

South Carolina County Names: Unreconstructed Individualism¹

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THOUGH THEIR FUNCTIONS VARY, counties are found in almost every state, and the number of counties in most states is both large enough to be interesting and small enough to be comprehended in a study of modest size.² Other civil divisions, e.g., townships, hundreds, and magisterial districts, vary much more than counties in their relative stability and importance. The township is a highly conspicuous unit of civic autonomy in New England; in much of the South it is an artifact of Reconstruction governments after The War, and has not been of enduring significance.³ Finally, the intermediate civil divisions are likely to outnumber counties several times over.

For several reasons we have chosen to look for patterns among the county names of South Carolina, the native state we share with our friend and colleague Claude Neuffer. We have become accustomed to looking for patterns through our work in editing two of the regional surveys of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, namely the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States and the Linguistic Atlas of the North-Central States, which together cover more than 700 counties. There is also a substantial amount of research

¹ This work was inspired by research into the settlement history of the Middle and South Atlantic States for the Linguistic Atlas of that region. The Senior Fellowship provided McDavid by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the cooperation of the Newberry Library in Chicago are gratefully acknowledged.

² Louisiana has politically equivalent parishes. Not every part of the United States lies within a county, however. Cf. Herbert Sydney Duncombe, *County Government in America* (National Association of Counties Research Foundation: Washington, D.C., 1966), p. 3. Alaskans, at their Constitutional Convention, deliberately avoided the name *county* so as to reflect a new concept of local government, named after much debate the *borough*, which won out over *county*, *province*, *tundraburg*, *municipuk*, and others. Cf. Ronald C. Cease and Jerome R. Sarnoff, eds. *The Metropolitan Experiment in Alaska* (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers: New York, 1968), pp. 9-14, 66 n. 24.

³ The historical information in this work is taken largely from David Duncan Wallace, *South Carolina, A Short History, 1520-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), but also from Eugene M. Sirmans, *Colonial South Carolina, A Political History, 1663-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

already done on the origins of the South Carolina county names for the first of the statewide place-name journals, *Names in South Carolina*, edited since its founding in 1954 by Claude Neuffer. And there are two striking characteristics of South Carolina's county names that attract almost instant attention. First, in a large number of instances, 31 of 46, the county and the county seat have the same name.⁴ Secondly, of the 56 most common names of counties in America, only seven appear in South Carolina, and 24 South Carolina county names are found nowhere else as county names.⁵

The South Carolina county names are listed in Table 1. Given are the date each was established and the number of times each appears as a county name in another state.⁶ A dagger precedes each abandoned name, some of which have been readopted at a later date. *Berkeley* is thus entered three times, twice with a dagger, for its current use dates only from 1882; *Charleston*, on the other hand, has been in continuous use since 1769.

Table 2 lists the 58 county names most frequently used in the United States and the number of times each appears as a county name. Those used in South Carolina are marked with an asterisk.

The naming of South Carolina's counties took place in four stages. Three counties were established in 1672, two years after the settlement of Charleston. A fourth was added in 1710. These counties were established for the purpose of locating land grants, and had no seats, for all public business was transacted in Charleston.

In 1769, seven districts, or precincts, were formed for the purpose of holding circuit courts. Each of these was named for the town in which court was convened.⁷ In 1785 the seven districts were subdivided into 34 counties; by 1792 the number of counties had reached 40, though many were short-lived.

In 1798 the counties were again reorganized, as 24 judicial districts; by 1855 their number had increased to 30. In 1868 a Constitutional

⁴ This was brought to the attention of readers of *Names* by Wm. E. Ashton, "Names of Counties and County Seats," *Names*, 2:1 (March, 1954), 14.

⁵ South Carolina's long tradition of out-migration would suggest to the contrary that more names might be exported.

⁶ Janie Revill, *South Carolina Counties, Districts, Parishes, and Townships* (Columbia, S.C.: n.d., n.p.) lists the counties established at the several reorganizations of state government.

