

## **Planters and Presbyterians: South Carolina from Atlantic Microcosm to the Eve of the American Revolution**

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The concept of Atlantic history is, at its heart, a comparative ideology. Its purpose is to examine the conflicts and co-relationships between various geographical elements of the Atlantic system. The driving force behind the vast majority of these relationships through history was colonialism. However, it is not always necessary to view these relationships at distances of thousands of miles. In many cases happenstance or the mechanisms of colonialism deposited such factions close together, so that two or more very disparate groups, whose Atlantic origins were perhaps far-flung, ended up interacting in a very limited geographical space. This is what I refer to throughout this paper as the Atlantic microcosm. Because of the accident of colonialism and migration, it is possible in these cases to look at the Atlantic relationships in such a place with a microscope rather than a telescope, turning the methodology of Atlanticism on its head while retaining the essence of its ideology; namely that the processes which made the Atlantic world created novel relationships among various and sundry groups within the Atlantic system that would not have occurred without the engine of colonialism.

Colonial South Carolina from the arrival of the Scots-Irish to the eve of the American Revolution represents just such a microcosm. Both the wealthy English planters of the Lowcountry, and the Scots-Irish settlers of the Backcountry, arrived in South Carolina through colonial processes, and were part of the same English colonial system. The Lowcountry aristocracy migrated, similarly to the planters of the West Indian colonies, principally to make a fortune. Many of the Backcountry settlers, on the other hand, sought to escape persecution, poverty or outside interference in their lives back home. Yet ironically the Atlantic engine that had brought both peoples to the same place also set them up for a collision which would initially set the two at odds but eventually tear down the divisions between them and create a very un-Atlantic common identity. This paper will argue that the American Revolution provided the catalyst for the end of the Atlantic World as the most important aspect of identity in South Carolina.

The differences between these two groups led to dramatic political battles over the direction of the colony of South Carolina, especially as the Scots-Irish became a viable political force and eventually the majority population. Change in power structures lagged behind population growth in the Backcountry. The desire of the Backcountry settlers to create order in their region, as well as their desire for adequate representation in the Colonial Assembly would be largely ignored by the Lowcountry planters who maintained political power in the colony. It would not be until the coming of the American Revolution, as ideological conflicts rocked the state, that the planters of the coast would reach out to the Scots-Irish for support, and by then it was almost too late.

This change in attitudes is highlighted in two sets of journals that Lowcountry travelers left, documenting their journeys in the Backcountry in the mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although these two encountered similar opposition and expressed similar derision at their uncivilized neighbors, they were fundamentally different in the way they addressed the

inhabitants themselves. Because of this, the latter of the two contributed to a dramatic shift in the way South Carolinians on both sides of the cultural divide thought of themselves. While Charles Woodmason's writings about his travels in 1766, as will be shown, displayed unguarded disdain for the backcountry settlers, and a desire to civilize them (make them more like the high culture of the low country), the later William Henry Drayton mission made attempts to cater to their needs and to meet them on their own terms, in order to bring them in on his side in the coming conflict with the British. This is a subtle but important difference and it points to a shift in Lowcountry ideology based primarily on necessity. The Drayton mission to the Backcountry represents a watershed moment in South Carolina because it represents the first concerted effort on the part of the Lowcountry powerbrokers to make concessions to Backcountry settlers in order to gain their support. It was the threat of an even greater foe, the British and South Carolina Loyalists, which forced these two groups to set aside their differences and unite, and it was this very struggle that changed the prime identities of white South Carolinians from their separate European cultural identities to a unified American identity based on the ideology of revolution (or in some cases, which lie beyond the scope of this work, in opposition to it).

Although this paper focuses on the conflicts in South Carolina, the circumstances and relationships are extremely similar to those in North Carolina. Although the brevity of this work and differences in the specific political issues of the two colonies preclude an equal treatment for North Carolina, the cultural divide was extremely similar. In a few cases, where better examples exist North of the very arbitrary border between the two colonies, I will use parallels from North Carolina to illustrate elements of the situation in South Carolina.

It would be easy to attribute the initial division between Lowcountry planters and Backcountry settlers to class, as Peter Rediker and Marcus Linebaugh have done in *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*.<sup>1</sup> After all, South Carolina contained some of the richest and poorest people in the thirteen colonies as represented by the Lowcountry planters and the Backcountry Scots-Irish respectively. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate in this paper, such an approach is overly simplistic. If, for instance, class had primarily driven the conflicts of the mid-late 18th century, the underprivileged whites of the Lowcountry, not to mention slaves, would have found much in common with the Backcountry farmers. Moreover, discriminatory laws and insulting comments in the writings of the period, directed at the Scots-Irish, would have been couched in class rhetoric rather than in religious or ethnic terms. This is demonstrably not the case. Rather, the primary conflicts between the Ulstermen living in the North and West of the colony, and the English living along the coast, stemmed from cultural and religious conflicts that were centuries old and that crossed the Atlantic with them. *The Many Headed Hydra* is correct in one respect; South Carolina was bitterly divided in the years leading up to the American Revolution. However, to attribute that division exclusively to class is a gross oversimplification.

