

NEW COUNTY ARGUMENT.

READ AND BE CONVINCED ON THE SUBJECT.

Large Counties Make it Necessary for the People to Take the Law into Their Own Hand, Lynch-ing the Result.

Even so late as 1896 the Charleston delegation in the house defeated the bill which had passed the senate to establish the new county of Aiken, assigning as a reason that Charleston would never vote to create another new county in the up country until the provision of the constitution of 1865, which restricted representation of any county to a maximum, should have been abolished.

I have thus given only a skeleton outline of the prime cause why a deficiency of seats of justice for administering law beset South Carolina for one hundred and ninety-five years.

During more than the first half of that period the back country people were driven either to Regulator's law or have no law at all. Captain John Lynch, of Pendleton, was so noted and just a leader in the business that his name has been given to "regulating" all over the world. By having to extemporize and enforce law on sudden occasions in times past, many of the best citizens of the interior not only lost their lives by assassins, but much valuable property by incendiaries and thieves. It was thus that the famous Thomas Woodward, of Fairfield, (the ancestor of the present Senator Tom Woodward, of the same county,) perished by the hands of assassins whom he had been compelled to "regulate," but had not hanged, as he doubtless ought to have done.

Charleston's arrogant spirit of monopoly at home while eloquently advocating liberty and free trade abroad, would probably still be dominating the state as regards counties and many other things, but for the fact that Hon. B. F. Perry, while acting as provisional governor by appointment of President Johnson in 1865, called a convention to frame a new constitution with only 124 members—the number of representatives in the house instead of having 170 members—the number in both house and senate. The up country had considerably more members in that convention than the six parish counties, yet so potent was Charleston's overshadowing influence, and so accustomed to her domination had the leading men in the up country become that the tyrannical parish system of senatorial representation was abolished, as I remember, by only two majority. If that constitutional convention of 1865 had consisted of 170 members as prescribed by the old constitution of the state, Charleston presumably still be "queen of the state" as well as "the queen city by the sea" and the five new representative and judicial counties of Oconee, Aiken, Hampton, Berkeley and Florence, which have been created since the war, would not now be in existence. But let us be thankful that the odious sectional parish system has been abolished forever, and that the long pretended natural antagonism between the up and low country is a thing of the past likewise, so that hereafter the little state can properly be divided into legislative and judicial counties as other states are. However it must be remembered that although Charleston was to blame for the fact that only one additional representative and judicial county was created in South Carolina during more than half a century, yet there is another formidable enemy always on the alert to prevent the formation of counties. Still he can readily be overcome by prudent, determined and concerted action as has been demonstrated in the establishment of five new counties since the war.

That formidable enemy is the vested interests at hand near established court house. True, exceptions may be found, yet it may be assumed as a fact that every land owner at one of these old court houses opposes any reduction of the tributary territory. He thinks if the county be diminished his real estate would depreciate, might even become nearly valueless, as it generally does if the existing court house be removed, which never ought to be done. Every hotel keeper thinks he would lose some big bills, and he would, especially from those who reside at a distance. Every shoemaker, tinner, blacksmith, merchant, etc., at the old court house fears that he would lose some customers. Every holder of a county office of profit apprehends that his fat fees would be diminished, and every candidate in training for one of the comfortable offices will oppose any curtailment of domain. The freeholders out of the corporate limits of the county town, but near by, will also protest against ceding any territory to a new county lest their several landed estates might shrink in value.

But the most busy, indomitable and professedly disinterested enemy against lopping off a slice of his county is the editor of the county paper. He cannot see that, if he were of any account and his paper worth taking the existence of several small adjacent counties would in-

crease his circulation and advertisements rather than diminish them. Some of the best and most prosperous journals in other states are issued from obscure county seats in small counties. Still the strongest opponents of reducing a county are its lazy local lawyers. The inert members of the bar wish for their clients to come to them instead of having to go to their clients, as if one man cannot easier go to half a dozen, but convenient, court houses to meet, say ten neighboring clients at each, than the sixty clients can go to him at one distant court house. Pettifogging lawyers also want people to dwell as far away from a court house as possible, for fear if they dwell close at hand they would become more intelligent, especially in legal knowledge, and often be enabled to dispense with having to pay Mr. Pettifogger a good fee for trivial advice.

