

#1246

# S.C. Cities and Towns - Pinckneyville

## Chan. Obs. April 20, 1952 **FRESHET WIPED OUT S. C. TOWN IN 1792**

UNION, S. C.—This month, 160 years ago, a freshet literally wiped out a town in Union County called Pinckneyville.

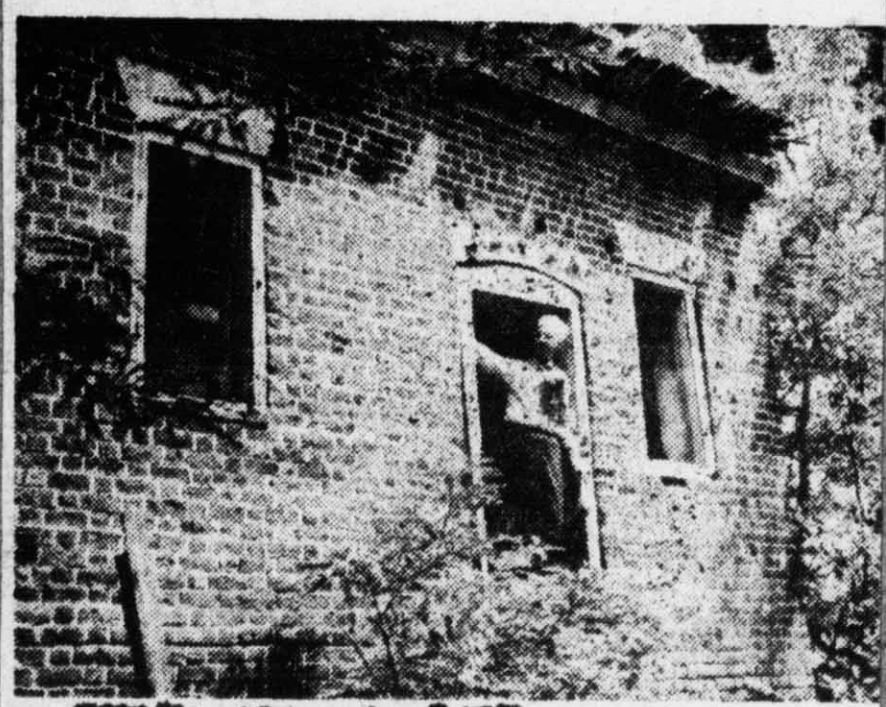
The town was rebuilt. But the builders were wiser. They moved the site to a pleasant, romantic and more elevated location farther up on the banks of Broad River.

The new location was "away from the confluence of Broad and Pacolet rivers."

National Gazette of Philadelphia told of this April 1792 disaster in the May 17, 1792, issue.

Pinckneyville, now extinct, was the capital of Pinckney District. It embraced the counties of Chester, Spartanburg, Union and York.

### Union County's 'Jug'



State May 19, 1953

Pictured above are two of the Upcountry's oldest jails. The Old Pinckney District jail, called "the Jug," was built in 1791 at Pinckneyville.

By WILLIAM C. LAKE

UNION—Perhaps two of the oldest jails in the Up-Country are the Pinckney District jail, called the "Jug," at Pinckneyville, and the Union County jail at Union.

Pinckney, built in 1791, is a one-story brick structure. And although it is 162 years old and obsolete, its walls are still intact, but the roof and floor have fallen in decay.

This prison served Pinckney district, comprising four counties, Chester, Spartanburg, Union and York, with Pinckneyville, now a ghost town, as the capital.

## Pinckneyville Ruins Found in Union County

Jail With Dungeon Stands—Charleston Names for Streets Used—McMahan Progenitor First Lived There—Promised to Be a Metropolis—"Pride of Former Days" Is Dead and "Glory's Thrill Is O'er."

Paper Read Before the Fair Forest Chapter, D. A. R., by Miss Minnie Lee Walker.

"When time who steals our years away Shall steal our pleasures too, The mem'ry of the past will stay, And half our joys renew."

In this day of automobiles, interesting trips are taken to battle grounds and other historic spots off the railroad. It has been a pleasure to visit Pinckney, and gather data for the unwritten history of Union county, S. C., which is the work of the Fair Forest chapter, Daughter of the American Revolution, for 1916 and 1917.

According to Ramsay, 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. Pinckney district, named in honor of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, was formed out of Spartanburg and Union of the Ninety-Six district and York and Chester of the Camden district. It is said that Gen. Edward Lacy, Baylis Earle and Col. William Farr were appointed by the state legislature to locate the site for Pinckney courthouse. They selected a spot in the northern portion of Union county, about 16 miles from Union, 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 the 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.