If Linebaugh and Rediker attempt to define how and why animosity and discord appeared in the colony, Rachel Klein has offered perhaps the best explanation thus far for how South Carolina came to overcome these sectional divisions. In *The Unification of a*

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

*Slave State*,<sup>2</sup> she argues that the growth of economic ties between the Backcountry and the Lowcountry in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century cemented relations between the two formerly disparate regions. This primarily economic change, she points out, began as early as the 1760s and was spurred by the spread of slave agriculture into the Backcountry, and especially, later on, by the development of the cotton gin, which allowed large-scale plantation-style agriculture outside of the rice belt.

The primary literature does present a strong case for economic forces being at the root of the dissipation of sectional tensions. Although Presbyterians in the Backcountry initially were mostly subsistence farmers, in the years immediately before the American Revolution, indigo, hemp, and tobacco exported via Charleston were beginning to become a larger and larger part of the Backcountry economy as well as South Carolina's at large. For instance, in December of 1768, a news dispatch from Charleston was published in the *Boston Chronicle*, discussing the economic progress of the Backcountry. "Several large quantities of excellent tobacco, made in the back settlements, have been brought to market," the dispatch stated, and "it might soon be made a very considerable article among our exports...the produce of good wheat has been so great this year that we may soon expect, from Camden alone, 2,000 barrels of flour and 1,500 of ship bread."<sup>3</sup> This would seem to fit into Klein's thesis that it was the economic development of the Backcountry that brought the two regions into close harmony as trading relationships were forged between western farmers and Charleston merchants; and I do not mean to challenge the basic premise that economic interdependence provided *an* important factor in the change of attitudes between the two regions toward each other.<sup>4</sup> However, the issue was significantly more complicated than mere economics.

The market thesis is sound as far as it can be applied, and Klein has done a good job in applying it. However, she neglects the equally important changes that were occurring in the way the two sections of the state thought about themselves. Economics is a powerful force, but so are culture and ideology. As late as 1775, the Lowcountry Revolutionaries were still hard-pressed to make their overtures to their Backcountry brethren successful, and men like William Henry Drayton still bemoaned the latter's apathy with frustration. In this case, human agency played a major role because it was men like Drayton, in ways very different than those of his predecessor Charles Woodmason, who very actively courted the Backcountry settlers. By offering them what they had always wanted, political stability and a voice in state government, this new wave of Lowcountry Revolutionaries tried to bring the Backcountry into the fold once the former realized how desperate times had become. In this way it was the reorientation of interests toward a common enemy, at least as much as reorientation toward a common economic endeavor, which gave the Lowcountry and the Backcountry common ground. While the unification of this particular slave state might have been a gradual, and possibly even inevitable, process, its most dramatic leap was unquestionably between 1775 and 1780, and it was the crisis of the American Revolution that provided the

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<sup>2</sup> Rachel N. Klein. *The Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808*. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> "News From the Back Settlements, 1768," *Boston Chronicle* December 5, 1768.

<sup>4</sup> See Klein for a more complete outline of her thesis.

catalyst for the dramatic shift in the way South Carolinians thought about themselves and each other.

Before proceeding to the question of how and in what ways the colony changed, it is first necessary to survey the specific differences between the two cultures. In the Lowcountry, centered around Charleston, was a thriving center of commercial agriculture, based on slave labor and cash crops, especially rice. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, before the development of the cotton gin, it was this little white grain that was planted in abundance on nearly every plantation in the region, and that filled the hulls of ships departing from the bustling port of Charleston. It is hard to overstate the magnitude of the rice trade or its importance to individual planters or to South Carolina's economy. A single merchant, Sam Eveligh, for example, exported over 100,000 barrels of it in a single 12-month period in 1760-1.<sup>5</sup>

This mono-cultural plantation economy was decidedly Atlantic in its origin and structure. Rice was not only the chief commodity of the region; it also represented a way of life and enabled a feudal social structure imported from the British West Indies. The Lowcountry was a land of enslaved black majorities and staggering wealth among the small white elite, most of them English, and many of them transplants themselves from the sugar plantations of Barbados, Jamaica, St. Kitts, Antigua and other Caribbean islands. Their migration to America in the first place was a product of economic conditions in the British West Indies. In Richard Dunn's *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the English Planter Class in the West Indies, 1624-1713*, the author discusses the process by which these very islands became havens for such a strong landed aristocracy. On the sugar islands, Dunn points out, and especially on Barbados, economies of scale and scarcity of free labor and land gradually forced smaller planters to sell out their tracts. In the 1670s and 80s, land in Barbados became more and more concentrated in the hands of a few powerful landowners. Those smaller planters, forced out of the Barbadian sugar economy, came in droves to the Carolinas to plant rice. These planters formed the core of what would become the equally powerful South Carolina planter class, many of whom aspired to achieve the status they had been denied in the sugar islands. By 1680, Dunn points out, less than ten percent of planters on Barbados owned more than fifty percent of both land and slaves.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, by the time of the American Revolution, the wealthiest planters in South Carolina owned roughly the same percentage of their agricultural economy.<sup>7</sup> With more plentiful land, they succeeded beyond their wildest expectations, and within a few generations had become similar in wealth and political power to the very group of people that had driven them from places like Barbados and Antigua.<sup>8</sup>

