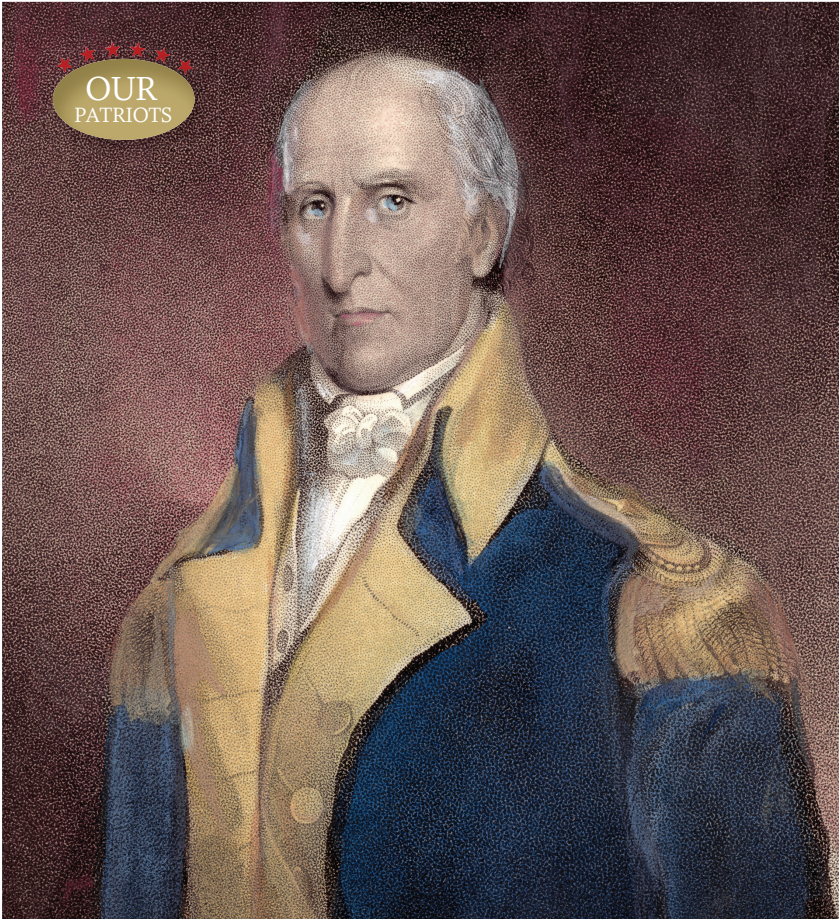


OUR
PATRIOTS



ANDREW *Fighting Elder, Wizard Owl* PICKENS

By Jamie Roberts

Impressive leadership of the Continental Army's Southern militia earned Revolutionary General Andrew Pickens accolades as a strong and successful commander, but his savvy negotiations with the American Indian tribes of the Piedmont region also made him an influential figure on the early American frontier. During his 20-year career as commissioner of Indian affairs, "Skyagunsta" or the "Wizard Owl," as the American Indians called him, negotiated a series of treaties on his Hopewell Plantation that led to a period of peace between the settlers and native people following the Revolution.

A Scots-Irish Core

Pickens, the son of Scots-Irish immigrants Anne and Andrew Pickens Sr., was born September 13, 1739, in Bucks County, Pa. The Pickens family, like many Scots-Irish pioneers, traveled south from Pennsylvania along the Great Wagon Road in search of land on which to settle and farm. They first landed in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, and later moved south to the Waxhaw settlement along the North Carolina–South Carolina border.

As a young man, Pickens fought in the Cherokee War of 1760–1761 and was an officer in a regiment that joined British troops in an 1761 expedition against the Lower Cherokee towns (roughly the group of settlements found in the Keowee and Tugaloo river valleys of Georgia and South Carolina).

In 1764, Pickens bought land in the Long Cane settlement in Abbeville, S.C., near the Georgia border. Because of its proximity to the trading path to the American Indian village of Keowee, the settlement was multicultural. There Pickens married Rebecca Calhoun, and they started a family. (One son, Andrew Pickens Jr., would serve as governor of South Carolina from 1816 to 1818.)

Pickens farmed and raised cattle, and served as a justice of the peace and a leader in the local Presbyterian church, gaining a reputation as the "Fighting Elder" because of his strict faith. In 1768, Pickens built a blockhouse to defend his family against American Indian attacks and serve as a base for his prosperous business trading with the local Cherokees.

Fierce Frontiersman

In Long Cane, Pickens became recognized for his tenacious fighting methods, many of them gleaned from Cherokee warfare. In July 1776, boundary disputes were turning bloody between the Cherokee Indians and white settlers in frontier towns. By August 1776, Pickens, now a captain, was leading a 25-man detachment to destroy the village of Tamasee in retaliation

for the violent attacks that had killed dozens of settlers. When the militiamen were attacked and surrounded by a large Cherokee force in an open field, they formed a circle and fired at the warriors. Pickens and his men ultimately won what came to be called the “Ring Fight.”

