Geographic Evolution of McCormick County, SC
Prepared by Wayne C. Ehrensberger

The Savannah River, which underflows J. Strom Thurmond Lake/Clarks Hill Lake above the dam at Clarks Hill, SC, passes along the moderately varied terrain of McCormick County's western flank.

Below ground, ancient seismic activity provided the region with unique geological character, shared with western Africa, to which South Carolina was once affixed before continental separation and shift.

Well before the arrival of European explorers, pre-1450, this area was part of the vast region inhabited by a somewhat mysterious, sophisticated society of natives referred to as the Mississippian Culture, but for reasons still unknown, the people suddenly vanished.

The "Transition Era" followed the Mississippian Culture, wherein many power struggles occurred among neighboring tribes who were attempting to fill the vacuum. By the end of the era their villages around what would become McCormick Co. had been abandoned.

By 1540, differing tribes held sway along the Savannah River: Apalachee, Chickasaw, Shawnee, Yamassee & Yuchi. In April that year, Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto led an expedition across the North American south, which included future South Carolina, on a conquest for gold. Hundreds of natives died as their homes were ransacked or destroyed by the Spaniards. Untold numbers perished later, ravaged by diseases unwittingly introduced. Entire tribes disappeared forever. In 1985, the U.S. De Soto Expedition Commission issued a report approximating his path. McCormick Co. was along the way. Not until the late 1600's would there be contact with Europeans again, at which point the Cherokee were overseeing the South Carolina back country region.

1663 - King Charles II granted the land that would became North and South Carolina to eight English noblemen known collectively as the Lords Proprietors.

A year after the Lords Proprietors secured their charter they established three counties within the new colony of Carolina. These counties were never surveyed and their boundaries fluctuated. The southernmost was named Craven, which vaguely started at what is today the Cape Fear River below Wilmington, NC, continuing into northern Florida. These early counties were incredibly considered to extend all the way to the Pacific Ocean, which the Proprietors really had no realistic concept of. Future McCormick County lay within, although the term "county" had no real meaning for a long time other than to describe a general geographical area. There was no real English authority at that time.

After 1651 - English colonists began to seriously settle the Carolina's, primarily along the coast.

1670 - The port city of Charles Town, eventually renamed Charleston, began to be established.

1682 - Craven County's southern border was terminated at the mouth of Awendaw Creek in present-day Berkeley County, SC and from there two new counties created, Berkeley and Colleton. Berkeley ran south from Awendaw Creek to the mouth of the Stono River in what is now Charleston County. Colleton County continued south from the Stono River to precisely where is not entirely clear, but it included what would become McCormick County.

1684 - Colleton County was divided into Colleton and Carteret Counties. Colleton was ended at the Combahee River and Carteret continued from there to the Savannah River, wherein was future McCormick County.

1685 – English settlers, beginning with trappers, hunters, traders and cattle drovers, began to press inland. The Cherokee agreed to treaties with terms far more lucrative for the settlers, which increasingly carved away Cherokee territory.

1706 - The Parish system was created, which was designed as a means to assign jurisdiction of the Church of England. The parishes administered the church's activities and governmental affairs within South Carolina, but all courts and records were held in Charles Town until 1769. Some of the parishes extended to the Cherokee Nation territory.

1708 - Carteret County was renamed Granville County.

1712 - The Carolina Province was split into North and South Carolina.

1745, May 25 - an act passed by the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly established Prince William or William's Parish, which included Granville County.