The early colony of South Carolina, like those British Caribbean outposts, was founded on the twin establishments of the Anglican Church and a commercial slave based economic ideology. But it was also based on the social aspirations of a wealthy but provincial class trying to replicate the comforts of aristocratic life in England. J.H. Elliott

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<sup>5</sup> P. Collinson, "Legendary Origins of Lowcountry Products, 1766." *Gentlemen's Magazine*. June 1766. 278-80.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Dunn. *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the English Planter Class in the West Indies, 1624-1713*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972). 97

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

argues that it was this very attempt to be “accepted as a virtuous ruling class on the model of Whig England,”<sup>9</sup> that led to the stability of Carolina society. Elliott conceives planter society as a conscious attempt to recreate European feudalism through a highly hierarchical society consisting of planters at the top, slaves at the bottom, and various gradations in between. This authority however, Elliott cautions, became “increasingly ragged” as the frontier expanded to the North and West.<sup>10</sup>

The very aristocratic aspirations and pretensions that Elliott describes form the nucleus of Janet Schaw’s eighteenth-century diary. Schaw, a self-described “Lady of Quality” from Scotland traveled to both the West Indies and Wilmington, North Carolina, a Lowcountry settlement located just north of the South Carolina border, where planter culture was equally well established. The similarities between the temperaments, behavior and pretension of the settlers of Barbados and Carolina struck her profoundly. “I may say of this place [North Carolina],” she wrote, “what I formerly did of the West Indian Islands, that nature holds out to them every thing that can contribute to conveniency or tempt to luxury.”<sup>11</sup> The traveling aristocrat, although somewhat bemused at the wildness of the surrounding countryside, felt right at home in planter society, as though high British culture had been transplanted across the Atlantic. “His manners,” she noted of a local planter, “are those of a gentleman and his deportment such as may render age respectable; his conversation agreeable and instructive, and his good nature most extensive.”<sup>12</sup> These were high compliments coming from a British aristocrat, and they were exactly the kinds of adjectives by which most wealthy South Carolinians aspired to be described.

Personal fortune was a common reason for immigration. Elizabeth Hyrne, a wealthy plantation mistress, wrote to her brother in London that she was “Shure [sic] you will be mighty pleased to se [sic] what a fine plase [sic] we are in and how likely we are to rais [sic] our fortune, tho at the moment we are very much stratened [sic] for mony [sic], negroes being very dear.”<sup>13</sup> Her desire to impress upon her relation that she was successful in remaking a quality English life in the New World shows that the new Carolina aristocracy identified itself as part of a larger world of English aristocrats living within the Atlantic system.

The interrelation between wealthy English people in various parts of the Atlantic world goes beyond perception, however. It was also cold, hard, economic fact. Most of the “negroes” to whose scarcity Hyrne was referring, according to the Governor and Council’s Report of 1708, came to the colony from British possessions in the Caribbean, especially Barbados and Jamaica. The Caribbean islands also exported large quantities of sugar, rum and molasses to the North American continent. Likewise, South Carolina’s chief exports, especially rice, went primarily to the Caribbean,<sup>14</sup> not only maintaining a healthy trade between the two regions that largely bypassed Britain altogether, but further

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<sup>9</sup> J.H. Elliott. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 288.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, Edited by Evangeline Walker Andrews. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 153

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 165

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Hyrne, letter to unknown brother circa 1702. Reproduced in Merrens, *The Colonial South Carolina Scene*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Governor and Council, 1708. Reproduced in Merrens, 33.

cementing the cultural identity shared between the two slave-holding British colonial regions. Initially, people like Hyrne and Schaw, who were, after all, the economic reason for the establishment of the colony, would represent the majority of whites in South Carolina. However, their dominance, at least in the numerical department, would not last long.

Far to the North and West of the rice belt lay the Backcountry, and the two regions could not have been more different. The state's newcomers, mostly Scots-Irish, the descendents of lowland Scots who seemed to be aliens wherever they went, populated the region. In only a few short generations they had migrated from Scotland to Northern Ireland, and from thence to Pennsylvania and down through the western reaches of Virginia and North Carolina to arrive in the Backcountry of South Carolina. These newcomers were principally Calvinist Presbyterians, mostly subsistence farmers and intent on living their lives with the minimum of intrusion by outside authority.<sup>15</sup>

They were relative latecomers to the colony but they would make up for their tardiness with numbers. The demographic shift in South Carolina was both rapid and dramatic. In 1740, South Carolina was a colony of wealthy Anglican rice planters situated almost exclusively in the Lowcountry, along the coasts and on land well suited to growing rice. The land beyond the rice belt was basically an unspoiled wilderness, populated mostly by the Cherokees, the Creeks and the Catawbias, among other tribes. Less than a generation later, after the mid-century Scots-Irish migrations, 50% of South Carolina's total population and 80% of its white population lived in the Backcountry.<sup>16</sup> The effect of this change on the colony can hardly be overstated.