His Long Cane militiamen joined Brigadier General Andrew Williamson’s expeditions in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina to suppress the Cherokees who banded with the Loyalists in the hopes of keeping their ancestral lands. Williamson’s forces destroyed more than 30 villages in the Cherokees’ Lower and Valley settlements (roughly those located north of the Hiwassee River in North Carolina, North Georgia and Tennessee). The expeditions forced the tribe to give up huge portions of land between the Savannah and Chattahoochee rivers in the treaty signed at Long Swamp in today’s Pickens County, Ga.

Revolutionary Valor

In the spring of 1778, Pickens was promoted from major to colonel of the South Carolina militia’s Ninety Six District Regiment. In 1779, British commander Henry Clinton sent British soldiers to South Carolina and North Georgia to control the backcountry and drum up Loyalist support. On February 14, 1779, Colonel Pickens and his 300 men defeated Colonel Boyd and a British force of close to 800 men at the Battle of Kettle Creek in North Georgia, 50 miles northwest of Augusta.

The victory at Kettle Creek slowed the recruitment of Loyalists, but by 1780, the British recovered enough to defeat the Southern Continental Army in the Siege of Charleston. Pickens was forced to surrender. He and other militia leaders accepted parole and agreed to return to their farms for the remainder of the war.

However, when Loyalist raiders looted his property and burned his home in late 1780, Pickens had no qualms in breaking parole, reactivating his militia and resuming guerrilla activities against the British.

Pickens worked well with Continental Army forces, as he proved at the Battle of Cowpens when his South Carolina militia was called upon to reinforce Brigadier General Daniel Morgan and his troops. On the morning of January 17, 1781, his rebels fired off two rounds before retreating, a tactic not carried out in previous battles, then reformed to help surround the enemy. The British regulars, led by Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, believed that the militia was fleeing and charged ahead. Drawn into a double flank, the Redcoats were decisively defeated.

For the Patriots in the South who had been repeatedly forced to retreat, this victory marked a turning point. Pickens’ conduct at Cowpens earned him a sword from the Continental Congress, and a promotion to brigadier general from South Carolina Governor John Rutledge. His next command was with General Nathanael Greene in North Carolina.

In May 1781, Greene sent Pickens and Colonel “Light Horse Harry” Lee to support Colonel Elijah Clarke in a siege against British-held Augusta, Ga. They succeeded in forcing British Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown to surrender on June 5, 1781.

The British, however, were able to withstand Greene’s subsequent Siege of Ninety Six, S.C. As Greene withdrew, he ordered Pickens to harass the Redcoats while keeping tensions down between the backcountry rebels and Loyalists. By July the British had destroyed the fort and village at Ninety Six and moved south.

As the British withdrew, Pickens joined Greene, Henry Lee and Francis Marion at the Battle of Eutaw Springs on September 8, 1781, one of the final major Southern battles in the war. During the battle, Pickens was shot off of his horse by a bullet that hit the buckle of his sword belt. He was not seriously hurt, but the wound continued

to bother him after the war. The battle ended in a draw, but it rattled the British.

Post-Revolution Service

Pickens served in the South Carolina House of Representatives from 1781 to 1794, and was a South Carolina delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Pickens was later elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, serving South Carolina from 1793 to 1795. He opposed the policies of

Did You Know? In the 2000 movie “The Patriot,” Andrew Pickens served as one of the sources for the fictional character of Benjamin Martin played by Mel Gibson. In a scene prior to the Battle of Cowpens, Martin asks the militia to fire two rounds before they retreated—similar to Pickens’ actions in that battle.

then-U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton.

Pickens acquired land in frontier South Carolina and built the Hopewell Plantation on a hill overlooking the Seneca River, across from the Cherokee town of Seneca. Hopewell would be his home from about 1785 to 1815. Several treaties with Southern American Indian tribes were negotiated at his home, each called the Treaty of Hopewell.

Though Pickens began his military career by fighting the Cherokee in the Cherokee War, he became well-regarded and trusted by tribal leaders. He served as a commissioner for Indian affairs and sympathized with American Indian causes in his later years.

In 1815, Pickens moved to the site of the former Cherokee village of Tamasee, S.C., near where he won his Ring Fight victory, and built a home. He died near Tamasee on August 11, 1817. (The Tamasee DAR School is now located in the same town.) He is buried at Old Stone Church Cemetery in Clemson, S.C. Hopewell Plantation is now owned and maintained by Clemson University. Cities and counties are named after him in Alabama, Georgia and his adopted state of South Carolina. 