South Carolina's Early Parishes
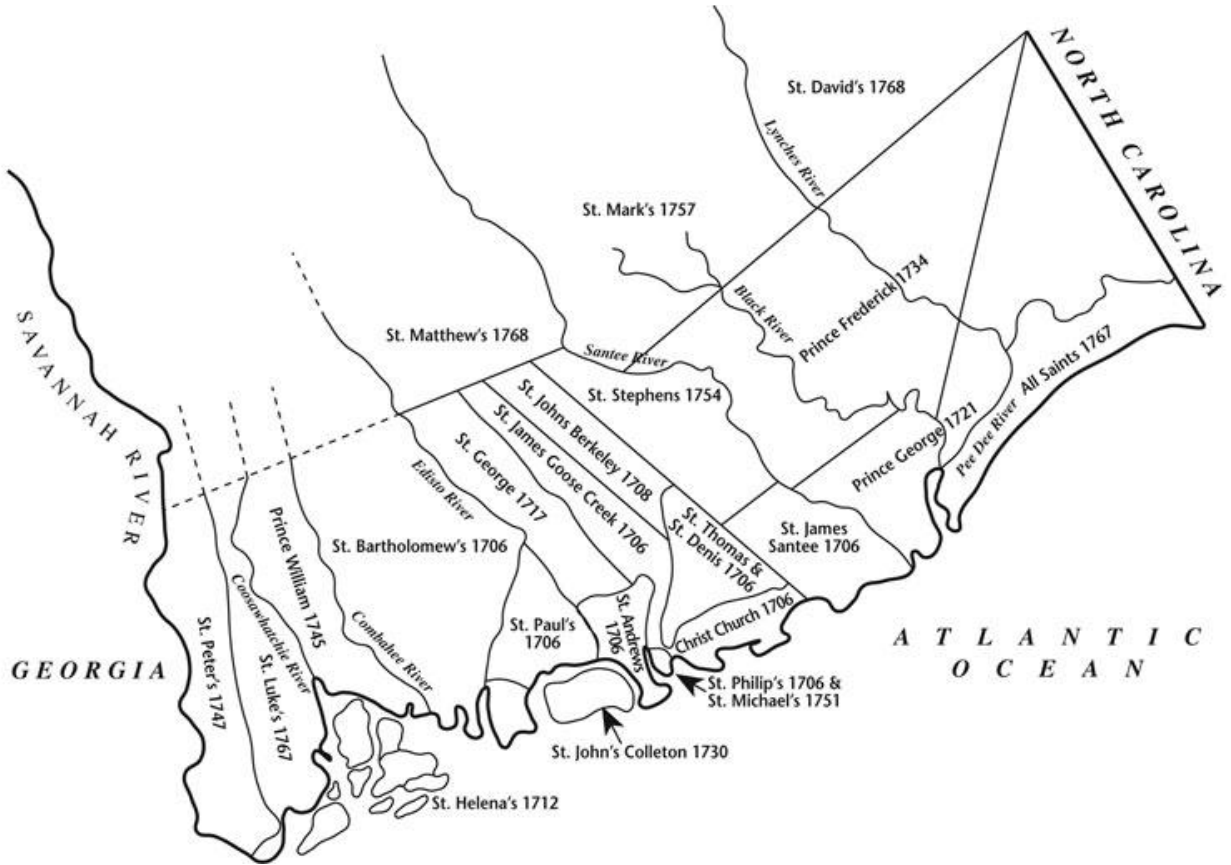
1747 – Map of Colonial America Southern Colonies, showing Granville County, SC
(see enlarged section following)

1747 map above with enlarged section showing Granville County, SC

1768 - South Carolina eliminated all counties, including Granville, none of which had been surveyed and officially laid out. Seven overarching Districts were created in their place with judicial seats in each. They were approved by Parliament in 1769 and remained until 1785.

