CITY HALL & COURT HOUSE, CHARLESTON, S. C.

South Carolina History

South Carolina was one of the original 13 colonies; it was the first state to secede from the Union and one of the first to rejoin the Union. First explored in the 1500s by the Spanish and French, it was also later settled by the English, Dutch and Scots-Irish.

In 1497 John Cabot claimed South Carolina for King Henry VII, but it wasn't until March 1670 that settlers finally landed in what is now called Bull's Bay and permanent settlement began.
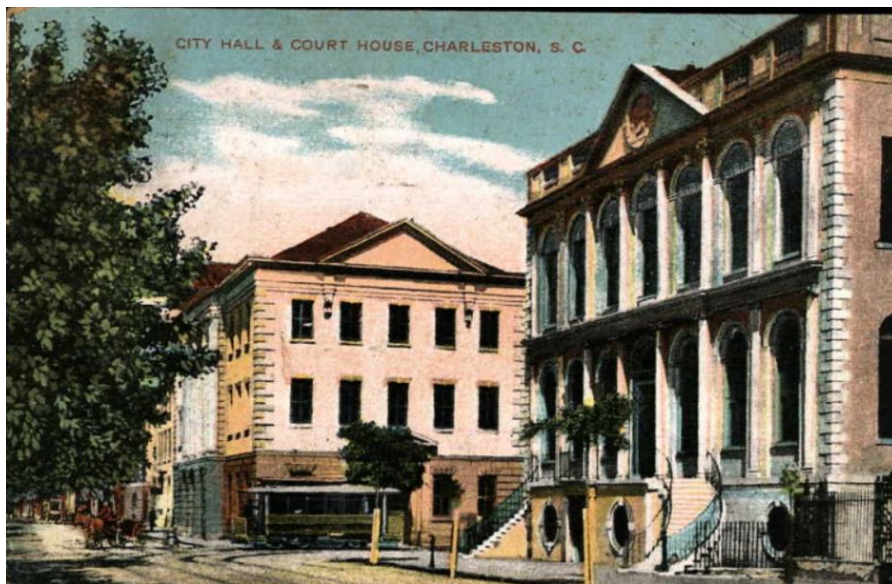
Charles Town, settled in 1680, and renamed Charleston in 1783, was one of the first pre-planned towns in North America and was the capital of the state until 1783. The capitol was moved to Columbia in 1783.

Following the election of Abraham Lincoln, South Carolina was the first state to secede and the first to ratify the Constitution of the Confederate States of America. The first shots of the Civil War were fired as the Union ship "Star of the West" tried to reinforce Fort Sumter.

In 1865, General William Tecumseh Sherman's troops cut a swath through South Carolina, leaving a path of destruction in their wake and burning the capital city of Columbia.

After the Civil War, the economy of South Carolina was destroyed and the state remained one of the poorest in the nation for over a century. Most people worked as farmers. Many were sharecroppers and tenants on large farms owned by the wealthier land owners in the state.

Around 1950, the importance of cotton diminished in the state as more textile factories and other industry moved in.

South Carolina is known as the Palmetto State after its state tree. The tree was added to its state flag when it seceded in 1861.
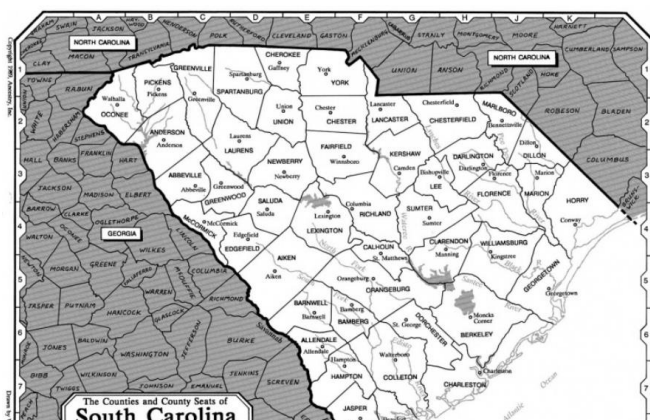
Counties of South Carolina

Significant Dates (through 1958)

1526 – Spanish attempted to establish the San Miguel de Guadalupe settlement; it failed within a year.

1562 – French attempted to establish the Charlesfort settlement on Parris Island; it failed with a year.

1566 – Spanish built coastal forts to discourage other settlements.

1629 – King Charles I granted all the territory between the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina to Jekyll Island off Georgia's coast in a charter to Sir Robert Heath.

1633 – Eight English nobles, the Lord Proprietors, were given a Royal Charter which established the Carolina Colony.

1666 – Captain Robert Sanford named the Ashley River and took formal possession of the Carolinas for England.

1669 – The constitution of Carolina, which guaranteed religious freedom, was approved.

1670 – Charles Town was established as the first permanent English settlement as well as the capitol.

1680 – The first group of French Huguenots arrived; Charles Town moved to Oyster Point, which is the current site of Charleston.