It is but human for the inhabitants of a county town to strenuously resist any encroachment upon what they regard as their tributary. They never once stop to reflect that a court house is built for the public good—not for the private benefit of those who locate at it, nor for the use of those who fill the county offices of profit. Whatever drawback, obstacle, inconvenience, injury, or expense the distant population of a large county may suffer, gives the average court house man no concern, and he can endure it all with Christian resignation, because, perchance, he may be able to turn a penny. It is so much easier and pleasanter to live by the sweat of somebody else's brow than by one's own, that it is the true business of life with some men never to try to live except at another's expense. Many a county seat resident who professes the purest religion, boasts the widest public spirit, prates of Ben Adhem love for his fellow men, will throw all such sentimentalism to the dogs as soon as you ask him to let a strip of his county's surplus area be cut off to help others without injuring him. But even if it should injure him, the good of the individual must be sacrificed for the good of the many. "The greatest good to the greatest number," is true Democracy. Has it injured either Orangeburg, Barnwell, Lexington or Edgefield because a portion of their respective territories was cut off to form Aiken county? Not at all. On the contrary it has helped all those counties by giving them smaller election districts; by shortening the term of their court by lessening cost of litigation, and while it has profited them largely in other respects, who will dare say it has not been of service to the people of Aiken county? And how can it possibly do Orangeburg or Lexington any harm to take some more of their broad acres to form the proposed county of Calhoun? Yet you will hear men argue almost frantically that ruin will result to old Orangeburg and old Lexington if it be done. Edgefield has nearly forgotten that the most populous and perhaps the most prosperous part of Aiken county ever belonged to her.

At this point let me make a prophecy. After Calhoun county shall have been well established, as I am sure will be the case, and after this historic village of St. Matthews shall have become a flourishing court house town, then when some eligible railroad depot on the South Bound or other road shall ask to appropriate a small section of Calhoun to straighten lines so as to form another new county, many if not most of you here today will violently oppose it, although you ought not to; the very reasons that Orangeburg and Lexington should acquiesce in creating Calhoun county now. In this connection, to my mind, one of the saddest commentaries on the selfishness and meanness of poor fallen humanity occurred in this state a few years ago when an amendment to the present state constitution was submitted to a vote of the people, proposing to strike out that provision of the constitution forbidding any new county to be formed of less area than six hundred and twenty five square miles or any old county to be reduced below that limit. The amendment was defeated mostly by the co-operation of the large counties, but the worst thing about the whole proceeding, if my memory is correct, was that nearly all of the counties of Anderson, Pickens, Oconee, and Aiken, the then youngest legislative and judicial counties in the state, forgetting how long they had suffered for a court house, and what hard work had been necessary to get it, voted overwhelmingly against the proposition. The local and assumed to be invested interests at the old county seat of a large county are ever ready to offer objections to reducing its area one foot to form a new county. Fallacious but plausible arguments against it are industriously urged on every side. I have heard them so often and so long that I have them by heart and will now proceed to refute them in detail.

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FROM THE COALING GROUND

FLAW TALKS NEW COUNTY TO HIS NEIGHBOR.

The Argument Takes Place Down in the Coaling Ground and He Leaves His Victim Converted to the Cause.

(Correspondence of The Ledger.) DRAYTONVILLE, S. C., Nov. 2, '96.

EDITOR LEDGER—Dear Sir: 'Tother day I chanced to meet a fellow from 'way down below the coalin' ground, and after I greeted him with the everyday password, he said:

"Flawpicker, this new county question is somethin' that bothers me. They keep me or the fence all the time. Now, Flaw, my vote is as good to me as anybody else's is to them, and I want to spend it to my own personal interest—that's what I've got it for. Now, I want your views on the matter."

"I'm goin' to vote for the new county," I said.

"Well, that may be to your interest and not mine. The papers, all but THE LEDGER, say it will heap a burden of taxes on me and my neighbors, and I ain't willin' to have my taxes raised," he said.

"Neither am I. A dollar in my pocket is worth 100 cents more to me than one in the county treasury, an' if there wasn't a way to make me pay it I wuldn't pay 'em narry red cent for taxes. I saw a report from Comptroller-General Norton, an' the taxes in all the new counties is lower than it is in the majority of the older counties. My dear brother, you ain't got a particle of room to fear that your taxes in the new county will be higher than you now pay in Union for it's the highest taxed county in the whole state—17 1/2 mills on the dollar. You ought to be glad to jump at the chance to relieve yourself of such a heavy tax," I said to him.

"Well, this court house and jail is to be built and it all takes money to do it," he said.

"Very well, the people of Gaffney have signed a bond of \$15,000 as a guarantee that they will build a court house and jail as an inducement to have the court house and jail situated in their town. So if you people will agree to have the court house and jail built in Gaffney the structures won't cost you a cent," I then remarked.

"How are we to know the people of Gaffney will build them?" he asked.

"They are compelled to build them or they forfeit the \$15,000 and the county commissioners can take the \$15,000 and let out the contract themselves," I said.

"How do we know their bond is good?" he asked.

"Write to Mr. N. W. Hardin, one of York county's best lawyers and find out, I think is the best way," I replied.

"How do we know that a court house and jail can be built for \$15,000?" he then asked.

"I saw the drawings and specifications of a court house that is much finer than Union's or York's, yet—much finer than Charlotte's court house—up at THE LEDGER office, that is guaranteed by contractors, also by the architect who drew it, to be built for \$10,000 and a jail can be built for \$5,000 easy. Man, \$15,000 is a big pile of money, you must recollect. I would almost do what Rufe Sanders said old man Luther Blanton would do—'walk across h—ll on a rotten rail'—for \$15,000. Go up to THE LEDGER office and ask to see the plans of the court house and estimate of cost of building, also Comptroller Norton's report of all the different counties and their taxes; and even if you had to build the court house and jail your taxes would be reduced because Florence county, which is now paying taxes to build courthouse and jail, has less taxes than Union by 7 mills, and even less taxes than Spartanburg by 2 mills, with all of Spartanburg's twenty-eight cotton mills included, and they are surveying, too."