1769 to 1785 - South Carolina "Circuit Court Districts

Future McCormick County was contained within the Ninety Six (Ninety-Six) District.
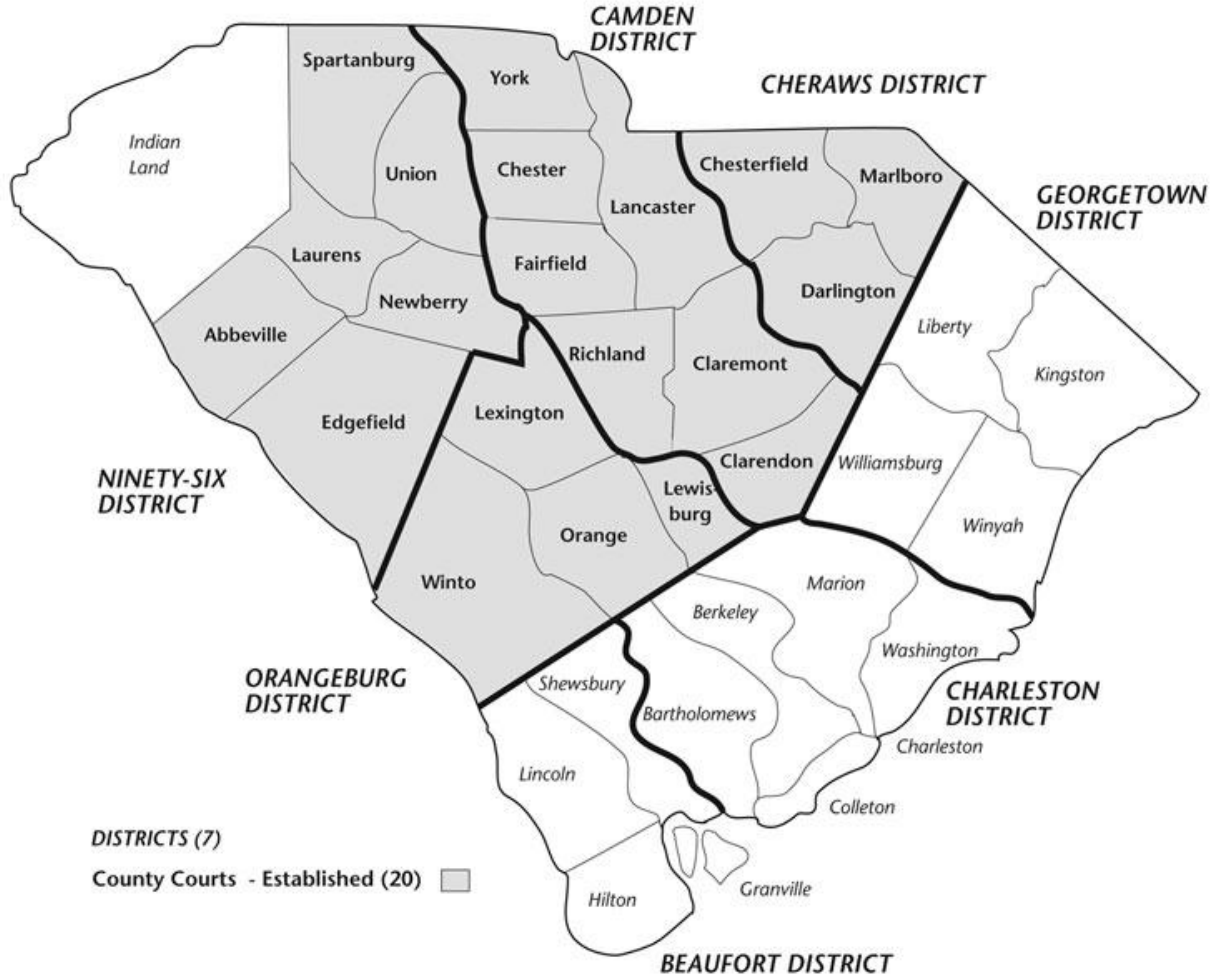
1779 Map indicating Forts Boone, Charlotte & Moore plus Ninety-Six Courthouse, New Bordeaux Settlement & a few roads within the Ninety-Six District
