

Forming of S.C. counties

After the Revolutionary War, it was necessary to set up a replacement of the English colonial system of courts, election districts, tax collection and the recording of land transactions, to mention only the major functions of local government.



Nearby history

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record a deed or file a will.

Effective in 1785, the state's seven districts were divided into counties. No county could be more than 40 miles square and each had to select a central place for a courthouse and a jail.

Camden District became seven counties that included Chester, Lancaster and York counties. Each county had a sheriff and magistrates. The office of sheriff carried great prestige. Camden retained its district court, which became, in essence, an appeals court.

Within six years the court system was restructured, probably because of population growth. Two new district courts (which were really circuit courts) were formed called Washington and Pinckney districts. Pinckney District was composed of York and Chester, which were taken out of the Camden District, along with Spartanburg and Union counties, which were taken out of the Ninety-Six District.

Actually, not quite all of York was in Pinckney District. East of the Catawba River (Fort Mill) was assigned to the General Sessions and Common Pleas Courts of Lancaster County.

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■ At citizens' request, districts were divided.

The town of Pinckneyville, complete with a court and jail, was slated to be built on the west bank of the Broad River in the present county of Union. After the first half-completed site was washed away in a flood, a second was built on a bluff above the river.

Pinckneyville was accessible only by ferry and there was a great deal of complaint about there being no accommodations for the people engaged in court business. The area was poor, and homes were widely scattered. There were few roads and those badly kept. The only inn was in York County, and this meant a ferry trip twice a day.

The first Pinckneyville court was in 1792, although the courthouse was not completed until 1796. Pinckneyville's courthouse and jail were made of bricks, in contrast to the county's log structures.

It was a contentious age. There were many suits over land titles. The lack of a strong banking system forced people to rely on personal notes backed, often, by only a person's reputation for integrity. Charges of slander helped fill the court dockets.

All of this attracted numerous lawyers to Pinckneyville when court was in session. However, for all of its grandeur, Pinckneyville was destined to be short-lived. The legislature restructured the court system in 1798 and Pinckneyville lost its reason for existence.

In 1799 the state did away with counties and in 1800 replaced them with election districts. Thus, from 1800 until a post-Civil War constitution in 1868, it is correct to speak of districts — Chester District, Lancaster District and York District — and not use the term "county."

Not a single one of the three counties, or districts, has the same boundaries it had in 1785. In fact, the county lines weren't drawn until 1796. For the first nine years our county boundaries were only "approximations."

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