"Gaffney isn't in the center of the proposed new county, either; that's another objection," he said.

"Well, if it isn't in the center, it is still closer than Union, or as close, anyway, and you get your taxes reduced, bear in mind—bound to; isn't another county in the state so high taxed as Union. If you don't believe that, get a postal card and sit down and write to Comptroller-General Norton, Columbia, S. C., for his county tax report, and read and study it well. It is a good thing to have in the house, anyway. And if you locate the county court house and jail outside of Gaffney's corporate limits you will have to be taxed to have it built. I would rather go a few miles further and have it in a good market town than to go to court in the country and after court is over then hitch up and drive on to town to do my trading," I said.

"It will increase the value of land and we will have to pay highest taxes on real estate," he said.

"Very well; I will grant that, but it will increase the population of Gaffney and cause a greater demand for your county produce. Your cows will bring more money, your sheep,

hogs, chickens, corn, fodder, water-melons, wood and all such stuff as that will be worth more. That's wherein the value of your land will increase, and should you ever want to sell it you can get something like a decent price for it," I said.

"Well, Flaw, supposin' I'm a renter; I'll have to pay higher rents for land. How about that?" he asked.

"I'll grant that, too; but the land rents will only increase as the population increases and the demand for land increases. Then the demand for country produce comes on at the same time," I replied.

"Then it's about as broad as it is long, is it not—low rents and slow demand; high rents and big demand?" he asked.

"I think not. The land can only produce a certain amount, and when the demand gets so great you can obtain almost any price for your produce. If it pays you a little on low rent and few sales it would sure pay you more on the larger scale. If there was no demand at all the produce would die, rot, etc., on your hands, and you would be loser," I said.

"Well, another thing; I don't like the idea of us country people a-buildin' up a town. How do you look at that?" he asked.

"In this instance it looks to me like the town people want us to let them build themselves up, but let's look at it t'other way. I believe it's to my own interest to feed my horse well to get good work out of him. I believe it's to my interest to build up my market town so I can buy things cheaper and sell my produce for better prices. If my vote will put the court house in Gaffney then I will slap her right thar. That will cause more trading to be done there; cause more stores to go up; cause more competition; all the merchants will be trying to buy my produce; all the merchants will be trying to sell me goods cheaper in order to get my trade. Truly it has been said: 'Competition is the life of trade.' How would you like to live in a country and no town in a hundred miles? How would you like to live in a town and no country people in a hundred miles to haul you wood, bring you in chickens, eggs, butter and raise you cows to eat and such like? How utterly impossible it is for a town and country to live to themselves! The most brotherly relationship should exist between town and country yet I have heard town boys say of a countryman, 'there goes a sager,' and on the other hand I have heard the country boys say, 'there's a town tacker,' or 'town dude.' Brother, this sort of a feeling never does any body any good—whether a countryman or a townsman. If I expect my horse to feed me I must feed him. If I get mad at my horse and turn in to beatin' of him an' he runs away or I kill him dead, there won't be much good come out of either of us. What I'm drivin' at, we must work together in love and harmony for good," I said.

"Yes, Flaw, I'm off on your side of the fence now, but after I get to reading the papers, all but THE LEDGER, I'm scared I'll get off on their side," he said.

"You should not listen to none of the newspapers, but write to Comptroller General Norton, of Columbia, S. C., and get his report, then I'm sure after reading and studying it carefully you will vote for the new county even if you had to be taxed to build a court house and jail and surveying, all of which you get free in this instance," I said.

I would love to have answered more questions for him but it was getting so late we had to part with the every day parting words.

I will try to answer any and all questions concerning the benefits of a new county, from now till Dec. 8, providing they reach me on or before Wednesday morning of each week, and I'll guarantee you that I'll answer it in a sensible, satisfactory way, too. If the new county is an injury to the majority, we don't want it; if it's a benefit we want a solid, wholesome vote for it on the eighth of December. I, you want to debate on this through THE LEDGER send in your query to Flaw Picker, an' if you don't know him send it to Banjer Lu, an' he will give it to me. Yours, for right or not at all, FLAW PICKER.

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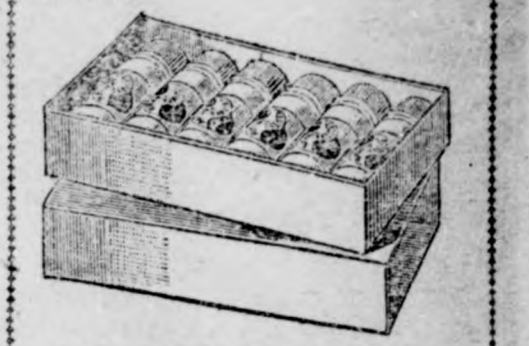


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