Counties in S.C., Formation of

(Adapted from records compiled by Charles E. Lee, former Dir., S.C. Dept. of Archives and History)

The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina, drawn up by the Lords Proprietors in 1669, stated that the "whole Province shall be divided into Counties" and planned for these counties to be basic territorial units for local government, administration of justice, granting of land, and election of representatives to the legislative assembly. Consequently, after the first hard years of settlement were passed, the Proprietors in 1682 ordered three counties laid out. Berkeley County, centering around Charleston, extended from the Stono River on the south to Seewee Creek (present-day Awendaw Creek) emptying into Bull Bay on the north. Craven County was to lie north of Berkeley; and, below Berkeley, Colleton extended to the Combahee River. A few years later a fourth county, Granville, was laid out between the Combahee and the Savannah Rivers.

These early counties never fully lived up to the roles appointed for them. During the first third of the eighteenth century the parishes of the established Anglican Church became the election districts; the Berkeley County courts extended their authority throughout the whole Province; and virtually all government of consequence was centralized in Charleston. The names of old counties continued in use until the American Revolution, but largely as a means of locating lands granted or sold and as the jurisdiction of militia units.

In 1769, by act of the General Assembly, the Province was divided into seven judicial districts. Below a line running generally from southwest to northeast about fifty miles from the coast, three districts were laid out: Georgetown, extending from the North Carolina line to the Santee River; Charleston, lying between the Santee and the Combahee Rivers; and Beaufort, located between the Combahee and the Savannah Rivers. Northeast of Georgetown was the Cheraws District, bounded on the west by Lynches River. West of the Cheraws was the large Camden District, bounded on the west by the Santee-Congaree-Broad River system. South and west of the Camden District, two more large districts extended to the Savannah River—Orangeburg to the south and Ninety Six to the north. Each of these districts except the Cheraws had a

courthouse town bearing the same name as the district which it served; court for the Cheraws District was held at Long Bluff.

Following the American Revolution, in 1785 counties were laid out within each of these districts. South Carolina government was greatly decentralized, and county courts in 1786 were authorized to do many of the things which previously only the government at Charleston had been permitted to do. The lowcountry districts of Georgetown, Charleston, and Beaufort, where the old parish system was well established, were not required to set up these county courts. One or two were tried but quickly abandoned. Orangeburg District was required to set up counties and county courts, but soon persuaded the General Assembly to discard them. Orange, Lewisburg (an original Lexington County), and Winton (an early version of Barnwell) were all abolished in 1791. Most of the counties in the other districts survived to become ancestors of the present ones. The 1785 Act gave the Cheraws District the counties of Chesterfield, Marlboro, and Darlington. Camden was divided into York, Chester, Fairfield, Lancaster, Richland, Claremont, and Clarendon. Ninety Six contained Spartanburg, Union, Laurens, Newberry, Abbeville, and Edgefield. Northwest of Ninety Six District lay the unorganized Indian Land, taken from the Cherokees during the American Revolution. Here Greenville was formed in 1786 and Pendleton in 1789.

Establishment of these early counties and county courts did not mean the abolition of the old district courts and boundaries; the district courts, presided over by state justices, continued to sit at the district capitals. The year 1791 brought significant but not fundamental change to the established system. Two new counties and two new districts were created. Kershaw County was formed from portions of Lancaster, Fairfield, Richland, and Claremont; and Salem County was formed from portions of Claremont and Clarendon. The Washington District was formed to encompass Greenville and Pendleton counties, and the Pinckney District came into being after taking York and Chester from the Camden District and Spartanburg and Union from the Ninety Six.

Great dissatisfaction with the early county courts brought about their demise. In 1800 each of the existing counties became the jurisdiction of a district court and were thus henceforth known as districts, with the state justices touring

from courthouse town to courthouse town. Claremont, Clarendon, and Salem counties became Sumter District. Marion District was formed from part of Georgetown; Colleton District was formed from part of Charleston; and Barnwell District was formed from part of Orangeburg. Shortly thereafter three of the inactive counties called for by the act of 1785 were revived and made judicial districts. In 1801 old Kingston County with its name changed to Horry was taken from Georgetown, which also yielded a revitalized Williamsburg in 1804. Also in 1804 Lexington was formed from Orangeburg with roughly the same territory of the former county of the same name. Washington, Pinckney, Ninety Six, Camden, and Cheraws vanished as the names of judicial districts, the former counties having taken over the superior judicial function.