### Charleston Names Used.

When the people settled at Pinckney—in old times called Pinckneyville—they laid out the village by a certain plan and named streets for Charleston streets. In the deed where Elizabeth Bankhead sold nine lots in Pinckneyville to Thomas C. Taylor in 1809, the following streets were mentioned: Meeting, Broad, Water, Tradd, etc. It was expected that Pinckney would be a commercial metropolis of upper South Carolina, and residences and stores were built accordingly. 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 by only 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 Bullock's Creek church, York county, South Carolina, a short distance on the other side of Broad river. The college was to be located at Pinckneyville, and occupied the attention of presbytery, but it was not established. There was a log

schoolhouse 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 40 or 50 years.

### 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 to Philadelphia and back a dozen times with his pack, and when he could afford it, bought a carryall and horse. On his 13th trip he was robbed of \$500 in gold at Smith's ford on Broad river, which caused him to have to go to walking again. The robber was also a counterfeiter, who lived in a cave on the border of North and South Carolina, so when a posse 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 1913 George Plexico, Capt. William Palmer and Isaac J. Foster were appointed by the legislature to appraise and value the public land in Pinckneyville, where the courthouse and jail were erected, part of which land being occupied by Daniel McMahan, Thomas C. Taylor and Amos Davis. Daniel McMahan bought the courthouse which he fitted up for a dwelling. He married Miss Margaret Kincaid of Fairfield. The Pinckney property remained the possession of the McMahan family until 1878 when Miss Mary McMahan sold it to the late B. F. Foster, whose son, J. B. Foster, owns it at the present day. In the deed Miss McMahan reserved the minerals on the land. There is a gold mine two or three hundred yards back of the brick store. The courthouse, as before mentioned, was the residence of the McMahans, and was burned in 1871 or 1872. It was a wooden building, and it is said when remodeled made a comfortable home. The old people remember the beautiful flower yard and summer house with its climbing roses. Daniel McMahan died there in 1846. He and other members of the family were buried at Bullock 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 home was burned. Dr. D. F. McMahan married Miss Eliza Hoey. Miss Frances McMahan married Dr. O. B. Irvine. They lived at Pinckneyville for some years and afterwards moved to Greenville. Miss Mary McMahan spent her last years in Greenville. The Stewart family lived near the McMahans. Some of them moved to Florida.

### Several Lawsuits.

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 so that Daniel McMahan would have to see his grave every day. The lonely and solitary grave is still in full view. The inscription on his tombstone is as follows: "Sacred to the memory of Thomas C. Taylor who was born in Ireland, March, 1776, and died in Pinckneyville, South Carolina, 19th 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." Justice of Quorum.

However, his wife, Elizabeth Taylor, does not rest beside her husband. She moved to Dallas county, Ala., and in 1839, through her attorney, Capt. James Fowler Walker, sold lots in Pinckneyville containing live acres, to William McCowan, 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 at Pinckneyville. He and Capt. James F. Walker were brothers-in-law, having married the daughters of William Reid. Capt. J. F. Walker was the grandfather, and William Reid the great-grandfather of the present writer and her brother, William Reid Walker. Robert Black was another merchant of the village.

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 in 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. In "Bay's Reports" can be found the case of Ferdinand De Graffenreid, Pinckney district, 1798. Judge Bay presided on the trial.

### Wooden Wheels.

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

It may not be amiss to mention that Seth Thomas of Plymouth, Litchfield county, Conn., owned six acres of lots in Pinckneyville, and sold them to Capt. 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 or ten years. He sold it to the late B. F. Foster, who lived there before moving to Union, and whose son, as before mentioned, now owns the site of Pinckneyville.

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 this almost deserted cillage are two brick buildings—the old jail and the store—the latter said to have been built by Daniel McMahan. Both these have been fitted up for tenant houses and are occupied by Darneille McMahan and family—descendants of the McMahan Negroes. The jail is rather interesting. The brick wall of the room is 18 inches thick and the size of the room is 14 feet by 20. It is plastered inside and has two windows and two doors. The shutters and doors are double planked and thick with nails well clenched. There is a chimney at one end of the room, and the two spaces between the fireplace and walls were planked up and used as

dungeons. These two dark cells could be closed if they had doors. They measure two feet by four feet. It is said criminals were lowered from the top.

### Through Santee Canal.

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 courthouse through the Santee canal to Charleston. He passed down Broad river, through the canal at Columbia, down the Congaree and Santee, through the Santee canal, and 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 naviga-

ble lands for of cotton,—that carries 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.

Stage coaches took the place of trains in those days, and ran rain or shine. They drove four horses to the coach, and changed horses every ten miles. They carried mail as well as passengers and their luggage. The driver would blow one long, distinct blast on the York side approaching Pinckney Ferry as a warning, and after taht a short blast for each passenger, so the innkeeper at Pinckney would know how many guests to expect. It is said on 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.

It is sad to think of the changes have befallen Pinckney since its good old days. After the courthouse was moved to Union and the tide travel changed when railroads the place of stage coaches through country, Pinckney went into a decay from which it never recovered. From a once thriving village it is left to lonely fate.

"So sleeps the pride of former days, So glory's thrill is o'er; And hearts that once beat high for praise Now feel that pulse no more."