

JOHN PICKENS

CHAPTER ONE

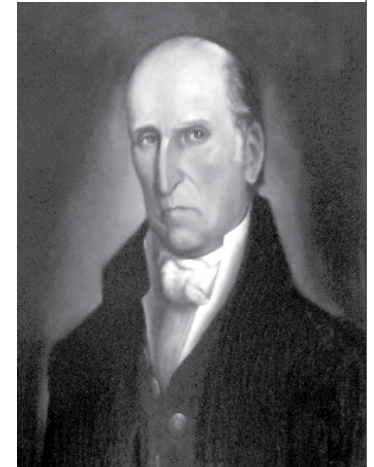
Conflicts between countries are common and have often determined world history. The conflict between England and Scotland directly affected the Indian tribes of North America. During the seventeenth century, many Scottish people migrated to France and other countries to avoid the conflict between England and Scotland. During this time, Robert Pickens, a Scottish lowlander, made a personal decision that would greatly affect the Chickasaw Nation a century later. Young Robert Pickens migrated to Normandy, France, where he obtained work as a postal clerk and settled down with the intention of living there permanently. At that time, he could not know that a serious European event would change his plans completely.

Robert, a Protestant, met and married Mademoiselle Jeanne Bonneau, a devout French Huguenot. Although France was essentially a Catholic country, Robert and Jeanne were able to live a peaceful life due to the Edict of Nantes. The Edict of Nantes was issued on April 13, 1598, granting civil rights to the French Calvinists (Huguenots) and Presbyterians; however, in October 1685, Louis XIV, the grandson of Henry

IV, renounced the Edict and declared Protestantism illegal, with the Edict of Fontainebleau. This act, most commonly called the “Revocation of the Edict of Nantes,” affected Robert and his family, so they moved to Limerick, Ireland, hoping for a more stable life.

In 1718, the Robert Pickens family left Limerick and sailed for the Colonies of North America. Robert’s son, William, along with William’s wife and children, arrived far north, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where they settled. Contrary to William’s route, Robert, Jeanne and at least three of their sons preferred to take the southern route. They arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, where this gregarious family happily established a permanent home.

Through the years, the children of William Pickens moved to other colonies. His son, Robert Pike Pickens, continued southward during the latter half of the eighteenth century in what was then the Cherokee Nation. Robert Pike Pickens, his wife Miriam and their children found a permanent home in the small, but



Revolutionary soldier, Brigadier General Andrew Pickens, a cousin of Robert Pike Pickens, was the executioner of, and a signatory to, the treaty with the Cherokee people, known as the Treaty of Hopewell, signed on November 28, 1785.

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Francis Wilkinson Pickens (1805 - 1869), another cousin of Robert Pike Pickens.

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very active community of Abbeville, South Carolina. Robert's cousin John Pickens helped establish the Cherokee Nation line north of the Pickens' home. He later became friends with the nationally known John Calhoun of the same area.



Pickens is a respected name appearing on the maps of practically all of the southern states. The Pickens family name adorns towns, counties, roads and creeks. Pickens District is one of the four districts in the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma. There are many descendants of Robert Pickens who had a significant role in shaping the United States of America.

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Francis Wilkinson Pickens (1805 - 1869), another cousin of Robert Pike

Pickens, served as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1834 - 1843 and was appointed Ambassador to Russia by President James Buchanan. After returning from Russia, he was elected Governor of South Carolina at the outbreak of the Civil War.

Alabama's third governor, Israel Pickens, still another cousin of Robert Pike Pickens, was a native of North Carolina. He served in the North Carolina Senate from 1808 - 1810, represented North Carolina in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1811 - 1817 and represented the "North Carolina Faction" in early Alabama politics. He was active in the American Colonization Society, was interested in scientific research and invented a lunar dial. Israel Pickens was appointed to the U.S. Senate and retired to Cuba, due to ill health, where he died on April 24, 1827.



Alabama's third governor, Israel Pickens.

