

A Brief History of

Richland County

South Carolina

Courtesy of Richland County Government
Photographs and Information Provided by Richland Library



Richland County's Public Information Office thanks the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, the South Carolina State Library and Richland Library for assistance in compiling this history of Richland County. The information presented in this booklet draws from a presentation the staff of Richland Library's Walker Local and Family History Center held in July at the request of Richland County. The history program was one of several events held in 2014 to mark the 215th anniversary of the County becoming a standalone governmental entity in 1799.

For more information on the history of Richland County, check out the following:

“Columbia & Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990”
by John Hammond Moore

“South Carolina: Atlas of Historical County Boundaries”
by John H. Long, editor

“A History of Richland County”
by Edwin L. Green

The best source of information about Richland County is Richland Library's Walker Local and Family History Center. The center, located in Richland Library Main on Assembly Street, has a unique collection of historic materials for the state of South Carolina, with a concentration on the Midlands. The expert librarians in the Walker Local and Family History Center help customers interested in genealogy or in researching local events. Additionally, many resources can be accessed online with your library card at RichlandLibrary.com. Richland Library accepts donations of local historical significance such as yearbooks, books, family histories, maps, funeral programs or local photographs. If you have materials you'd like to donate, please contact the Walker Local and Family History Center for more information.



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On the cover: Richland County Sheriff's Department, 1913. Mounted on horseback on Sumter Street are J.D. Dunaway, A. Porter Whitworth, Robert S. Hipp, Jesse Helms, Sheriff John C. McCain and James Huffman. Photograph by Walter Blanchard.

The Richland County of 215 years ago would be mostly unrecognizable to its residents today. From the sprawling “rich land” that was home to prosperous Native Americans to the populous county that is home to the capital of America’s eighth state, Richland County is unique in its past and present. The following is a brief time line of Richland County through the years, from its first settlers to modern times.

Settlement

The area that was to become Richland County was for centuries home to Native American tribes such as the Congaree and Wateree. The Cherokee Path, an important trading route, ran across the state along the western edge of the Santee, Congaree and Saluda rivers. In 1718, Fort Congaree was built on the western bank of the Congaree River to be used as a fort and trading post. By 1740, some of the first permanent white settlers arrived to the area

that would become Richland County. Fertile land around the Congaree River lent itself to the cultivation of indigo, a major export crop for colonial South Carolina.

Fort Congaree was rebuilt in Granby, a small town near present-day Cayce, in 1748. Several years later, around 1769, backcountry planters began to insist on better access to courts, so the circuit court system was established. This brought basic legal services to the area.

Detail of a Henry Mouzon map, 1775. During the Colonial period, the area to become Richland County was sparsely settled. Nearby Townships were Saxe Gotha, Fredericksburg and Amelia. Henry Mouzon II’s map of North and South Carolina became an important military asset for those fighting in the Southern theater of operations during the American Revolutionary War. Copies of it were carried by both George Washington and British Commander Sir Henry Clinton.



The Revolution

As the Revolutionary War began to unfold in 1775, pre-Richland County was still sparsely populated. A few local delegates from the Congaree area, including Col. Thomas Taylor, John Hopkins, Robert Goodwyn, William Howell and William Tucker, were sent to the First South Carolina Provincial Congress in Charles Towne (early Charleston).

No battles occurred in the area, though many local men joined in the fight. In 1781, General George Cornwallis surrendered to French and American forces in Yorktown, Virginia, and soon thereafter, all British troops left South Carolina.

Antebellum

In 1785, the judicial district of Richland County was formed from the Camden District and its courthouse was located in the lower portion of the County, in Horrell Hill. A year later, it was decided that South Carolina's capital should be more centrally located in the state. So the capital was moved from Charleston to the new city of Columbia.

After Columbia was established, Col. Wade Hampton bought large tracts of land to the east of Gills Creek and Col. Thomas Taylor bought large tracts of land on the west side of it. Hampton's slaves built Woodlands Plantations and he eventually opened a racetrack for his prized horses near the present-day Epworth Children's Home on Millwood Avenue.

In 1787, the Richland County Sheriff's Department was formed with Joel McLemore serving as the first sheriff. The department consisted of Sheriff McLemore and one deputy.