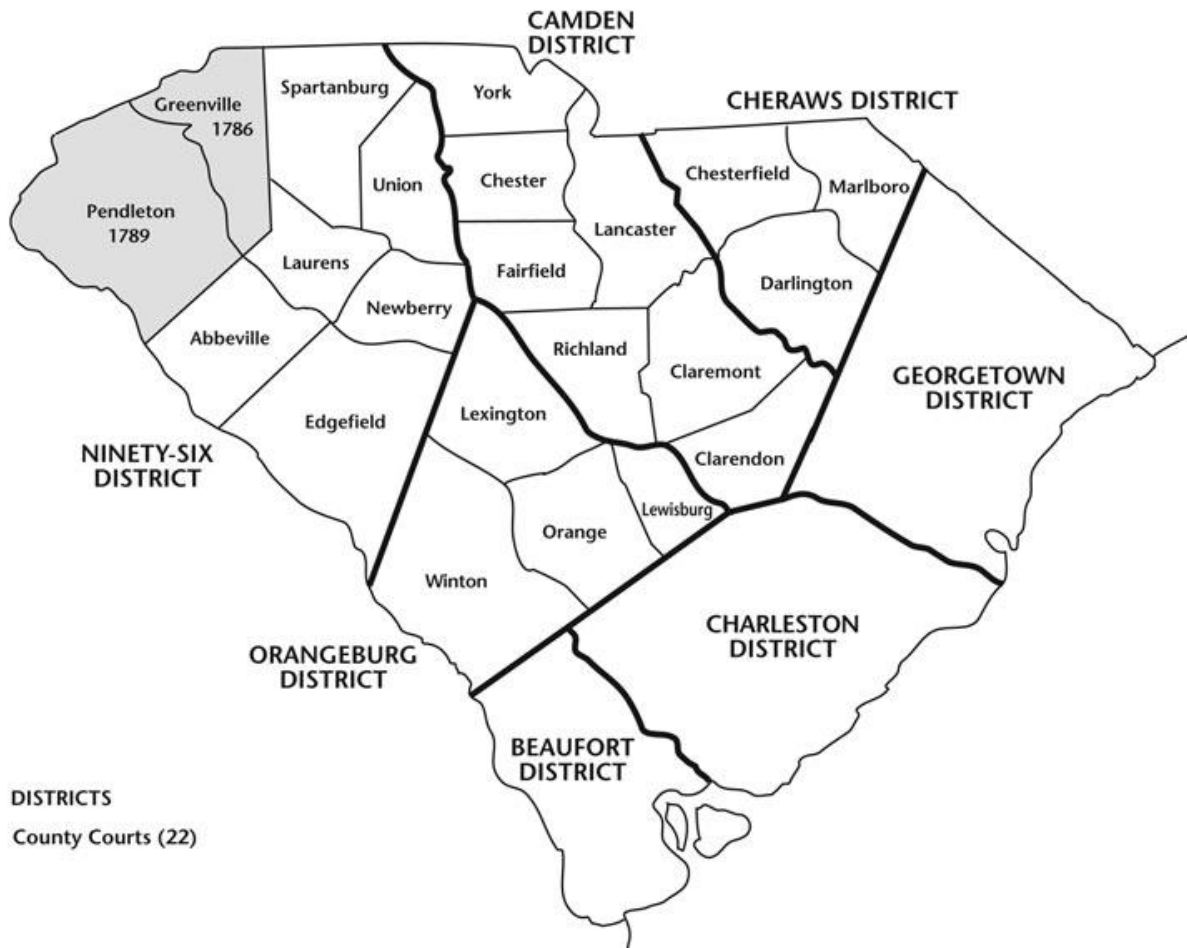
1785 – Twenty SC County Court Precincts were created in four Circuit Court Districts
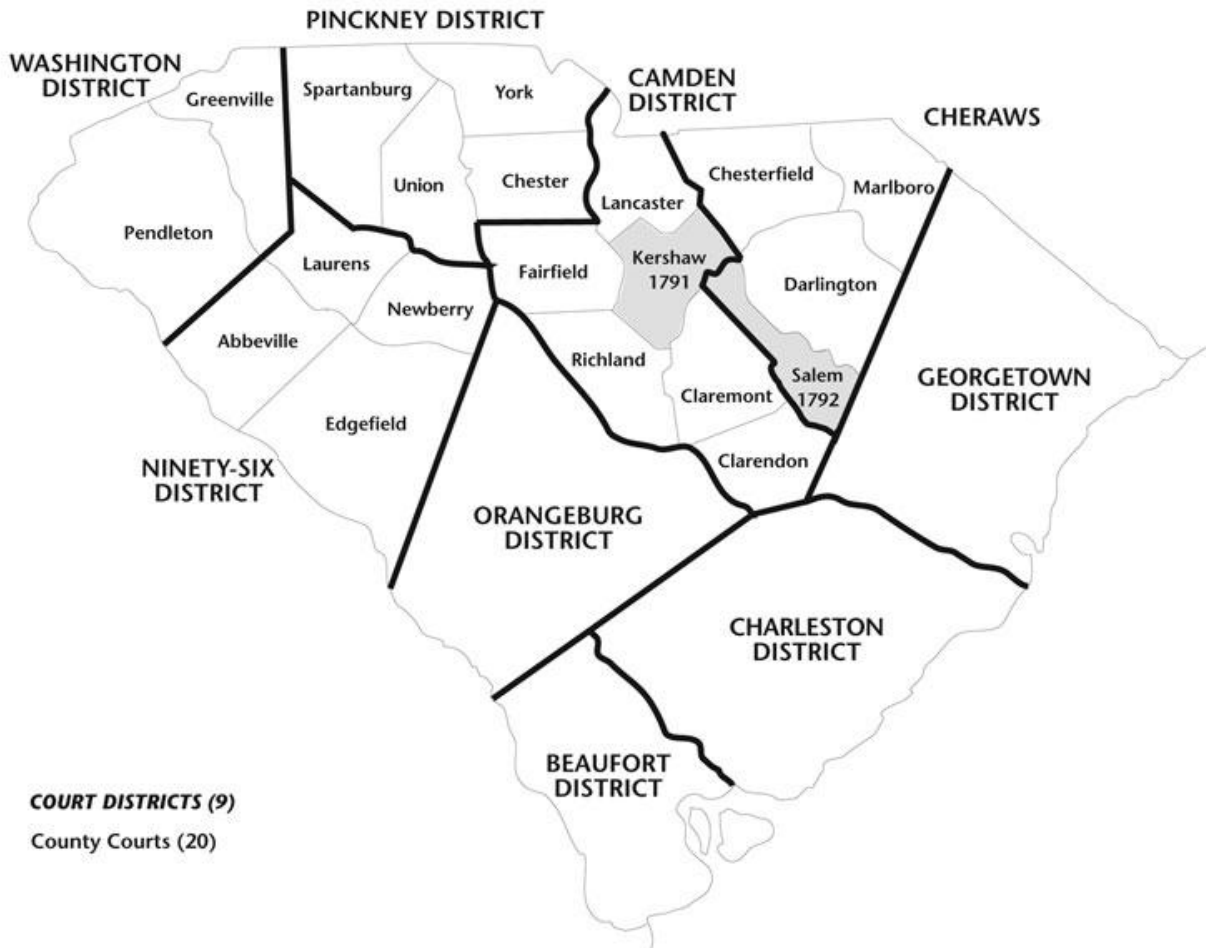
Future McCormick County overlaps Abbeville & Edgefield still in the Ninety-Six District