(Alabama Department of Archives and History)

Many early American colonists of the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia became well acquainted with their neighboring Indian tribes. Dozens of friendships ripened into marriages; however, the Robert Pike Pickens family did not prefer this close association. Yet, Robert's sons, John and David, often visited Cherokee friends, much to the consternation of their parents. The Cherokee trail to Atlanta lay only a few miles from the Pickens home near Abbeville, and it was inevitable that the gregarious sons would develop Cherokee friendships. Robert did not understand this, since there was a great deal of enmity that existed between them and the Cherokee people.

In 1761, Cherokees in the Abbeville vicinity burned Joseph Pickens, a cousin to John Pickens, at the stake. The Pickens family was justifiably outraged. Suspicious of his Cherokee relationships, John's family accused him of being involved. John vowed his innocence, but it was to no avail. Thereafter, his name became anathema to all his relatives except his younger brother David and his sister. John endured these accusations for some time; however, this tragic event ultimately led to an irrevocable change in his life. One last time at a family gathering, John proclaimed his innocence, but he still refused to break ties with his Cherokee friends.

One morning in 1786, John Pickens looked out of his window at the road leading to the Cherokee Trail, where he could see traders and other travelers heading west. Where they were going was no mystery, and John needed no explanation for this heavy amount of traffic. John's mind was made up – he would soon be joining them. Bidding David farewell, he took to his horse, which was laden with the few possessions he could

carry with him. John was deeply hurt by his family's accusations and soon joined the traders on their westward journey.

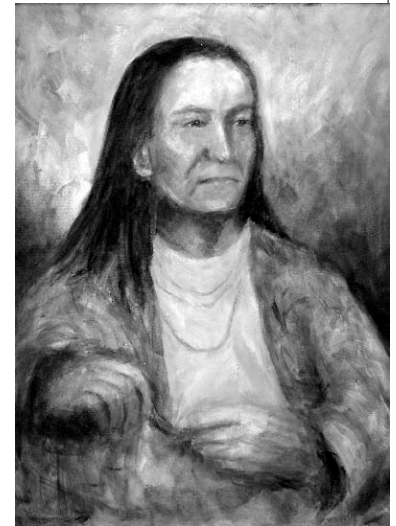
Within weeks, he arrived in the Creek Nation. Being unfamiliar there, he traded fresh horses and continued on to the Choctaw Nation in Mississippi. There he found his old friends, who welcomed him. Exhausted, John accepted their invitation to remain as long as he desired, although the growing town of Natchez was more appealing. At that crossroads of heavy traffic, which he considered "back home," he reminded himself that there would be many business opportunities. Having grown up in a family involved with livestock, he felt good about this line of business. With gratitude for the hospitality of his Choctaw friends, John soon left the Choctaw Nation and traveled to Natchez.

The Natchez Trace was a 444-mile trade route that cut completely through the Chickasaw Nation from Natchez to Nashville, Tennessee. Several inns (or "stands")



Colbert's Stand is located on the Natchez Trace in Alabama.

(Courtesy of the Natchez Trace Parkway, U.S. National Park Service.)



George Colbert

(Courtesy of the Natchez Trace Parkway, U.S. National Park Service.)

were set up along the trail that offered a respite for travelers. A Chickasaw, George Colbert, operated the most prominent of these stands at the junction of the Natchez Trace and the Tennessee River. It was there that he reportedly charged General Andrew Jackson \$75,000 to ferry his army across the river. While this angered the General at the time, it was a common demonstration of tribal autonomy and Indian nationalism in early America.

Located at the southernmost point of the heavily traveled Natchez Trace, and with its connection to the abundant river traffic, John Pickens envisioned a prosperous life there. The industrious and friendly John Pickens met many people in Natchez, and within days became acquainted with many business people. After only a few weeks, John had an active livestock business partnership with Richard King of Natchez. Advantageously located in the center of town, the business did well. It was in Natchez that John met and married a Chickasaw woman named Mary.