1682 – The Lords Proprietors created three counties: Berkeley, Colleton and Craven.

1683 – Baptists first arrived in Charleston from Somerset, England; Scots-Irish settle along the Ashley River.

1686 – The Lord Proprietors create a fourth county, Granville.

1691 – The Carolinas took on the name Carolina, derived from the Latin name Carolus which translates into English as Charles.

1700 – A hurricane struck Charleston, killing 98.

1709 – The first major group of Swiss and German colonists reached the Carolinas.

1712 – Territory of Carolina becomes a Colony; a law was passed that required church attendance and prohibited work or travel on Sundays.

1713 – Another hurricane struck killing 70 people.

1718 – Blackbeard sailed into Charles Town Harbor and took hostages for ransom; pirate Stede Bonnett, was captured and hanged in Charles Town.

1718 – Citizens of South Carolina rebel against Lords Proprietors; James Moore elected governor.

1721 – South Carolina became a Crown Colony.

1728 – Passenger and shipping service began between New York and Charles Town.

1729 – North and South Carolina become two separate colonies.

1730 – Settlers began moving into the interior of the state.

1730 – 1739 – About 20,000 enslaved Africans brought to South Carolina.

1739 – Sixty one people – 40 black, 21 white – died in the Stono slave revolt led by a slave named Jemmy. Two other slave uprisings happened in 1739 leading to "black codes" which regulated every aspect of slave life.

1740 – Fire destroys a good portion of Charles Town.

1742 – During the Battle of Bloody Marsh, the Spanish attempt to regain control of Charles Town and failed.

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1747 – The Choctaw Indiana signed a treaty which established trade with the Choctaws in return for not attacking French Settlements.

1752 – A hurricane struck killing 103 people.

1754 – Cotton was first exported from South Carolina

1760 – The Cherokee War began.

1761 – The Cherokee War ended and the resulting treaty opened land for more settlement.

1767 – Future president Andrew Jackson was born in Waxhaw, South Carolina and was the first American president to be born in a log cabin.

1769 – Seven judicial districts were established: Beaufort, Charleston, Georgetown, Cheraws, Camden, Ninety Six, and Orangeburg.

1773 – The first public museum in the colonies was established in Charles Town.

1774 – Henry Middleton, John and Edward Rutledge, Thomas Lynch, Christopher Gadsen named as delegates to the First Continental Congress; Middleton was named President of the Continental Congress.

1775 – Lord North extended the New England Restraining Act to five other states including South Carolina; the act disallowed trade with any country except Britain; Carolina's First Provincial Congress met.

1776 – The first battle of the American Revolution was fought when 15 British warships and 1,500 troops attach Fort Moultrie and were repelled.

1777 – Each male citizen in South Carolina was required to denounce the King and declare loyalty to the state.

1778 – A major fire destroyed much of Charles Town; arson was suspected.

1779 – George Washington sent 1,400 Continental troops to Charles Town to defend against a large British attack.

1780 – British troops lay siege to Charles Town, encircling the population. After 40 days, Charles Town surrendered to the British.

1781 – Col. Isaac Hayne was hanged by the British outside Charles Town; eventually American forces retook most of the state.

1782 – The British Army was defeated and left Charles Town.

1783 – Charles Town was renamed Charleston.

1785 – Counties were laid out by the General Assembly and county courts were established.

1786 – Capitol moved from Charleston to Columbia.

1788 – South Carolina became the 8th state on May 23, 1788.

1792 – A law was passed requiring all free African Americans between the ages of 16 – 50 to pay an annual head tax of $2.

1804 – Another hurricane hit South Carolina.

1822 – Denmark Vesey and other slave followers planned to capture Charleston, kill most of the white population and escape. Vesey and 33 others were hanged.

1828 – The United States passed the Tariff of 1828, which South Carolinians referred to as the Tariff of Abominations; tariffs were collected on imports to help protect northern industries.

1830 – The first steam locomotive in the U.S. began a passenger route between Charles and Hamburg, South Carolina.

1832 – South Carolina passed an Ordinance of Nullification and threatened to secede. A compromise was devised by Henry Clay and the crisis was adverted.

1838 – A fire destroyed half of Charleston.

1843 – The Citadel opened for first class of Cadets.

1856 – Representative Preston Brooks, a pro-slavery Democrat from South Carolina, caned Senator Charles Sumner, a Republican abolitionist from Massachusetts nearly to death during Congress.

1860 – In response to Lincoln's election, South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union prior to the Civil War on December 20, 1860.

1861 – Confederate soldiers fired on Fort Sumter; Confederate Naval Sailor and Marines' Cemetery built.

1863 – Union Admiral Samuel F Du Pont failed to break through defenses at Charleston's harbor while testing ironclad vessels.

1865 – During February 1865, General Sherman and his troops marched through North and South Carolina destroying almost everything in their path; Columbia burned by Union soldiers, most likely Sherman's troops.

1886 – A 7.3 earthquake in Charleston and killed 92 people; a 7.5 earthquake struck the Low Country and killed 83.