⁷ In Virginia, counties were created and a court house was subsequently built at a convenient location. The seats thus established took their names from the names of the counties, often with the designation *Court House* applied, e.g., *Appomattox Court House*. As the seats grew in importance *Court House* was often dropped, though a few cases survive, e.g., *Amelia Court House*.

revision established these judicial districts as counties and added one to their number. Since 1871, 15 new counties have been established.

About half the high frequency county names in Table 2 are commemorative of the founding fathers and Revolutionary heroes.⁸ The disinclination of South Carolinians for these names is not indicative of a lack of patriotism, despite the well-known Anglophilia of Charlestonians, most recently in evidence during the visit of the Prince of Wales.

From the Revolutionary period we find the patriotic *Union* (1785), which also occurs in 17 other states. *Liberty* (1785), which occurs in four states, was renamed *Marion* (1798) after the first Marion was abolished. Marion, which appears in 16 other states, honors General Francis Marion, The Swamp Fox. Two more county names follow from Marion's fellow partisans General Thomas Sumter, The Gamecock, and General Andrew Pickens, The Fighting Elder. *Sumter* was created as a county in 1798, but *Pickens* county dates only from 1826, after Pickens' term as governor. Several other names come from partisans of local significance: *Barnwell* (1798), *Horry* (1801), and *Anderson* (1826); *Spartanburg* (1785) honors the Spartan Regiment.

Not every prominent partisan is remembered by a county name, however. The Revolutionary battles at Kings Mountain, Cowpens, Eutaw Springs, and Camden provide no names, though Baron DeKalb, who fell at Camden, is honored by six states. The short-lived *Camden* (1769) was pre-Revolutionary. The Battle of Fort Moultrie, at which Sergeant Jasper retrieved his regiment's colors, provides a South Carolina county name, but not until 1912. And while South Carolina is unique in commemorating the Battle of Lexington with a county name, the name took two tries to become established (1785, 1804). Finally, the defender of Charleston, General Benjamin Lincoln had a short-lived county named in his honor.

With the exception of Georgia, the original 13 states have seldom named counties for signers of either the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence. South Carolina briefly had a *Pinckney* (1792), but only Henry Laurens, not a signer but a member of the Continental Congress imprisoned in the Tower of London, is remembered as a founding father in South Carolina. Not even the coincident name of Colonel William Washington, who led the cavalry at Cowpens, could spare George Washington the embarrassment of two unsuccessful attempts to name a county in his honor.

⁸ The sympathetic English liberals are rarely honored by county names. North Carolina has a *Wilkes* and a *Pitt* and also takes Pitt's title, the Earl of *Chatbam*. Georgia also has a *Wilkes* and a *Chatbam*.

Having established the patriotism of South Carolinians, we can now look to the pre-Revolutionary era. English royalty accounts for *Charleston* (1769), *Georgetown* (1769, 1798), *Williamsburg* (1785, 1805), *Orangeburg* (1769, 1798), and the defunct *Orange* (1785) and *Kingston* (1785). *Beaufort* (1769), *Chesterfield* (1785), *Marlboro* (1785), and the defunct *Shrewsbury* (1785) recall other members of the nobility. The Lords Proprietors, to whom Charles II granted Carolina, account for the names of the first four counties: *Berkeley*, *Craven*, *Colleton*, and *Granville*. *Berkeley* and *Colleton* were readopted after the Revolution, and *Clarendon* (1855) recalls Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon.⁹ None of the Carolina peerage established by the Proprietors is recalled by county names. Most prominent among these was Landgrave Thomas Smith, with whom an energetic South Carolina genealogist can establish connections through the two dozen children borne by his two wives.¹⁰

Though nearly all the rivers in South Carolina bear Amerindian names, only five counties have been so named. Two, *Winyah* and *Cheraws*, are defunct. The three that survive are from the very last period of naming. *Saluda* (1896) is unique to South Carolina, *Oconee* (1868) is shared with Georgia, and *Cherokee* (1897) is shared with seven other states.