1786 – 1790 – Former Cherokee "Indian Land" in South Carolina's NW Corner is absorbed into the Ninety-Six District and divided into two County Courts

CAMDEN DISTRICT

CHERAWS DISTRICT

Greenville 1786

Spartanburg

York

Pendleton 1789

Union

Chester

Chesterfield

Marlboro

Lancaster

Laurens

Fairfield

Darlington

Newberry

Richland

Claremont

GEORGETOWN DISTRICT

Abbeville

NINETY-SIX DISTRICT

Edgefield

Lexington

Clarendon

Lewisburg

Orange

Winton

CHARLESTON DISTRICT

ORANGEBURG DISTRICT

BEAUFORT DISTRICT

DISTRICTS
County Courts (22)

1791 – 1799 – Several Court Districts are redrawn and/or designated/re-designated & County Courts reduced

PINCKNEY DISTRICT

WASHINGTON DISTRICT

CAMDEN DISTRICT

CHERAWS

Greenville   Spartanburg   York

Pendleton

Union   Chester

Lancaster

Chesterfield   Marlboro

Laurens   Fairfield   Kershaw 1791   Darlington

Abbeville   Newberry

Richland

Salem 1792

GEORGETOWN DISTRICT

Edgefield   Claremont

NINETY-SIX DISTRICT

Clarendon

ORANGEBURG DISTRICT

CHARLESTON DISTRICT

COURT DISTRICTS (9)

