Pinckneyville to be the Charleston of the upcountry. To that end, streets were named for Charleston streets — Meeting, Broad, Water, Trade, etc. The town was designed to become a commercial metropolis as well as "a center of social activity."

Soon, Pinckneyville had gained several stores, a tavern and inn combination, and a post office. Alexandria College was chartered by the Rev. Joseph Alexander but never got off the ground. There was never a church. Churchgoers attended either Bullocks Creek or Mount Tabor, both Presbyterian churches.

The jail had walls 18 inches thick made from hand-pressed brick. It measured 14 by 20 feet and had two cells between the walls and the fireplace. Each cell was only 2 by 4 feet, with no door. Prisoners were lowered from the top of the cell, which had an iron grate fastened over it. One cannot imagine a more cruel contraption.

The stagecoach that carried four

passengers with luggage also served as a mail coach that "ran rain or shine." Drivers would blow one long distinct blast when approaching the town from the York side of the river. There was a short blast for each passenger so the innkeeper would know how many guests he would have to feed. It was said the chickens became so aware of the stagecoach blasts they would "literally run for their lives."

Two of the town's best-known merchants were Daniel McMahan, a storekeeper, and Thomas C. Taylor, the innkeeper. The two men, both natives of Ireland, detested each other. There were frequent lawsuits over property lines. One of their neighbors had two oxen he named McMahan and Taylor be-

cause he said the oxen would not pull together.

Before he died, Taylor requested that his body be buried in front of McMahan's place so Daniel McMahan would have to look at his grave every day. Taylor died in 1832 and was buried as he requested. McMahan lived to be very old, dying in 1878.

In 1800 the districts were rearranged. The Pinckneyville court district was abandoned. The town managed to hold on for a few years but was labeled a "dead town" in 1840. By then Daniel McMahan was living in the old courthouse, which he had turned into a residence.

By 1950 the only surviving building was the jail, today a crumbled

pile of bricks.

Pinckneyville is all but forgotten, but it should be mentioned that Thomas E. Suggs, a clock vendor from Waterbury, Conn., lived in Taylor's inn. He operated the Waterbury Clock Factory at Bullocks Creek across the Broad River from Pinckneyville.

Scattered records also show the famed clock maker, Seth Thomas of Litchfield, Conn., was at Pinckneyville. Thus Pinckneyville was a distribution center for some of the most prized shelf clocks produced in America.

*Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.*