Thus in 1804 South Carolina presented a picture of judicial districts of roughly uniform size. It should be understood that not all of the functions of government (and indeed, not even all the judicial functions) proceeded in accordance with these district lines. The probating of estates and the recording of land transfers were courthouse functions usually done in accordance with district boundaries. Election districts sometimes encompassed more than the judicial district, and sometimes there was more than one election district within a single judicial district. Most judicial districts contained several regiments of the state militia. Various functions of local government, such as poor relief, education, and road building were carried on in a bewildering multiplicity of ways.

Further changes in the period before the Confederate War brought only slight changes to the system. In 1826 Pendleton was divided into the two districts of Pickens and Anderson. Then, after nearly thirty years during which no new districts were formed, Clarendon District was taken from Sumter with the same boundaries as the earlier Clarendon County of 1785.

The Constitution of 1868 stated that "the Judicial Districts shall hereafter be designated as Counties," and formed Oconee County from the western part of Pickens. Four new counties were established under the Constitution of 1868: in 1871 Aiken County was established from parts of Orangeburg, Edgefield, Barnwell, and Lexington; in 1878 Hampton from a part of Beaufort; in 1882 Berkeley from a part of Charleston; and in 1888 Florence from parts of Marion, Darlington, Williamsburg, and Clarendon.

An ordinance of the Constitutional Convention of 1895 formed Saluda County from part of Edgefield. Under our present Constitution ten new counties have been established. Four of these were constituted in 1897: Bamberg, from Barnwell; Cherokee, from parts of Spartanburg, Union, and York; Dorchester, from Berkeley and Colleton; and Greenwood, from parts of Abbeville and Edgefield. The six remaining counties with their dates of birth and parent counties are Lee (1902—Darlington, Kershaw, and Sumter); Calhoun (1908—Orangeburg and Lexington); Dillon (1910—Marion); Jasper (1912—Beaufort and Hampton); McCormick (1916—Edgefield, Abbeville, and Greenwood); and Allendale (1919—Barnwell and Hampton).

Source of South Carolina County Names

Abbeville—Abbeville, France.
Aiken—William Aiken, president of the South Carolina Railroad at the time the town of Aiken was laid out.
Allendale—Allen family, original settlers of the town of Allendale.
Anderson—Col. Robert Anderson of the Revolution.
Bamberg—Bamberg family, original settlers of the town of Bamberg.
Barnwell—Gen. John Barnwell of the Revolution.
Beaufort—Henry, Duke of Beaufort, one of the Lord Proprietors of Carolina.
Berkeley—John, Lord Berkeley, one of the Lord Proprietors of Carolina.
Calhoun—John C. Calhoun, statesman of South Carolina.
Charleston—Charles II of England.
Cherokee—Cherokee Indians.
Chester—Chester, Pennsylvania.
Chesterfield—Chesterfield, Pennsylvania.
Clarendon—Earl of Clarendon, one of the Lord Proprietors of Carolina.
Colleton—Sir John Colleton, one of the Lord Proprietors of Carolina.
Darlington—Source unknown.
Dillon—Dillon family, original settlers of the town.
Dorchester—The town of Dorchester, which was built by settlers from Dorchester, Massachusetts.
Edgefield—Fanciful.
Fairfield—Fanciful.

Florence—The town which was named for Miss Florence Harllee, daughter of Gen. W. W. Harllee.
Georgetown—The town which was named for George II.
Greenville—Isaac Green who ran a mill in Reedy River about which the town grew.
Greenwood—Fanciful.
Hampton—Gen. Wade Hampton, soldier and statesman, Governor and United States Senator.
Horry—Col. Peter Horry of the Revolution who was general of militia when Horry was established.
Jasper—Sergeant William Jasper of the Revolution.
Kershaw—Col. Joseph Kershaw of the Revolution.
Lancaster—Lancaster, Pennsylvania.
Laurens—Henry Laurens, statesman of the Revolution.
Lee—Gen. Robert E. Lee.
Lexington—The battle of Lexington, Massachusetts.
Marion—Gen. Francis Marion of the Revolution.
Marlboro—Presumably in honor of John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough.
McCormick—Cyrus H. McCormick, reaper, manufacturer.
Newberry—Supposed to have derived from an early settler.
Oconee—Indian name of a mountain in the Cherokee Nation.
Orangeburg—Prince of Orange, who was husband of Princess Anne, daughter of George II. The town was named in compliment to her and the county derived from the town.
Pickens—Gen. Andrew Pickens of the Revolution.
Richland—Descriptive.
Saluda—Indians who formerly lived there gave the name to the river, the county derived therefrom.
Spartanburg—The early settlers called their selection the "Spartan Country" because of the fortitude they had to practice.
Sumter—Gen. Thomas Sumter of the Revolution.
Union—From an old church of that name.
Williamsburg—Prince William, son of George II. A township was given that name and the county derived therefrom.
York—York, Pennsylvania.