County Courts (20)

BEAUFORT DISTRICT

1815 – 1867 – Smaller Districts replaced most of the larger – Anderson & Pickens Districts were created from former Pendleton County Court District
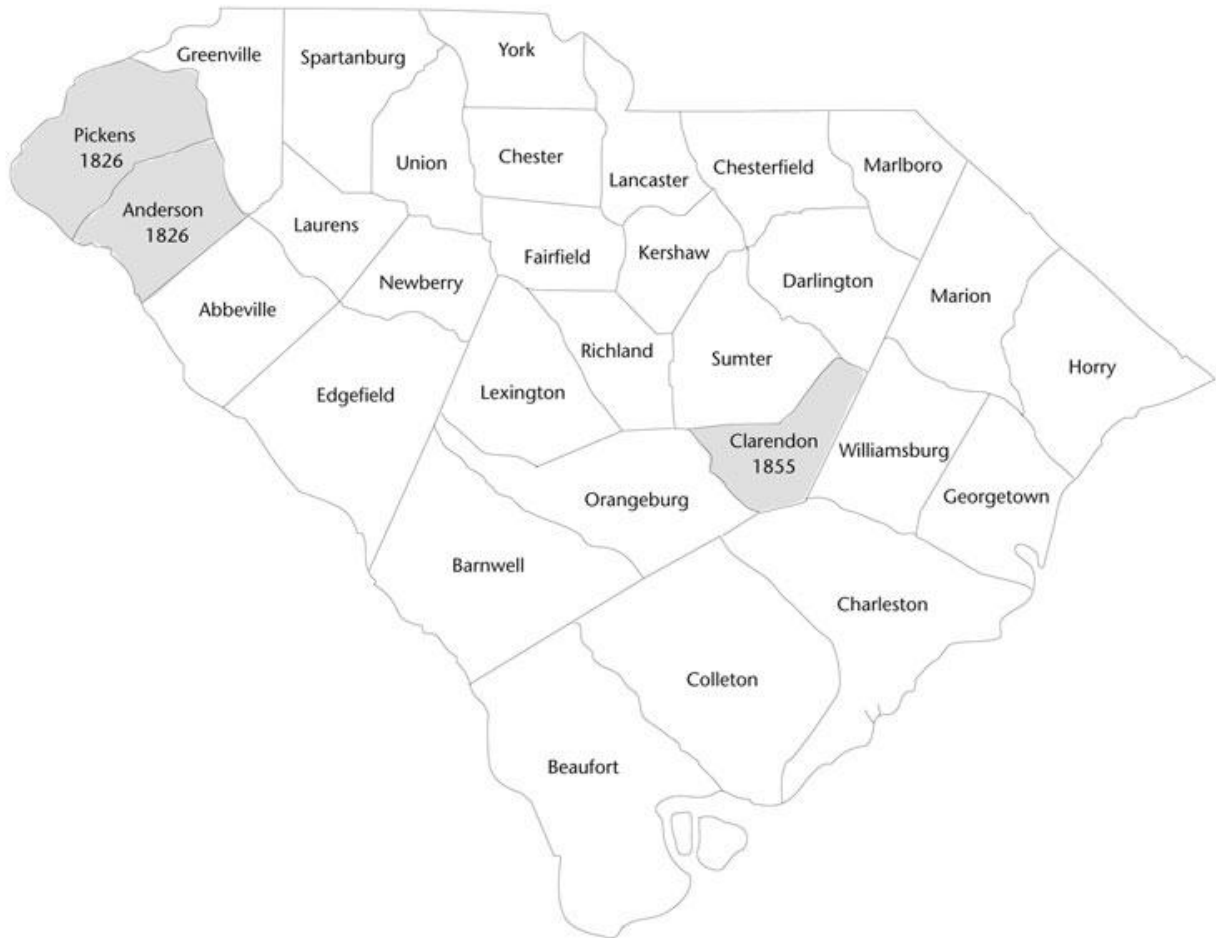
1878 – 1907 South Carolina Counties replaced "Districts" – In the former Ninety-Six District, Greenwood County is carved from Abbeville, Edgefield, Laurens & Newberry Counties – Saluda County emerged from Edgefield & Newberry
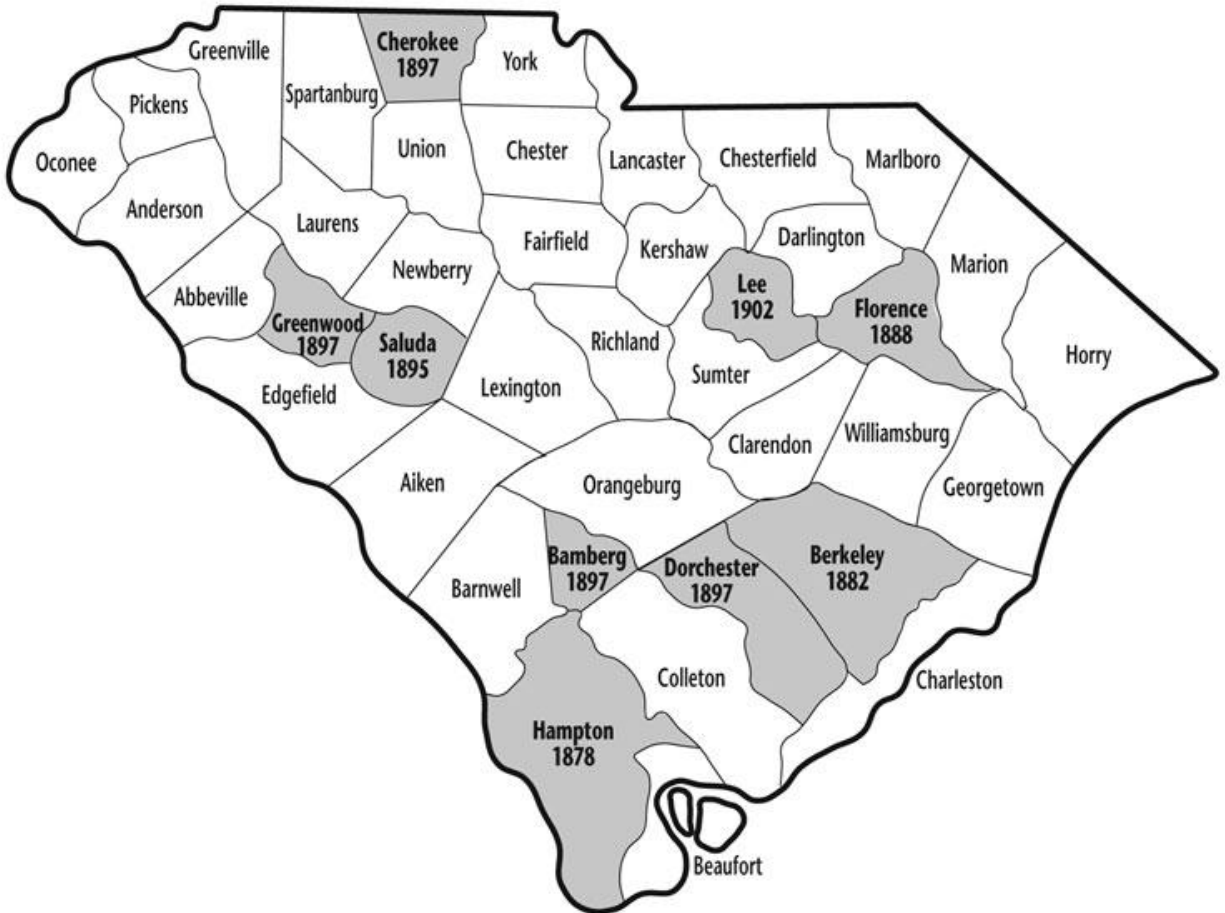
1916 to Present – South Carolina Counties – McCormick County is carved from
Abbeville, Edgewood and Greenwood Counties

McCormick County, like the namesake town within, is named for Cyrus Hall McCormick.
A considerable lobbying effort was necessary to create the county.