On January 18, 1789, John became seriously ill while working with his livestock adjoining the home of his business partner, Richard King. (Diagnosis of John's sudden illness is documented in later court records.) John was removed to Richard King's home, and a messenger boy was immediately sent to get Mary at the Pickens home. It is clear that John realized his illness would be terminal. Within a few hours, he drafted a will that left his property to Mary, their expected child, and John's youngest brother, David, who had remained in Abbeville. The soon-to-be-born child of John and Mary Pickens was Edmund Pickens, a name that would become historically significant to the Chickasaw Nation.

The will of John Pickens was probated in Natchez, and the records of the office of the chancery clerk reveal the following documents:

WILL

IN THE NAME OF GOD AMEN: I, John Pickens, of the District of Natchez, being weak in body but of sound and perfect mind and memory (blessed by God for the same), considering the mortality of my body, and knowing that it is appointed for all men once to die, do make and publish this my last will and testament in the manner and form following (that is to say) first: I resign my body to the Dust from which it came and my soul into the hand of God, who gave it; and as for what worldly Estate it has pleased God to give me, I dispose of it in the following manner: first: that all my just debts and funeral charges shall be paid: and the remainder to be divided equally into three parts of which I give one third to my beloved wife Mary; one third to the child that my said wife is now pregnant with, and the remaining one third I give to my brother David Pickens; and for the full performance of the same, I do appoint my trusty and worthy friends Robert Miller and Charles Collins of the District aforesaid, Executors to this my last Will and Testament. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal this eighteenth day of January in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and eighty nine.

J. Pickens (Seal)

Signed, sealed and delivered in the presence of Richard King – Jn. Griffing – John Bell – Justus King – Prosper King – Oswell X (his mark) Yarbrough.



In Natchez on this twenty second day of the month of January in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty nine, before me, Don Carlos de Grand Pre, Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Armies and Civil and Military Commandant of the said Port and District appeared Richard Miller, who informed me of the death of John Pickens, who died on the eighteenth day of the present month at the house of Justus King, to which he had removed by reason of sickness, intending to make a Journey to the Choctaw Towns; and thereupon the said Miller delivered to me the sealed will of the said Pickens and the witnesses who signed the same being also present I proceeded immediately to open the said Will in the presence, namely: Richard King, John Griffing, John Bell, Justus King, Prosper King and Oswell Yarbrough, all of who being duly sworn were asked if the signature purporting to be that of the deceased Pickens was really his own writing and the signatures following were really their own. To which they answered that the signatures of Pickens was really his own writing, and the others they acknowledged to be their own, ratifying and confirming the same, in the presence of Don Antonio Soler, Don Joseph Martinez Rubio and Juan Carreras, Witnesses present – Richard King – Justus King – John Bell – Jn. Griffing – Oswell X (his mark) Yarbrough – Prosper King – Jose Martinez Rubio – Antonio Soler – Juan Carrerras – Estevan Maiar – Interpr. Carlos de Grand Pre.

At the Port of Natchez on this twenty sixth day of the month of January in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty nine, I Don Carlos de Grand Pre, Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Armies, and Civil and Military Commandant of the said Port and District, accompanied by the Interpreter, the Executor of the Will, and the Partner of the deceased, repaired to the House of Richard Adams, in which the Widow of the said decease John Pickens resides, who I required to declare all and every property in her possession belonging to her deceased husband, as likewise the Cattle and horses if any, in order that an inventory thereof may be taken of the whole Estate, in which I have proceeded as follows. – Two shirts. Two pairs trousers. Two pair pantaloons of cotton. One pair cloth Ditto. 1 Cotton vest. 2 roundabouts ditto. One old cloth Great-coat. One pair large breeches, old. One old hat. One saddle. Cattle and horses, vz: Several horses running in the Woods, branded with the brand of the deceased. And there being nothing more to Inventory, I have closed this present sitting and have signed with the said Widow, the Executors, the Interpreter, and Witnesses assisting. – Robert Miller – Antonio Soler - Franc Pabana

Her

Mary M.P. Pickens

Mark

-- Carlos de Grand Pre --

At the said Plantation at two p.m., finding that the Partner of the decease had in his possession all the Papers yea. Relating to the affairs of the deceased, have closed the Inventory for the present and have signed with the Widow, the Executors, the Interpreter and witnesses assisting.