Another source for South Carolina county names is Colonial political entities antedating the various attempts to reorganize the counties. Between 1731 and 1761, 14 townships were established in a belt 70 to 120 miles from the coast in order to encourage frontier settlements. Few of these were successful, but the names *Kingston*, *Williamsburg*, and *Orangeburg*, of which the two latter survive, were transmitted as county names.

The most important pre-Revolutionary civil division was the parish, of which 24 were established between 1706 and 1778. Prince George's Parish is closely related to *Georgetown*, and the parish name *Orange* replaced the township name *Orangeburg* for a few years. The only other parish name adopted as a county name was *Bartholemew*, and that but briefly.

The name of Andrew Pickens, already cited as a partisan hero and a governor of the state, suggests the names of other governors as a

⁹ The North Carolina county names *Carteret*, *Craven*, *Granville*, and *Hyde* still recall the Proprietary era.

¹⁰ H.L. Mencken, *The American Language*, The Fourth Edition and the Two Supplements, abridged, with annotations and new material by Raven I. McDavid, Jr., with the assistance of David W. Maurer (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 574, lists the most common American surnames. Their use as county names is: *Smith*, five; *Johnson*, 12; *Brown*, nine; *Williams*, two; *Miller*, three; *Jones*, six; *Davis* (or *Davies*), six; *Anderson*, five; *Wilson*, four; *Taylor*, seven.

possible source of county names. Though perhaps a dozen streets in Charleston, the first capital of South Carolina, bear the names of former governors, mostly from the Colonial period, only four other names from the gubernatorial ranks appear as county names. *Colleton* and *Craven* were named for Proprietors; their relatives who served as governor did so only after the counties had already been established. Aiken was not named for the governor of that name, but for his father, the president of the South Carolina Rail Road. *Hampton County* honors Wade Hampton III, the first post-Reconstruction governor, who was at the crest of his popularity when the county was established in 1878.

Calhoun, the only native Vice President, was not honored by a county name until 1908. An 1857 attempt to name the present Aiken County for him failed to pass the legislature. Robert E. Lee, who like Hampton had a forebear prominent in the Revolution, has a South Carolina county named for him, but not until 1898. The name of Andrew Jackson, the only native President, was never adopted as a county name in South Carolina.

We have already seen that South Carolinians have a highly particularistic notion of what constitutes an appropriate county name. A number are drawn from surnames of purely local significance: *Allendale*, *Darlington*, *Dillon*, *Kershaw*, *Lewisburg*, *Pendleton*, and perhaps *McCormick*, *Greenville*, and *Winton*; *Florence* is from a given name. Three counties replicate English county names: *Chester*, *Lancaster*, and *York*. *Dorchester*, *Bamberg*, and *Abbeville* reflect places in England, Germany, and France, respectively. *Greenwood*, *Edgefield*, *Fairfield*, and *Richland* appear to be fanciful. The local significance of *Claremont*, *Newberry*, and *Salem* remains undetermined.

At each of the three major reorganizations, in 1769, 1785, and 1798, existing town names have supplied a large portion of the county names. Indeed, county names not replicating their seat names have had a hard time surviving: *Berkeley* (seat Moncks Corner), *Clarendon* (Manning), *Colleton* (Walterboro), *Richland* (Columbia), and *Williamsburg* (Kings-tree) all failed on their first adoption. Several other county names have perished, perhaps due to the lack of an identically named seat: *Claremont*, *Craven*, *Granville*, *Liberty*, *Lincoln*, *Salem*, *Shrewsbury*, *Washington*, *Winton*, and *Winyah*. On the other hand, *Camden*, *Cheraw(s)*, *Ninety Six*, *Pendleton*, and *Pinckney* were not saved by town names; likewise *Lewisburg*, which later took its parish name, *St. Matthews*. And the parish name *Bartholemew* did not save the county name.

