

Cockfighting was big sport in S.C. until late 1890s

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Frontiersmen often indulged in the blood sport of cockfighting.

There is an account of Thomas Sumter's soldiers setting up fights at their winter camp on Clems Branch in upper Lancaster County in 1780. Young Andrew Jackson is supposed to have watched and gambled on the cockfights.

The practice continued and was not illegal until after the Civil War. By 1902 there were not only laws on the books penalizing "Whoever inflicts unnecessary pain or suffering upon any animal," but half of the fine went to the S.C. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Still, in the late 1890s and early 1900s there was a well-known "cock pit" at Lesslie Station near Rock Hill. This was the scene of "cocking mains," a term that apparently referred to a series of cockfights put on as entertainment for the public. Devotees came to Lesslie from Rock Hill, Yorkville, Charlotte, Lancaster and Chester and from as far away as Greenville, S.C.

In an effort to draw larger crowds, a "flaming red circular" addressed to "the sporting public" announced that on the 12th of December 1902, there would be a combination bull fight-cock fight-dog fight at R.F. Thomasson's cockpit, 3½ miles east of Rock Hill.

A covered grandstand seating 500 people had been constructed and admission set at \$1. Hacks were to meet all trains at Rock Hill, and the public was told the events would start at noon and continue through the afternoon into the night and commence early on the next day.

The Associated Press got word of the planned fights and, immediately, the president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals wired S.C. Gov. M.B. McSweeney.

The S.C. attorney general then informed the governor state laws would be broken if the planned events went on.

McSweeney then ordered the York County sheriff, John Logan, to proceed to stop the fights and, if necessary, to use the state militia unit on duty at Rock Hill or to form a posse.



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*Nearby
History*

The day before the fights were scheduled, the sheriff went to Thomasson's place and ordered them stopped. Thomasson told the sheriff he intended to carry out the fights as advertised. Sheriff Logan sent for a detachment of eight or 10 men from the Catawba Light Infantry, a rifle company of 26 men. Capt. Dunlap came immediately with 25 riflemen.

About 75 spectators had come to Lesslie and heard Thomasson's reply to Sheriff Logan, which was considered to be a bluff on Thomasson's part in an effort to keep those who came to see the fights from being disappointed.

They all quietly left the scene.

In February 1910 there was another big cockfight scheduled, this one up on the N.C. line and staged by Columbus Parham. Officer J.L. Sanders of the York County sheriff's office got word of the fight. When Sanders and two others got there, they found several dead roosters and 40 or 50 chickens waiting their turn.

Parham operated a small store. Officer Sanders searched it and found bootleg whiskey hidden in a barrel of loose corn. Parham paid a \$200 fine.

In an attempt to make cockfighting carry a heavier penalty. John McElhaney, a Fort Mill magistrate, proposed to outlaw cockfighting within three miles of a schoolhouse. McElhaney said if every institution of learning in the county were chartered it would be pretty hard for the fighters to find a suitable place more than three miles from a schoolhouse.

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