Her

Mary M.P. Pickens

Mark

Robert Miller – Franco Pabana – Juan Carreras – Antonio Soler – Grand Pre.

At the Port of Natchez on this twenty seventh day of the month and year before written, I the said Commandant, accompanied by the Interpreter and Witnesses assisting, have repaired to the House of Richard Adams, to continue the Inventory, and not finding Richard King there, who has in his possession all the papers belonging to the deceased, the said Inventory could not be continued; whereupon I have closed this present sitting, and have signed with the Widow the Interpreter, and the Witnesses assisting.

Robert Miller – Juan Carreras – Antonio Soler – Grand Pre.

At the Port aforesaid on this twenty-sixth day of the month and year before written, I the said Commandant, have repaired to the Plantation of Richard King who has in his charge sundry horses and mares belonging to him and the deceased John Pickens in partnership, as also sundry notes given by individuals for horses sold and have proceeded in the Inventory thereof, in presence of the Interpreter and Witnesses assisting as follows:

Ten horses running in the cane marked one half 3 P and the others as a∇. Twenty mares running also in the cane marked in the same manner. Five Colts, in the same range, branded in the same manner. Seven horses on the other side of the River, branded in the same manner. Eight mares running in the same range, branded in the same manner. Thirty-five horses and mares at the Aroyelles branded in the same manner. One horse on the Plantation of Richard Adams, branded in the same manner. Two mares and one Colt at the same place, branded in the same manner. One horse said to have been stolen by Herman Kirk and Samuel Walker. And it being noon, I have closed this present sitting and there being no more horses to inventory, I have signed with the Widow, the Executor, the Interpreter, and Witnesses assisting. Richard King, Juan Carreras, Franco Pabana, Robert Miller, Grand Pre.



Four days after John's death, Robert Miller, one of the Executors of his will, informed the magistrate, Don Carlos de Grand Pre, Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Armies and



Juanita Keel Tate in front of the home of Richard King, now known as the Post House.

Civil and Military Commandant of the said Port and District. Thereupon, his will was duly probated beginning January 22, 1789. As noted on previous pages, John Pickens' estate was inventoried in the required manner, in the presence of Mary, his widow, whom they contacted at the home of Richard Adams, where she and John had been living at the time of his death. Witnesses and assistants in the procedure were Don Antonio Soler, Don Joseph Martinez Rubio, Juan Carreras, Richard and Justus King, John Bell, John Griffings, Oswell Yarbrough and Prosper King. Interpreter was Estevan Maiar. (Before the magistrate) Carlos de Grand Pre.

The inventory consisted mostly of livestock, including horses, oxen, mares, and colts and was branded with one of these brands: "one half 3P" or "A∇." In addition, there was a small

fortune in promissory notes payable to John Pickens. John's business partner, Richard King, reported many verbal notes payable to the deceased, which were added to inventory.

After the sale of livestock in February, April and June 1789, the estate of John Pickens was legally and satisfactorily closed, as acknowledged by his business partner, Richard King, on June 22, 1789. And so it was that a few months after his father's death in 1789, Edmund Pickens was born.



Editor's Note: Over a century later, descendants of Edmund Pickens, Juanita Keel Tate, Gwendolyn Tate Gentry, Paula Gentry Klewer and Jerod Impichchaaha' Tate visited the King home, now known as the "Post House," situated at the extreme south end of the Natchez Trace. They found the ground floor – formerly a stable – converted into an attractive restaurant, and toured the upper floors. One of the upstairs rooms is where John Pickens, Mrs. Tate's great-great grandfather, executed his last will and testament before passing away.

The table on the following page lists several of the author's ancestors: