

'Shining city on a hill'

1828 'First Mountain Court' site still visible at Old Pickens Nuclear Center



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After the district was divided, a new courthouse was required for Pickens County as well as Oconee County at Walhalla. This is the first courthouse (about 1871) in New Pickens. It had been moved board by board on wagons, and brick was added.

BY JERRY LAMAR ALEXANDER

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

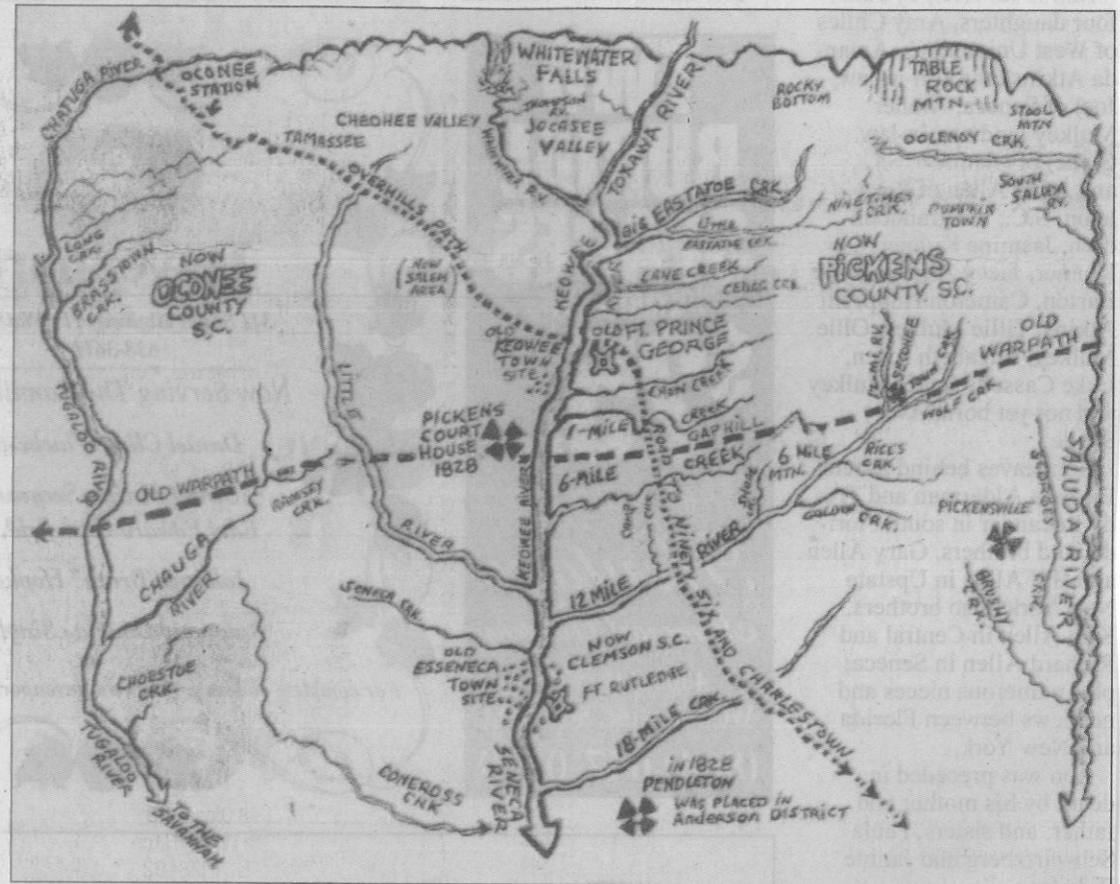
In 1828, Pickens Court House, "that shining city on a hill," became a reality among the stately oaks lining ole Keowee River.

This was at Robertson's Ford alongside the ancient east-west Cherokee Trading Path 5 miles northeast of Seneca. Fortunately, today this 1862 Antebellum court village site is still barely visible among the main buildings at one of most magnificent electrical power generating complexes in our modern world — Duke Energy's famous World of Energy.

Back in 1828, the expanding population of settlers was literally crying out for a new, centrally located district court. It was deemed more than just badly needed to serve our mountain people. After some amount of surveying, stakes were driven in by local commissioners as an outline for a new (1862-1868) "Pickens District Court House."

And so, civilization came stumbling into the area as the Antebellum District Court Town (for Oconee and Pickens counties) as we know them today. And, by the way, both these lovely counties are today stacked full of beautiful lakes and cheerful people celebrating their 150th birthday this year. But their "mothering town" was this 1862 Pickens Court House.