By 1790, Col. Wade Hampton had planted the first crop of Sea Island cotton. Other planters followed and soon the area was filled with large plantations with large populations of enslaved black men, women and children. Most Richland County farms grew cotton, but corn, wool, oats, peas, sweet potatoes and butter also were produced on these grand plantations; many of them had their own saw mills, cotton gins and grist mills.



Hill House, built 1793. Home of Columbia's first intendant and Richland County's first governor, John Taylor, son of Col. Thomas Taylor. This house stood at Laurel and Assembly streets. It burned in 1893.



Richland County Courthouse. The block of Washington between Main and Sumter streets long held the courthouses of Richland County after the County seat moved to Columbia. This c. 1905 photograph shows the second of three courthouses built on this block.

In 1799, Richland County's boundaries were established and Columbia became the County seat. The courthouse was relocated from Horrell Hill to Columbia at the corner of Richardson (present-day Main) and Washington streets.

In 1805, South Carolina College opened in Columbia with 30 students. Richland County's John Hopkins was elected Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina in 1806, and 20 years later, John Taylor

(the son of Col. Thomas Taylor), also of Richland County, was elected Governor of South Carolina.

By 1833, the South Carolina Railroad Company had laid tracks from Charleston to Hamburg, and soon after its wooden tracks crossed into Richland County at McCord's Ferry on the Congaree River. The Best Friend was an open-air train that regularly transported passengers to Hopkins Turnout where they then traveled to Columbia by coach.

Civil War

After Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860, a Secession Convention met at First Baptist Church in Columbia to discuss South Carolina's right to secede in response to actions of the Federal Government.

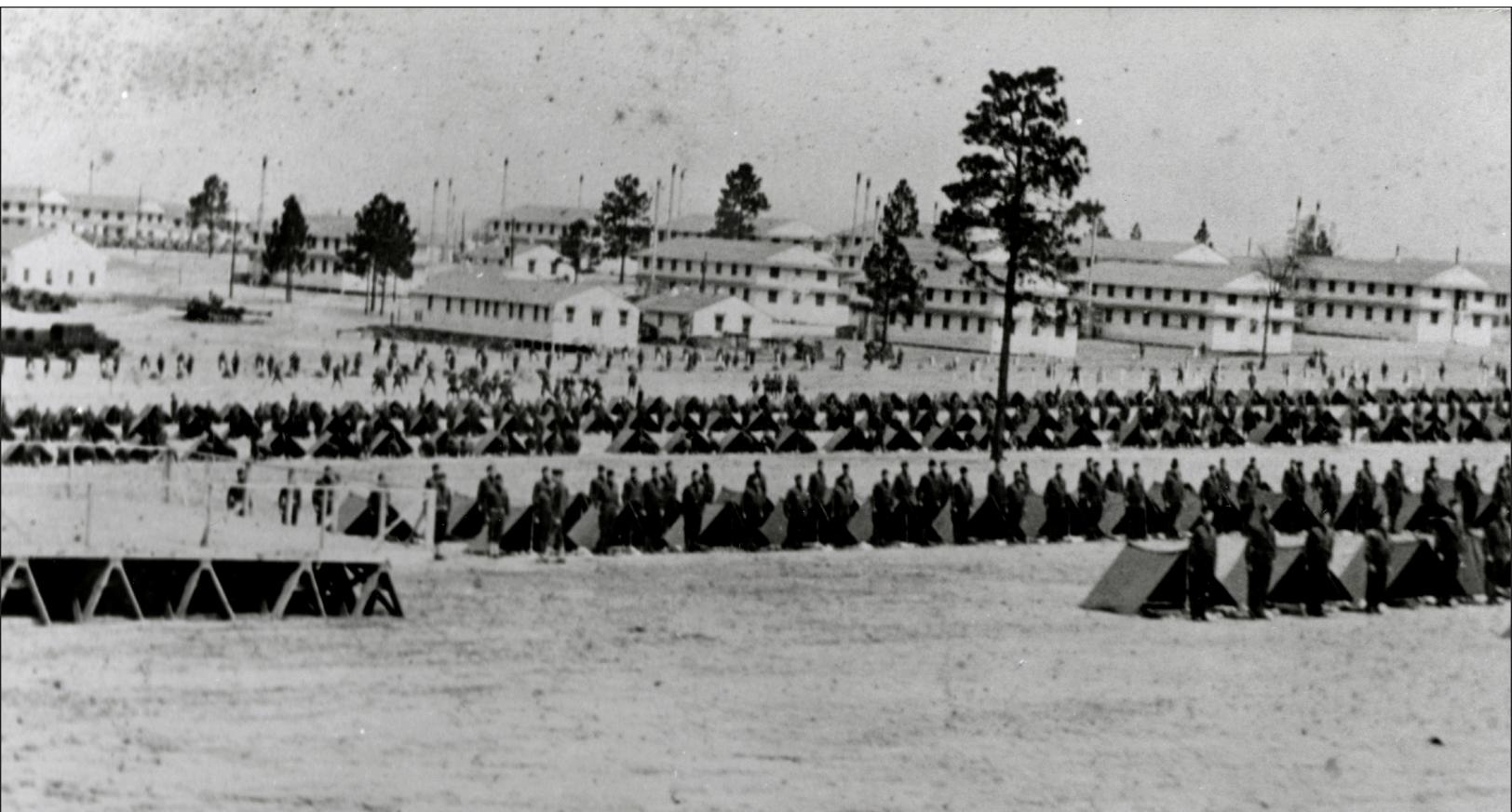
As the Civil War unfolded, several Richland County men, including Robert Adams II, Joel R. Adams, James Hopkins and Gen. Wade Hampton III, led Confederate Army brigades. On Feb. 17, 1865, Columbia Mayor

Thomas T. Goodwyn was forced to surrender the capital to Gen. William T. Sherman. That night, the courthouse and many plantations and homesteads throughout Richland County were burned by Union troops.

Reconstruction

The Federal Government took over South Carolina in April 1865, and Columbia began to rebuild. Large plantations were divided into small farms and village life began to emerge around the train depots throughout Richland County.

By the 1870s, the population of Richland County was about 23,000. Under the Reconstruction government, the State Normal School and the Freedmen's Bureau were established to assist newly freed slaves in securing land and education. The state penitentiary was built on the banks of the Columbia Canal. In 1876, Gen. Wade Hampton III was elected governor as South Carolina was returned to state rule.



Camp Jackson, 1917. World War I brought the establishment of Camp Jackson, a training ground for troops. This eastern Richland County location was chosen for its temperate climate and dry, sandy soil.



Main Street at Taylor looking north, c. 1905. Pedestrians, electric street cars and carriages mingle in the business district of Columbia at the turn of the 20th century. Photograph by Walter Blanchard.

20th Century

W.B. Smith Whaley and Company constructed the first hydroelectric-powered mill on the banks of the Columbia Canal. Other mills followed, and formerly rural residents in Richland County began to move closer to Columbia. Pratt Nurse Training School and South Carolina's first skyscraper – now known as the Barringer Building – opened in Columbia.

In 1917, Camp Jackson (now Fort Jackson) was established as a training ground for soldiers during World War I. It was deactivated in 1922, then reactivated in 1939 with the onset of World War II. By 1940, it expanded to encompass 53,000 acres in eastern Richland County.

On April 24, 1930, the Columbia Municipal Airport (now Jim Hamilton–L.B. Owens Airport) was dedicated. It went on to serve the needs of Fort Jackson and the U.S. Navy before returning to commercial use.

In the 1950s, several “equalization” schools were built throughout the County as attempts to halt racial desegregation. In 1963, the University of South Carolina was desegregated, but it took many years for desegregation to permeate through all of Richland County's schools.

Riverbanks Park and Zoological Garden opened on the banks of the Saluda River in 1974 and three years later the Columbia Mall opened, reflecting a



Couple at Owens Field, c. 1945. In the background is the Curtiss-Wright hangar, built in 1929 to house airplanes for passenger and airmail service. Photograph by Russell Maxey.



Riverbanks Park Zoological Gardens, c. 1979. Riverbanks opened in 1974 through the creation of the Rich-Lex Riverbanks Park Special Purpose District. Photograph by Russell Maxey.

shift from downtown to suburban attractions. The South Carolina State Museum opened in 1988.

