

Old Pickens Presbyterian Church

est. 1847



The Pickens District, named for Revolutionary War General Andrew Pickens, was established in 1826. The courthouse was built along the banks of the Keowee River, and a thriving village called 'Pickens Courthouse' or, later, 'Old Pickens', grew up around it. Among the early residents of the town were the Norton, Cary, Ramsey, and Lawrence families. One of the county's earlier newspapers, the Keowee Courier, was established there by Col. Elliott Keith in 1849. Only a few families lived in the town between 1828 and 1840, but by 1860 it had six merchants, a newspaper, a doctor, several lawyers, blacksmith shops, a stable, a hotel, a boarding house, and a brickyard. Public buildings besides the church included a courthouse, jail, Masonic lodge, and an academy. There were ten to twelve private homes, and the population numbered around one hundred.

OLD PICKENS CHURCH was the only church to be organized at Pickens Courthouse. Although some records say that the single-gable brick church was built in 1830, Presbyterian records do not agree; the church was officially organized by the Reverends Joseph Hillhouse, David Humphries and Joseph B. Hillhouse in 1847.

Only two of the members, Samuel R. McFall and James George, were male. They had been members of the Presbyterian Church in Anderson County, and were ordained as elders. Among the female members were women from the Reid, Steele, Craig, Alexander and Price families. Construction on the actual church building began in 1849, and was completed in 1851. Among the early ministers who supplied the church were Joseph Hillhouse (1868) and Ezekiel Foster Hyde (1875).

The actual town of Pickens was relocated when the district was divided into Oconee and Pickens counties in 1868. At the time, many of the businesses and residents relocated to the new county seat, leaving the village and the church to languish. Although some histories indicate that the church was dissolved in 1887, it continued to exist, although clearly struggling. It was listed as the only vacant [pastor-less] church in the Piedmont Presbytery in 1928. According to the church minutes, it was “a hopeless case from the standpoint of the Presbyterian church and the organization is maintained from purely sentimental reasons on our roll of churches.”

In the early 20th century, the Whitmire family moved to a farm which encompassed part of Old Pickens; they and other Methodist families apparently used the church for services until



around 1942. Various presbytery and synod minutes indicate the church continued to struggle through the 1950s and 1960s, having as few as two or three living members.

Piedmont Presbytery recommended in 1956 that the church, with “a membership of only two or three but with a ruling elder,” be asked to consider dissolution. The building and grounds would then be transferred to the Presbytery.

In 1957 the Seneca Church was asked by Presbytery to try to revive the work at Old Pickens, but this effort did not succeed. The church was officially dissolved on October 1, 1968. It is the only surviving structure of the original town of ‘Old Pickens’. (Some of the information in this sketch was obtained from Frederick C. Holder's *Historic Sites of Oconee County*, 1991; also SCGenWeb/Old PickensPresbyterianChurch)