Although built of mostly heavy plank and skinned logs, the rough little mountain village quickly gained several buildings and about 1,600 people, most attracted by the business at the double-storied courthouse. Land



This drawing of Oconee and Pickens counties includes the site of the 1828 Pickens Court House.

deeds had to be recorded, as did plats and all legal papers. Lawsuits regarding land or other debts drew crowds as well.

Often, Court Week in the new village could become a circus. Even some local women folk loved to shuck their daily chores — such as following behind a dusty corn plow or carrying heavy milk buckets — to come in for a few days. When their husbands would allow it, that is. They came both to see and be seen and even witness raw Pickens District justice. Maybe in the form of a hanging or public whipping or more. Soon, a hotel or two, a tavern and

merchandise stores, followed by a ladies fine dress shop or two and a couple of boarding houses made appearances.

So indeed, all was not completely "doom and drab" at the Old Pickens Court House village and even the surrounding countryside. After all, this was a vibrant, new, wide-open mountain court town for Upper South Carolina and some social life was often abounding — like weekly square dances.

Prominent ladies and other social minded folks also took charge of the festivities, which flourished. Fiddle and banjo tunes began squealing about dark. On Saturday evenings, horse-drawn

buggies driven by top-hatted drivers from nearby plantations began arriving at the spacious Pleasant Alexander Plantation Home at the edge of town. It lay right alongside the sparkling Keowee.

This home was removed earlier in the 1860s from Lake Keowee's bed. However, it serves visitors today as the main building and office at nearby High Falls County Park. You may visit and tour it freely.

To finish up the square dance, frivolities would be gone as the rising sun of Saturday morn lazily arrived back down on the river.



Allen

on Tuesday, July 3.

A funeral service will be held at 2 p.m. Thursday, July 12, at Sandifer Funeral Home chapel, with a burial to follow at Corinth Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C. A potluck dinner will be held at Foothills Community Church following the service for family and friends to celebrate his life. The family is at the residence.

Ron was born in Hammondsport, N.Y., on July 16, 1958, to Alice and William Allen, the seventh of nine children. Ron and Julie raised our four children in Naples, Fla., before moving to Central, S.C. Ron decided, after he became saved, to become a pastor. He graduated from Southern Wesleyan University with a bachelor's degree in religion at the age of 40. He went on to pastor Chesnee Wesleyan Church then Seneca Wesleyan Church.

The single most important things in his life were his wife, four daughters and 12 grandchildren. If they were happy, then so was he. Ron loved old classic rock music and introduced music to his grandchildren when they were very young. He also had a passion for old cars, old Westerns and loved yearly traveling adventures with his wife, Julie.

Ron is survived by Julie; four daughters, Amy Chiles of West Union, S.C., Amanda Atkins (and son-in-law, Joe) of Seneca, Amber Mulkey (and son-in-law, Clyde) of Clemson, S.C., and April Allen of Pendleton, S.C.; his grandchildren, Jasmine Kuhner, Lily Kuhner, Jacey Atkins, Kylie Barton, Cameron Hupp, Eli Atkins, Tillie Mulkey, Ollie Mulkey, Elizabeth Allen, Luke Cassell, Teddy Mulkey and not yet born, Avery Siegle.

Ron leaves behind sisters, Barbara Alderman and Trudy Locander in south Florida; and brothers, Gary Allen and Bill Allen in Upstate New York; also brothers, Kim Allen in Central and Richard Allen in Seneca; plus numerous nieces and

as a way into Tennessee and beyond. Rumors of a railroad traversing the lower part of Oconee and Pickens counties surfaced. And thousands of residents continued their desire for smaller districts. The death knell sounded in 1868 as crumbling Old Pickens Court House Town finally met the inevitable fact. It was divided by legislative action into Pickens and Oconee counties. Pickens County took over the eastern side of the river and Oconee adopted the western side. The beautiful Cherokee name of Oconee was given the latter, and Pickens was named in honor of General Andrew Pickens, a legendary Indian fighter, local citizen and early legislator.

The sturdy little timbered building usually housed three or four lick-er-heads. But this "old hoosegow" soon burned plumb to the ground — accidentally of course. It happened fairly early in the town's history. All resident penals were liberated before flames reached them, thank goodness. Even if there was a river full of water nearby, it could not be accessed quickly enough by using 5 gallon wooden buckets toted in a run of some 300 yards.

A further miracle described the fact nobody was scorched, not even a mite. All that burned were the fat mattress ticks that surely inhabited the little brig. The good news was that a rumor spread saying all regular customers quit dead sober for a few weeks after that. The facility was quickly rebuilt.

But the old scattered district was just too large. It really was un-serviceable. Following the Civil War, circumstances had changed. Walhalla was now figuring on a prominent commercial role just a few miles away. Officials

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COURT: Nobody was scorched, not even a mite

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had plans for a Stump-house Mountain Tunnel