

H-Net Reviews

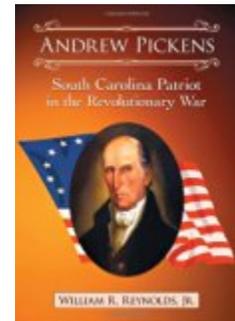
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

William R. Reynolds. *Andrew Pickens: South Carolina Patriot in the Revolutionary War*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2012. x + 396 pp. \$55.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6694-8.

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Published on H-War (October, 2013)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



A direct descendent of Andrew Pickens's brother Joseph, author William Reynolds makes his leanings very clear in the prologue. In referring to the birth of Andrew and Joseph Pickens, the author states, "Now I look back, and almost envision heralds proclaiming, 'Hark! Hark! Britain's tyranny over this land is coming to an end, and a new free country will rise up to claim its destiny!' An exaggeration, you may say. Well, perhaps I took some liberty with that opening" (p. 7). The declaration colors what would otherwise be a scholarly work, and any bias that might be discerned in the book can be understood in the light of this statement.

Mr. Reynolds points out that Pickens is not as well known as other Revolutionary War figures who served in the South, such as Francis Marion or Thomas Sumter. He explains in the preface that his intent is to shed light on "one of the more humble and unassuming of these heroes" and he adds that "an updated reference that details Pickens' important contributions to American independence is necessary" (p. 3).

But this book is more than a biography. Pickens was a very active militia officer, and was involved in numerous actions both large and small. The author tracks Pickens's involvement in the war and, in doing so, examines many of the actions in great detail, including detailed maps. Since many of these militia actions are considered minor, they do not as a rule receive such attention. Burr's Mill, Fishing Creek, Cowan's Ferry, and Thicketty Creek are not exactly household names. But Pickens was also involved in well-known battles such as King's Mountain, Cowpens, and Guilford Courthouse. In following Pickens, the book provides a broad view of the war in the South, from minor, little-known engagements to battles

celebrated in the annals of military history.

The author discusses interesting details that are usually overlooked. For example, at one point, British Lieutenant-Colonel Banastre Tarleton was ill with yellow fever while many of his men suffered from malaria. The author presents a discussion of the differences between the two diseases. The author provides details on the militia itself. He describes the clothing, weapons, and tactics. He also contrasts the militia with both the Continentals and their British opponents.

The book's detail extends to precisely locating the exact whereabouts of sites. When the author refers to Tuckaseegee Ford, for example, he adds that the site "was located at present-day Charlotte, North Carolina, between where Long Creek enters and Interstate 85 crosses the Catawba.... [T]he listed address is 5000 Whitewater Center Parkway. It is near the United States National Whitewater Center" (p. 151). In many instances, the author precisely locates modern historical markers, or mentions that the site is now underwater at a reservoir that did not exist at the time. This information is invaluable for anyone interested in locating the sites of the action, and gives the reader confidence in the author's familiarity with the area.

The author carefully backs up his work with extensive use of primary sources. There are lengthy excerpts from diaries, letters, newspapers, and military dispatches. The author points out where different sources disagree, and explains why he prefers one over another. In addition there are several appendixes that include civil records, a roster of Pickens's militia, and pension applications. The book is extensively illustrated. There are portraits of the main players, maps of various phases of actions,

and photographs of the sites as they are today. There are instances, however, in which he does not accept the primary source as it stands, and asserts that changes are required to make the document accurate: "Replacing 1775 in the date of the letter with 1776, and attributing the authorship to Major Williamson rather than Colonel Thomson, is necessary to fit the action described therein. This letter is obviously written by Williamson and inadvertently attributed to Thomson one year earlier to the day" (p. 73). Changing both the date and the author of a letter without relying on other, corroborating primary sources to support his alterations is quite a stretch. This leaves the reader wondering if the author is trying too hard to prove his point.

In addition, the author does have an identifiable bias. Atrocities on the part of the British are inexcusable, while those on the part of the Americans are perfectly understandable. In referencing one portion of the Battle of Cowpens, for example, he states that "The Tories reportedly did not get off a shot, thus the mortality might be deemed unwarranted. The South Carolina militia had heard enough of the indignities Waters' militia had forced upon Whig families, and vengeance was unavoidable" (p. 204). He likewise makes excuses for Light Horse Harry Lee and his massacre of a militia force that became known as Pyle's Hacking match (pp. 245-246). But regarding Waxhaws, he says "That Tarleton could engineer such a slaughter fits his personality" (p. 144). He also seems to be rather disparaging of Loyalists. He quotes American militia officer A. L. Pickens: "Unfortunately for the loyal cause, Boyd had taken into his force a number of plundering banditti, out more for loot than for the love of the Royal Master they so ostentatiously clove to. The best and most constructive families on the frontier had joined the Whig movement" (p. 105). The author makes his own the observation that "The remainder had deserted as Tory militiamen had a habit of doing when faced with difficulties" (p. 206). In spite of the fact that

the author recognizes the "criminal element and lawlessness" in the back country, he seems to pin that criminal element squarely on the Loyalists (p. 26).

While Pickens was without a doubt an important figure, the reader sometimes wonders if the author has inflated Pickens's position in the Revolution. In discussing Cowpens, the author asserts that "General Morgan still seemed leery of fighting with a force that was militia by majority" and "Morgan did not decide on action until he was joined in the night by Pickens," at which point Pickens declared his intention to fight and Morgan concurred (pp. 212-213). The sole source for this information is a 1934 biography of Pickens titled *Skyagunsta, the Border Wizard Owl, Major-General Andrew Pickens* by A. L. Pickens, and as such might be considered suspect.

While the author utilizes primary sources, there are numerous instances in which he resorts to conjecture about the motivations and actions of individuals: "Andrew and Joseph, being close-knit, would have counseled together and discussed major decisions" (p. 17); "The younger Pickenses had probably heard stories about British cruelty through tales handed down from their ancestors" (p. 46); "Chief Justice Drayton likely bent President Rutledge's ear" (p. 76). This habit somewhat detracts from the overall scholarly tone of the book, as these instances always bolster the author's opinion with no documentation to back them up.

There is no doubt that Andrew Pickens is deserving of recognition for his part in the Revolution, and in some aspects this book is valuable. It is written in an informal style, and can be considered an "easy read." It cannot, however, be categorized as an academic tome, and should be used with care. It can be utilized as a jumping-off point for research on Pickens, but the information therein should be carefully referenced and backed up with primary sources.

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Citation: Carole Butcher. Review of Reynolds, William R., *Andrew Pickens: South Carolina Patriot in the Revolutionary War*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. October, 2013.

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