The reasons for Scots-Irish migration were very different from those of the Lowcountry Planters but they were also the result of the process of colonization. In this case, the colonization that first drew them away from their homes occurred not to the South in the Caribbean but far to the East, on the other side of the Atlantic in Northern Ireland. Although Presbyterianism was officially allowed in English-controlled Ireland after 1719, only Anglicans were permitted to hold office until 1780.<sup>17</sup> Religious marginalization, if not outright persecution, became a strong motivating factor for Presbyterian Ulstermen to make the journey to America, as did the example of their similarly afflicted Calvinist brethren in Massachusetts. During the first decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Reverend Cotton Mather, a Puritan Congregationalist minister in New England began writing a series of letters to various churches, as well as the Divinity School at the University of Glasgow, encouraging Presbyterian clergy in both Scotland and Ireland to convince their congregants to come to America. It was there, he claimed, that the Calvinist doctrines that both Presbyterians and Puritans shared could be practiced free from the restrictions that were becoming increasingly a part of life in the old world.<sup>18</sup> Because of this, most of the earliest Scots-Irish immigration was focused on New England, although over time, Philadelphia would pass Boston as the primary port of entry for the Ulster natives.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Walter Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Edgar, 2; Michael C. Scoggins, *The Day it Rained Militia* (Charleston: History Press, 2005), 21

<sup>17</sup> T.W. Moody, "The Ulster Scots and the Coming of the American Revolution," *Irish Quarterly Review*, (March, 1945), 89

<sup>18</sup> Bolton, 17

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

Just as important as the religious issue, if not more so, was the dramatic increase in rents that landlords charged on farms in the Ulster Plantation. Like their Lowcountry neighbors, many Scots-Irish migrated to the vast wilderness of America from their first area of settlement because growing population and the finite availability of land had made earning a living impossible. The years 1717-18 mark the beginning of a tightening of the availability of land in Ulster, corresponding directly to an increase in both rent prices and emigration to America.<sup>20</sup> This would continue to be the case right up to the American Revolution. In fact, of 518 Ulster immigrants on-board four ships in 1774, 156 listed excessive rents as their reason for coming to America, while 298 claimed the more vague but related reason "To seek a better livelihood and employment."<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, they encountered many of the same problems in Pennsylvania that they had suffered in Ulster. In 1745, the raising of rents, along with political quarrels with their Quaker neighbors, once again forced many of Pennsylvania's newest settlers to move. This time they headed south.<sup>22</sup> The Great Wagon Road wound south from Philadelphia through Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina, all the way into the South Carolina Backcountry, finally becoming the Waxhaws Road in the area between the town of Charlotte on the North Carolina-South Carolina border, and Camden, South Carolina. It was this road that became a highway for Ulster immigrants and left them scattered along its route in a long narrow band across all the colonies it passed through.<sup>23</sup>

It was primarily the land bounties offered in various regions that attracted the new inhabitants and none of these bounties were more generous than South Carolina's, which offered each head of household a hundred acres plus fifty for each family member, including servants.<sup>24</sup> This area had been Indian land until South Carolina seized it in the Yamasee War of 1715-17, and the colony was eager to have it settled as a buffer zone between the plantations of the Lowcountry and the western frontier. To this end, the House of Commons, in 1746, supported the colony's efforts to populate the area by exempting new settlers from provincial taxes for 15 years.<sup>25</sup> They were also exempted in most cases, from paying quit rents or fees on the required paperwork to be filed when taking up new claims.<sup>26</sup>

In 1772, the migration route shifted, cutting off several links in the chain, as the first major migration of Ulstermen, consisting of 467 families, arrived in South Carolina directly from Northern Ireland. The reason for this mass migration was an incident that occurred in Londonderry, among the congregation of Reverend William Martin. A man from his congregation, in a fit of rage, had murdered a tax collector, who had come to demand payment while the man's wife was in childbirth. Fearing retribution, Reverend Martin gathered his entire flock, and transplanted the whole community to the Catawba

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<sup>20</sup> Moody, 89-90

<sup>21</sup> Treasury 47/9-12. England and Wales emigration list, 1773-6. British Public Records Office. Quoted in R.J. Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America 1718-1775* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1966), 81.

<sup>22</sup> E.R.R. Green, "The Scotch-Irish and the Coming of the Revolution in North Carolina," *Irish Historical Studies* (September, 1950), 78.

<sup>23</sup> Edgar, 3

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Journal of the House of Commons 12/14/1739. Quoted in Kaylene Hughes, "Populating the Backcountry" (Ph.D. Diss. Florida State University, 1985), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, 13-15

River Valley in South Carolina, where a significant Scots-Irish community already existed. From this point on, much of the Ulster migration to America would come directly through the port of Charleston.<sup>27</sup>

The Scots-Irish proved to be of a highly independent ilk, and were as reluctant to be governed by outside entities in the New World as they had been in the Old. In 1774, Royal Governor Josiah Martin of North Carolina wrote to the Earl of Dartmouth that his new constituents were, like New Englanders, “of the leaven of the Independents...ever...unfriendly to monarchical government.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps it was the independent and community based nature of their Calvinist religious doctrine, that made the Ulstermen similar to New England Congregationalists, but whatever the reason, both Carolinas had trouble governing the Ulster communities from their colonial capitals. Although Martin’s declaration was intended as a reference to the predisposition of the region’s inhabitants toward the American Revolution, it also carried an undertone about their opposition to authority in general. They were, by and large, no more interested in being governed from Charleston, or in this case New Bern, than they were in being governed from England. It was the same spirit of Presbyterian defiance that marked the Ulstermen as outsiders in America as in Britain and Ireland, and T.W. Moody points out that it “was a vital fact in their history politically, as well as morally and intellectually.”<sup>29</sup> It would also be one of the primary qualities that would alienate them to the Anglicans who came in contact with them.

In 1766, a young English born Anglican minister, named Charles Woodmason, decided to leave Charleston for the Backcountry to work as an itinerant preacher among the settlers that made up the region. For many in the more civilized portions of the colony, his journal represented the first real glimpse they had into the way of life of their neighbors in the hinterland. By this time, many congregations existed in the Backcountry, the majority of them Presbyterian or Baptist, with only a scattering of Anglicans. Yet most of them did not have a permanent preacher, but rather were served by itinerants of exactly the sort Woodmason aspired to be.

The first of these churches he came upon was the Presbyterian Meeting House in Pine Tree Hill (Camden), where he officiated on September 21<sup>st</sup>. To his chagrin, the residents were less than impressed. “Offer’d to give sermon twice every Sunday,” he noted in his journal, “Rejected.”<sup>30</sup> “The people around,” he continued, were “of abandoned morals and profligate principles, rude, ignorant, void of manners, education or good breeding.”<sup>31</sup> It was not just in Camden that Woodmason was appalled at the seeming lack of gentility among the western South Carolinians. In the High Hills of the Santee “according to custom, one half of them [the congregants] got drunk before they went home.”<sup>32</sup> In the Lynche’s Creek congregation “They came to sermon with itching ears only, not with any disposition of heart, or sentiment of mind- assemble out of

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<sup>27</sup> Edgar, 5

<sup>28</sup> Robert J. Cain, ed. *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, second series, volume IX (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 1963) 1083.

<sup>29</sup> Moody, 88

<sup>30</sup> Charles Woodmason, *The Journal of Charles Woodmason*, reproduced in Richard J. Hooker ed. *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 6

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Woodmason, 12.



curiosity, not devotion, and seem so pleas'd with their native ignorance, as to be offended at any attempts to rouse them of it."<sup>33</sup>

In one of Woodmason's tirades against a local Backcountry minister, in which he described the man as "this dirty fellow" for being constantly drunk and in the company of prostitutes, he explained away the behavior by stating parenthetically that the man was simply "a Presbyterian," as though in Woodmason's mind this was typical of the low breeding and bad culture brought over from Ireland.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, William Byrd, an English aristocrat on a tour of South Carolina in 1728, commented rather curtly that the small landholders were "rarely guilty of flattering or making any court to their governors."<sup>35</sup> Nor did the biased perception of the Backcountry end at the colony's border. In 1746, in the wake of four deaths, the Governor and Assembly of North Carolina found it necessary to outlaw boxing, as well as the cutting out of the tongue, eyes, or nose of fellow citizens.<sup>36</sup> Despite the inherent brutality of slave society, this type of rampant frontier violence was generally seen by easterners, attempting to model their societies on the genteel and sophisticated existence prevalent on English and Barbadian manors, to be appallingly primitive and base.

The Presbyterian religion, as evidence by Woodmason's dismissive comments, was seen as at least a contributing factor in this general backwardness. On November 30, 1706, before any large number of Presbyterians had arrived, the Protestant Episcopal Church, or the Church of England, was established as the official religion of the colony of South Carolina, making it a crime to openly subscribe to any other. Although this law was rarely enforced, it did bar most members of other faiths, including Presbyterians, from holding public office.<sup>37</sup> The situation was even worse in the neighboring colony of North Carolina, where even private practice of nonconforming religions was not always safe. In 1773, a Presbyterian Academy known as the Queen's Museum, in the small backcountry hamlet of Charlotte, North Carolina, on the Great Wagon Road, had its charter revoked by that colony's board of trade.<sup>38</sup>

Although the first confrontations between the new migrants and entrenched inhabitants of South Carolina were religious in nature, those conflicts quickly broadened into political battles. As the colony grew, the Assembly divided it into a number of parishes, which served as civil and political administrative units within the colonial structure.<sup>39</sup> These parishes had little meaning for the Backcountry settlers, as they were initially all anchored on the Atlantic coast and stretched an indeterminate distance inland by extension of lines that had never been surveyed. The backcountry settlements existed beyond the pale of colonial rule in Charleston, and largely had to create their own law and order. Since as early as 1741, settlers in Fredericksburg (Camden) and what would become the Waxhaws region had been petitioning for local courts and administration so

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 54

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in J.H. Elliott. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). 340.

<sup>36</sup> Elliot J. Gorn. "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry." *American Historical Review*. (1985), 18-43.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Dalcho, *An Historical Account of the Protestant-Episcopal Church in South Carolina*. (Charleston: E.Thayer, 1820), 75

<sup>38</sup> Green, 80.

<sup>39</sup> Dalcho, 75

that they would not have to travel so far for justice or for official business. Charleston remained unmoved.<sup>40</sup> The first parishes to be established in the Backcountry did not become law until 1757, well into the Ulster migration, and even after that point they were little more than lines on a map. The South Carolina Backcountry continued to exist in a state of near anarchy almost until the American Revolution.

In the period after the Cherokee War of 1760, the lawlessness of the backcountry attracted large numbers of roving bands of bandits, which the Lowcountry legislature refused to do anything substantial about. Petitions by the people of the region to establish courts, sheriffs and legislative districts fell largely on deaf ears.<sup>41</sup> It was against this backdrop that the War of the Regulation broke out. In 1767, many of the Scots-Irish formed groups collectively known as the "Regulators." Determined to establish law and order in the backcountry with or without Charleston, these vigilante groups began to mete out their own form of justice to lawbreakers, miscreants and general ne'er-do-wells across the region. By early 1768, the Regulator movement had succeeded in shutting down the majority of the most troublesome criminal bands, but armed with their newfound power, these same Regulators quickly became a problem in the colony. They took advantage of their position for personal gain, and corruption and institutional violence became nearly as prevalent as anarchic violence and theft had been before.<sup>42</sup>

In response to Regulator excess, a second vigilante movement, known as the Moderators, developed. Predictably, they quickly fell into the same trap of violence and excess as the Regulators. Although the conflict eventually petered out, it did not do so before large quantities of blood had been spilled, and the Backcountry clamored more than ever for attention from the colonial government.<sup>43</sup>

In 1769, the Colonial Assembly finally attempted to address the issue of lawlessness in the backcountry with the Circuit Court Act of 1769, creating three expansive Backcountry legal districts, with the towns of Ninety-Six, Camden, and Long Bluff in the Cheraws, serving as courthouse seats. The act put an end to the dominance of the authority of the Regulators, but Charleston would not authorize formation of an official colonial militia to enforce legal matters in the area until 1773, two years before the American Revolution itself broke out.<sup>44</sup> As evidenced by the Regulator conflicts and the Cherokee War of 1760-1, however, the Backcountry was far from lacking in defensive capabilities. The purpose of the officially sanctioned militia regiment, when it did come, was to put the colonial government back in control of administration in the Backcountry. However, the settlers in the region had already developed their own means of defense and had created their own local militias regiments long before Charleston finally approved their existence.

Representation proved to be an even bigger problem than local administration. Even after bearing the brunt of the 1760-61 war against the Cherokees, the Backcountry still lacked meaningful representation in the Colonial Assembly in Charleston. By the late 1760s, the nebulous region known as St. Mark's Parish, which encompassed the whole of the Backcountry, had two representatives in the Colonial Assembly to represent three

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<sup>40</sup> Journal of the House of Commons. 2/24/1741 and 3/17/1745. Quoted in Hughes.

<sup>41</sup> Scoggins, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Scoggins, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 22.

fourths of the colony's white population.<sup>45</sup> As a corollary to the Regulator movement, a number of Backcountry settlers marched to polling places in the Lowcountry in 1768. They demanded that they be given the right to vote for members of the Colonial Assembly on the grounds that the western borders of the Lowcountry parishes had not been sufficiently defined, and so could be viewed to extend indefinitely. Thus their own settlements lay within the borders of such-and-such parish, guaranteeing them a voice as residents. Although many were forcibly turned away, these vigilante voters did manage to elect three of their own in St. James Parish.<sup>46</sup>

The fight for adequate representation was about more than mere political power. It was a symbolic demand for recognition that the Backcountry was a part of the colony of South Carolina, and that its inhabitants expected to be treated as such. The franchise movement, along with the Regulator Movement, must be seen as twin manifestations of the same phenomenon, whereby Backcountry settlers sought to forcibly integrate and settle their society with that of the Lowcountry planters.

Such acts of defiance and assertion did little to ease the tensions between factions or to decrease the prevalence of Lowcountry impressions of the Ulstermen as troublesome miscreants. Such attitudes were already deeply ingrained in the psyche of many planters, and they helped to create bias and division between the two Carolina cultures. This discord might have come to a head in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century had not the coming of the American Revolution drastically altered the trajectory of tensions. A turning point in the unification of interests between the Backcountry and the Lowcountry came on May 3, 1775, when a rumor came from London that the British Government was considering employing Indians and slaves in their coming war against the colonists. This information was demonstrably false, but at the time it was terrifying to both factions in South Carolina. The rumor capitalized on the greatest fear of each region. In the Lowcountry, where blacks outnumbered whites, the thought of a slave uprising was enough to put chills down the spines of nearly every resident. In the Backcountry, which still carried the scars of the brutal Cherokee war of 1760-1, the prospect of another Indian war was petrifying. For both factions, the government that would be willing to engage in encouraging such uncivilized warfare instantly became a bigger enemy than their neighbors up or down state. It was the beginning of a shift toward identity tied to the Revolution, rather than to sectional divisions, because it brought into sharp focus the dangers both groups faced from a war with Britain. However, it would take more than a negative catalyst to bring the two factions together. Positive steps would have to be taken to unify the sense of purpose in the political arena by removing the perception of the vast power imbalance that existed to that point.<sup>47</sup>

By the summer of 1775, it was becoming increasingly obvious that if revolution in South Carolina were to be viable, the rice planters who had begun it would need the help of their Backcountry neighbors. To this end the newly formed Committee of Safety dispatched three men into the hinterlands to convince the Scots-Irish that revolution was not only necessary but inevitable. One of these three travelers was

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Maxwell Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 13-18.

<sup>46</sup> Rachel Klein, *The Unification of A Slave State*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 48

<sup>47</sup> Piecuch 40-43.

William Henry Drayton, a wealthy planter and aristocrat. Accompanying him on his journey were two ministers: William Tennent, a Presbyterian, and Oliver Hart, a Baptist. Their inclusion in an expedition organized by Anglican Charlestonians points to the importance the Lowcountry Revolutionaries were now putting on appealing to upcountry settlers on their own cultural terms, as well as to the urgency of the mission. Prominent Whig Henry Laurens wrote to his father that he believed the expedition would tie the Backcountry to the Lowcountry such that “all those people [the Scots-Irish] may be brought at least to promise absolute neutrality and many of them to join us.”<sup>48</sup>

All of a sudden, urgency had caused the planter elite to take notice of their neighbors. The welcoming hand that the ruling class of the Lowcountry were extending was perhaps self-serving but at least it was being extended in the first place. The Drayton-Tennent-Hart mission represented a sea change in the relationship between the two halves of the South Carolina populace. Not only were planters reaching out to Backcountry settlers, they were doing it on the latter’s own terms. This was not just a dramatic departure from earlier behavior, it was a dramatic departure from the perceptions and misperceptions of Charles Woodmason’s era.

However, the three men of the expedition were not met with nearly the reception they had hoped to receive. Although some Backcountry settlers signed the Association, a document pledging loyalty to the revolutionary cause, many did not and some were overtly hostile to the travelers. Drayton conceded that this was probably due to their lack of representation in the new government, and that if they were offered seats in government more in line with the proportionality of their population in the province the Whigs might make more progress.<sup>49</sup> It wasn’t that primarily Tories populated the Backcountry, he argued, or even that most Backcountry residents were indifferent to the American Revolution, rather they were simply suspicious of the sincerity of their Lowcountry neighbors. They certainly weren’t going to support a revolution for Lowcountry dominance of the state without serious concessions in terms of their own representation.<sup>50</sup>

To this end, in June of 1775, the new Whig government created four Backcountry legislative districts, similar to the earlier militia districts, centered at Camden, Ninety-Six, Long Bluff and Orangeburgh, that could send representatives to the new congress. It was not much, but it was a start to bringing the people of the North and West of the colony into South Carolina politics. In February 1776, at the urging of Drayton, the Provincial Congress further divided these four into ten administrative regions and allowed each to raise its own militia regiment, both for defense against the British and Tories, and for law enforcement duty.<sup>51</sup> When South Carolina drafted its first constitution later that same year, it gave the Backcountry an unprecedented thirty-seven percent (76 of 202) of the representation in the State Legislature.<sup>52</sup> Although still far short of proportional to their share of the population, this dramatic change was a significant gesture of inclusion to the

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<sup>48</sup> Henry Laurens to John Laurens, July 30, 1775. *Papers of Henry Laurens*. Volume X (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981), 257-8.

<sup>49</sup> William Henry Drayton to Council of Safety, August 9, 1775. Chesnutt, David C. and C. James Taylor eds. *Papers of Henry Laurens*. Volume X. 286-7.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Scoggins, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Klein, 89.

portion of the populous that it was now becoming apparent would make or break the young revolution in the state.