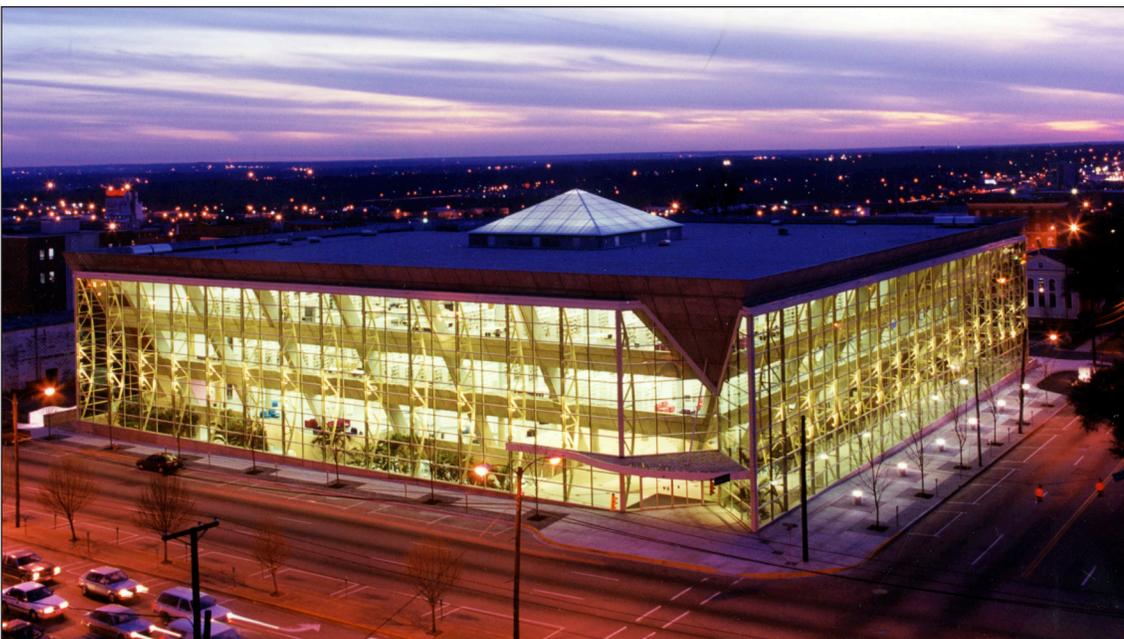
In 1993, Richland County Public Library opened its new Main Library on Assembly Street and also expanded and improved its other locations.

Richland County Today

Though agriculture continues to be an important industry in Richland County, the County's agrarian

roots are now juxtaposed with Columbia – the state capital and largest city in South Carolina – as well as Fort Jackson, the largest and most active Initial Entry Training Center in the U.S. Army.

Richland County's close-knit urban and rural communities, beautiful rivers and lakes, award-winning hospital systems, diverse museums, vibrant music and art scene, strong military presence and numerous higher learning institutions are why more than 390,000 people call it home. Richland County has proven, throughout history, to be a great place to live, work and play.



Public Library, 1993. Richland County Public Library opened its modern main library branch in 1993 on Assembly Street and expanded its services throughout the County. Today, the library system, known as Richland Library, continues to modernize to serve the needs of Richland County residents.



Named for the sprawling “rich land” that supported hearty indigo and cotton plantations for generations, Richland County’s seal denotes its central location in South Carolina and its significance as the headquarters of the South Carolina State Legislature.

Richland County was carved out of the Camden District in 1785 and flourished with rolling farmland as important trade routes were established along the Santee, Congaree and Saluda rivers. In 1786, the state capital was relocated from coastal Charleston to the geographic center of the state, and a new city was born. Once Columbia was established as the state capital and County seat, Richland County’s boundaries were formally incorporated in 1799, as depicted on the County seal.

The balanced scale of justice and the South Carolina State House also are featured on the seal. During Gen. William T. Sherman’s burning of Columbia and Richland County in 1865, the State House was spared. It was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976.

From its agrarian roots to its establishment as the legislative hub of South Carolina, Richland County today boasts a vibrant military community at Fort Jackson, several acclaimed educational institutions, the South Carolina State Museum, a cutting-edge urban scene in downtown Columbia, and a plethora of recreational activities, all nestled between the banks of its many rivers and lakes.