In 31 of 46 cases the county and the county seat have the same

name. Seven of the 15 remaining counties were established in the modern period, after 1868. This congruency of county name and seat name is something the South Carolinian comes to take for granted, and it is a source of confusion when he travels. Neighboring North Carolina has only 14 instances of county name-seat name congruency, for example. The state of affairs in South Carolina's other neighbor, Georgia, is even worse, for there many names are used both for counties and county seats that are separate political entities, e.g., Jefferson is the seat of Jackson County, Jackson is the seat of Butts County, Jeffersonville is the seat of Twiggs County, Baxley is the seat of Appling County, and Appling is the seat of Columbia County, and so on.

Table 3 gives the number of counties in each state, the number of county name-seat name congruencies, as in South Carolina, and the number of county name-seat name incongruencies, as in Georgia.¹¹ South Carolina has far and away the highest proportion of congruency, 67 percent; Virginia is a distant second with 44 percent. Wisconsin, California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Texas range from 30 percent congruency down to 22 percent congruency. Four of these highest-congruency states are original colonies. Perhaps they are tied more closely to English practice; England, Scotland, and Ireland have about 50 percent congruency, but Wales only about 25 percent congruency.

Like South Carolina, several states have no county name-seat name incongruencies. Georgia has the largest number of incongruencies, but is nudged out of first place by Indiana when the proportion is calculated. Following Indiana and Georgia in rank order are Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Ohio, and Arkansas. Note that these states form a continuous territory. Skipping Idaho, the next in rank, the continuous territory is expanded by the next states in rank order: Wisconsin, Iowa, West Virginia, Texas, Michigan, and Mississippi. Apart from noting from our perspective as dialect geographers that this continuous territory is strongly influenced by the Midland dialect area, we shall leave an explanation of the pattern to others.¹²

Individualism is readily apparent in the naming of South Carolina's counties. The naming process has been highly principled: the county

¹¹ We include derivative forms as cases of county name-seat name congruency. If towns other than county seats are included, incongruencies appear even in South Carolina: neither Leesburg nor Leesville are in Lee County, and Calhoun Falls is not in Calhoun County; on the other hand, the towns of Kershaw and Dorchester are in counties of the same name, but neither is the seat.

¹² Hans Kurath, *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949) delimits the boundaries of the Midland speech area.

name and the seat name should conform; furthermore, names should be judged for their purely local significance. And there has been, except for the most recent countries, persistent application of the principles: there is a reluctance to abandon an appropriate name or to succumb to the tides of fashion.¹³

While the example of Delaware, whose three counties have remained intact since their establishment in the seventeenth century, does not suggest further research, it is apparent that the naming of counties follows different patterns from state to state. And once the patterns have been ascertained for the several states, regional patterns might emerge. But such research can only be carried out where intrepid and dedicated onomasticians like Claude Neuffer have first laid the foundation.

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¹³ William D. Workman, Jr., editorial analyst for the Columbia, S.C. *State* and a long-time student of South Carolina politics and government has pointed out in a private conversation that new names are sometimes proposed and argued for, but not adopted, in the course of constitutional revisions.