The Congress also created three Continental, or regular army, regiments to be used for defense throughout the state. One of these, the Third South Carolina Regiment, also known as Thomson's Rangers for its commander William "Danger" Thomson, was raised exclusively in the Backcountry. There can be no doubt that the creation of this Backcountry regiment was in part a political move. No less an authority than General William Moultrie, the highest ranking South Carolinian in the Continental Army and a prominent planter and politician, wrote after the war that "It was thought not only useful, but political to raise them [Thompson's Rangers], because the most influential gentlemen in the back country were appointed officers, which interested them in the cause."<sup>53</sup>

It was this regiment, along with the new Backcountry militia, which in November of 1775 ambushed a Tory militia force under Patrick Cunningham in the Ninety-Six District, marking the beginning of the so-called "Snow Campaign" that ended in the expulsion of the most prominent Tory leaders in the Backcountry from the state.<sup>54</sup> Having been given a stake in the politics of South Carolina, the Scots-Irish strongholds North of Camden in the Waxhaws area became a hotbed of revolution, and one of the areas of strongest resistance to British aggression.<sup>55</sup>

On October 1, 1775, William Henry Drayton was elected President of the Provincial Congress. Tellingly, on the very same day that this man whose overtures had helped to convince the Backcountry settlers to join the revolutionary fight took the reins of power, Thomson's Rangers captured the notorious Backcountry Tory, Robert Cunningham and brought him to Charleston for trial.<sup>56</sup> These two simultaneous events, the election of an inclusionist to the highest post in the revolutionary South Carolina government, and a successful operation against Tory opposition, organized and executed solely by Backcountry officers, are indicative of the new spirit of cooperation between the state's two halves. Backcountry Whig leaders Richard Richardson and William "Danger" Thomson, began together gathered a total of 136 local Tories and sent them to the authorities in Charleston to be tried and imprisoned.<sup>57</sup> Such police actions became more and more frequent as Backcountry Whig leaders, lent both moral and material support from their Lowcountry counterparts, began to exert more control over the hitherto ungovernable northern and western districts of the state.<sup>58</sup>

Whig ideological inclusion led to a significant realignment of old alliances in South Carolina. More and more, Whig unity against Tory came to replace sectional animosity. The extension of political rights and inclusion by the Lowcountry aristocracy served not only to cement the alliance that would win the American Revolutionary conflict but also to create a statewide identity that, even if it never fully supplanted sectionalism, at least became an important facet of how South Carolinians viewed

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<sup>53</sup> William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution: So Far as it Related to the Colonies of North and South Carolina and Georgia*, Volume I (New York: D. Longworth, 1802), 64

<sup>54</sup> Scoggins, 26-31

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> John Buchanan. *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas*. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997). 100.

<sup>57</sup> Piecuch, 56.

<sup>58</sup> For more on the process of Whig power consolidation see Piecuch, 45-63.

themselves after the war. The five years of undisputed Whig rule that followed the Dryaton-Tennent-Hart mission did much to strengthen these ideological ties and to bring Lowcountry Planters and Backcountry farmers together.

By 1780 and 1781, Lowcountry militia under men like Francis Marion and their Backcountry counterparts commanded by Generals like Thomas Sumter and Andrew Pickens, himself a Presbyterian Minister, would fight side by side against the British.<sup>59</sup> John Buchanan, the eminent historian of the American Revolution in the Southern colonies went so far as to suggest that “The irony of the Revolution in South Carolina is that it was started by the Rice Kings and saved by the Backcountry militia, which was overwhelmingly composed of men the Rice Kings held in contempt.”<sup>60</sup>

Just as William Henry Drayton suggested, the granting of certain political rights to the Backcountry, such as representation in the State Legislature and official sanction for the militia regiments charged with keeping order, gave the Scots-Irish a stake in the state that, coupled with the imminent threat posed by the British, made them a valuable part of the revolutionary effort. It was this struggle for recognition and political rights that the Ulstermen had waged everywhere they had been sojourners on both sides of the Atlantic, in Scotland, Ireland, Pennsylvania and the Carolinas. The Scots-Irish would play an important role in South Carolina politics from that time on, producing, among other things, two of South Carolina’s most famous politicians, Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun.

The situation in South Carolina was entirely different in 1776 than it was in 1760. Although animosities remained between Lowcountry and Backcountry, most Whigs in the state were more concerned with their opposition to Great Britain, and their suppression of the Tory elements within their state than they were in fighting amongst themselves. This about face was accomplished through the twin factors of the imminent threat posed by the British invasion, and the concessions the planters were willing to make to guarantee Backcountry support. The struggle to win independence from Britain was replacing old Atlantic identities with a new American one construed in opposition to a foreign oppressor. In many ways, this transformation marks the beginning of a “South Carolina” that can be discussed as a single entity. This is not to say that the American Revolution eliminated all animosity between the two halves of the state. Quite the contrary, that animosity exists in some form up to the present day. But it was the necessity brought on by the American Revolution that created those two American halves out of two trans-Atlantic wholes.

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<sup>59</sup> Buchanan, 301.

<sup>60</sup> Buchanan, 193.

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