1868 – In June 1868, South Carolina along with Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and North Carolina are admitted back into the Union; Joseph Rainey was the first African-American in South Carolina to become a U.S. Congressman.

1870 – President Grant declared a state of martial law in nine counties in October 1870 to break the control of the Ku Klux Klan.

1911 – South Carolina required registration of marriages.

1915 – Registration of deaths and births begins in South Carolina.

1919 – Boll weevils began devastating crops eventually ruining the cotton industry.

1923 – A school fire in Beulah killed 77 people.

1925 – The "Charleston," a new dance that started in Charleston's pubs and dance halls swept across the nation.

1929 – As part of a larger labor movement, textile workers held more than 80 strikes in South Carolina.

1934 – George Gershwin wrote *Porgie and Bess*, the first American opera, while in Charleston.

South Carolina Censuses

Federal censuses for South Carolina begin in 1790 and are mostly complete, although the Richland District is missing for the 1800 census. The 1850 census of York and Lexington districts indicates county of birth as well as state for each person.

Although South Carolina did not conduct any full colonial censuses, fragments of state census returns are available at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. These include the 1829 state census of Fairfield and Laurens districts, and the 1839 state census of Kershaw and Chesterfield districts.

The population returns for the 1869 state census are complete except for Clarendon, Oconee, and Spartanburg counties. The 1875 state census returns are available for Clarendon, Newberry, and Marlboro Counties, as are partial returns for Abbeville, Beaufort, Fairfield, Lancaster, and Sumter counties. The original returns are found at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

South Carolina Census Records on Ancestry.com

- U.S. Census Reconstructed Records, 1660-1820
- South Carolina, Compiled Census and Census Substitutes Index, 1790-1890
- Index to the 1800 Census of South Carolina
- Free Blacks and Mulattos in South Carolina 1850 Census
- Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790: South Carolina

South Carolina Vital Records

A law mandating registration of all births and deaths in South Carolina was signed into law on 1 September 1914. Actual registration began in 1915, and South Carolina achieved 90% compliance within a few years.

South Carolina had no law requiring marriage licenses or registration until 1911, though many earlier records were recorded on the county level.

Population	
1790	249,073
1800	345,591
1810	415,115
1820	502,741
1830	581,185
1840	594,398
1850	668,507
1860	703,708
1870	705,606
1880	995,577
1890	1,151,149
1900	1,340,316
1910	1,515,400
1920	1,683,724
1930	1,738,765
1940	1,899,804
1950	2,117,027

South Carolina Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- Web: South Carolina, Find A Grave Index, 1729-2012
- South Carolina, Death Records, 1821-1960
- South Carolina Delayed Births, 1766-1900 and City of Charleston, South Carolina Births, 1877-1901
- South Carolina Marriage Index, 1641-1965
- South Carolina Death Index, 1950-1952

Other South Carolina Vital Records Resources

- South Carolina Vital Records Services: Holds records of births, marriages, and deaths. The Genealogy page provides a link to South Carolina Death Indexes.

South Carolina Military Records

- U.S., Confederate Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865
- South Carolina, Clemson University Student Military Service Records, 1894-1944
- Colonial Soldiers of the South, 1732-1774
- Roster of South Carolina Patriots in the American Revolution
- South Carolinians in the Revolution . . .

South Carolina Immigration & Travel

- South Carolina, Naturalization Records, 1868-1991
- U.S., Southeast Coastwise Inward and Outward Slave Manifests, 1790-1860
- Florida and South Carolina, Passenger Lists, 1907-1948
- Directory of Scots in the Carolinas, 1680-1830
- South Carolina Naturalizations 1783-1850

South Carolina Land & Wills

- Warrants for Land in South Carolina, 1692-1711
- Indexes to the County Wills of South Carolina
- Warrants for Land in South Carolina, 1680-1692
- Warrants for Land in South Carolina, 1672-1679
- North Carolina Land Grants in South Carolina

Other Collections

City Directories

Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.

Other Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about South Carolina history and genealogy. In addition to these state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for a local resource when researching.

Statewide Research Resources

- South Carolina State Archives: In addition to its on-site collections, the Archives has also indexed several collections of interest to genealogists, including transcripts of early wills from 21 counties; militia enrollment from 1869; criminal court records; and records of Confederate Veterans. Available collections are described on the Digital Collections page.
- South Carolina State Library: The site includes a link to a South Carolina Obituary Resources page.
- South Carolina Historical Society
- South Carolina Archives and History Foundation
- South Carolina Genealogical Society
- South Carolina GenWeb
- South Carolina Digital Library
- University of South Carolina – Digital Collections
- The National Archives at Atlanta: This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in South Carolina, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.

Specialty and Regional Research

- South Caroliniana Library

Help and Advice

- South Carolina Family History Research
- Counties of South Carolina
- Cumberland and Atlantic States Research
- Why Southern Research Is Different, Part I and Part II
- The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands
- Jewish-American and Deep South Jewish Heritage

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