Table 1

Establishment of South Carolina County Names

Abbeville	1785	Dorchester	1897	Marlboro	1785
Aiken	1871	Edgefield	1785	Newberry	1785
Allendale	1919	Fairfield	1785	†Ninety Six	1769
Anderson	1826	Florence	1888	Oconee	1868
Bamberg	1897	†Georgetown	1769	†Orange	1785
Barnwell	1798	Georgetown	1798	†Orangeburg	1769
†Bartholemew	1785	†Granville	1710	Orangeburg	1798
Beaufort	1769	†Granville	1785	†Pendleton	1789
†Berkeley	1672	Greenville	1786	†Pendleton	1798
†Berkeley	1785	Greenwood	1897	Pickens	1826
Berkeley	1882	Hampton	1878	†Pinckney	1792
Calhoun	1908	Horry	1801	†Richland	1785
†Camden	1769	Jasper	1912	Richland	1799
Charleston	1769	Kershaw	1791	†Salem	1792
†Cheraws	1769	†Kingston	1785	Saluda	1896
Cherokee	1897	Lancaster	1785	†Shrewsbury	1785
Chester	1785	Laurens	1785	Spartanburg	1785
Chesterfield	1785	Lee	1898	Sumter	1798
†Claremont	1785	†Lewisburg	1785	Union	1785
†Clarendon	1785	†Lexington	1785	†Washington	1785
Clarendon	1855	Lexington	1804	†Washington	1792
†Colleton	1672	†Liberty	1785	†Williamsburg	1785
†Colleton	1785	†Lincoln	1785	Williamsburg	1804
Colleton	1798	McCormick	1916	†Winton	1785
†Craven	1672	†Marion	1785	†Winyah	1785
Darlington	1785	Marion	1798	York	1785
Dillon	1910				

†County and name abolished.

Table 2

Tokens of High Frequency County Names

Adams	12	Hamilton	10	Mercer	8
Benton	9	Hancock	10	Monroe	17
Boone	8	Harrison	8	Montgomery	18
Brown	9	Henry	10	Morgan	11
Butler	8	Jackson	23	Orange	8
*Calhoun	11	*Jasper	8	Perry	10
Carroll	13	Jefferson	26	Polk	12
Cass	9	Johnson	12	Pulaski	7
*Cherokee	8	Knox	9	Putnam	9
Clark(e)	17	Lafayette ^b	17	Randolph	8
Clay	18	Lake	12	*Richland	7
Clinton	9	Lawrence	11	Scott	11
Columbia ^a	10	*Lee	12	Shelby	9
Crawford	11	Lewis	7	Taylor	7
Cumberland	8	Lincoln	23	*Union	17
Fayette ^b	17	Logan	10	Warren	14
Franklin	25	Madison	20	Washington	31
Fulton	8	*Marion	17	Wayne	16
Grant	15	Marshall	12	Webster	8
Green(e)	16				

^a Includes Columbus Co., N.C.

^b Fayette, 11; Lafayette 6.

* Occurs in South Carolina.

Table 3
County Name-Seat Name Congruency

	a	b	c		a	b	c
Alabama	67	8	5	Nebraska	93	14	4
Arizona	14	1	0	Nevada	17	2	0
Arkansas	75	3	11	New Hampshire	10	0	0
California	58	17	2	New Jersey	21	5	0
Colorado	63	12	3	New Mexico	32	5	1
Connecticut	8	5	0	New York	62	8	3
Delaware	3	0	0	North Carolina	100	14	0
Florida	67	4	3	North Dakota	53	5	4
Georgia	159	12	31	Ohio	88	12	13
Hawaii	4	1	0	Oklahoma	77	12	1
Idaho	44	4	6	Oregon	36	5	1
Illinois	102	7	8	Pennsylvania	67	17	4
Indiana	92	9	18	Rhode Island	5	3	0
Iowa	99	14	11	South Carolina	46	31	0
Kansas	105	20	6	South Dakota	67	5	1
Kentucky	120	9	21	Tennessee	95	8	16
Louisiana	64	10	5	Texas	254	57	26
Maine	16	0	0	Utah	29	4	1
Maryland	23	0	0	Vermont	14	2	0
Massachusetts	14	4	0	Virginia	98	43	8
Michigan	83	24	4	Washington	39	5	1
Minnesota	87	15	3	West Virginia	55	5	6
Mississippi	82	6	8	Wisconsin	71	21	8
Missouri	114	13	19	Wyoming	23	1	1
Montana	56	2	4				

a Number of counties.

b County Name-Seat Name Congruency.

c County name same as a seat name in another county, e.g., Franklin, Pa. is the seat of Venango Co., but the seat of Franklin Co. is Chambersburg.