

INVESTIGATION REPORT

on

FRANCIS W. PICKENS NATIONAL PARK

Edgefield County, South Carolina

September 15, 1936

FRANCIS W. PICKENS
NATIONAL PARK

PROPOSED FRANCIS W. PICKENS NATIONAL PARK

Investigated September 15, 1936, by Herbert E. Kahler, superintendent, Fort Marion and Fort Matanzas National Monuments, and Ralston B. Lattimore, acting superintendent, Fort Pulaski National Monument.

Proposed name of park: Francis W. Pickens National Park.

Location: Edgefield County, South Carolina, approximately one mile from the town of Edgefield.

Accessibility: The area is adjacent to U. S. Highway #25 and near U. S. Highway #1. It can be reached by paved highways from Columbia, S. C., 56 miles; from Greenwood, S. C., 33 miles; Aiken, S. C., 22 miles; and Augusta, Ga., 26 miles. The area, itself, is traversed by a network of sand clay roads in poor condition.

Description of Setting: The proposed park consists of approximately 10,000 acres of rolling countryside, formerly embraced in several plantations. About half of the acreage is now covered with second growth pines and hardwoods and the balance is made up of old fields, more or less open, of which 2,000 or 3,000 acres are under cultivation. The principal crops of the region are cotton and corn. The area is drained by two small creeks, red with silt after rains. The soil ranges from sandy to sand clay to red clay.

Physical Description of site: Included in the proposed park are several ante-bellum plantations, which were formerly possessed by the Pickens, Simkins, Brooks and Tompkins families, prominent in the history of South Carolina and who have left many descendants in Edgefield County. On at least three of these former plantations are frame dwellings dating from early 19th century. The dwellings, all in very bad repair, are typical of the upper Carolina country. They are built high from the ground, two stories with attic, verandas front and rear, with wide stair hall extending through the center from front to rear. On either side of the stair hall are two rooms of good proportions. The halls and rooms usually have delicate wooden cornices and finely carved wooden mantels. The kitchen extends to the rear as a wing or a small detached building

opening on the back veranda. On several of the plantations included in the area are family burying grounds.

"Edgewood", the home of Francis W. Pickens, was moved to Aiken, South Carolina, in 1929, and is occupied as a residence by Mrs. J. B. Salley. Only one old building, said to have been smokehouse, now remains at Edgewood Plantation. The garden site and avenues are traceable, but the boxwood hedges and other shrubbery have been removed.

Historical narrative: Francis W. Pickens, one of the principal characters in 19th century South Carolina history, was born April 7, 1805. He was the son of Andrew Pickens, Jr., who commanded a regiment in the War of 1812, and who was the governor of South Carolina, 1816-1818. His grandfather, Andrew Pickens, was a general in the revolution and a pioneer in the Carolina upland. The Simkens and Brookes with whom he was related also took an active part in local and national politics.

Educated at Franklin College, Athens, Ga., and South Carolina College, Columbia, S. C. young Francis W. Pickens began the practice of law in the office of Eldred Simkins, Esq., at Edgefield, S. C. Entering politics at an early age, he was two years a member of the South Carolina house of representatives, 1832-34, nine years in the Congress of the United States, 1834-43, two years in the state senate, 1844-45. In 1858 he was appointed by President Buchanan as ambassador to Russia, where he remained until near the end of 1860, when he returned to South Carolina to be nominated and elected Governor, 1860-62. He was an ardent secessionist and his career as war governor of South Carolina is well known.

Married three times, the third wife of Francis W. Pickens was Lucy Petway Holcombe of Marshall, Texas, who at the time was acclaimed one of the most beautiful women of the South. The mansion at Edgewood was constructed soon after his first marriage and it later became cultural and political center of South Carolina. Pickens died January 25, 1869, and is buried at Edgefield.

Historical Evaluation: While Francis W. Pickens, his illustrious father, grandfather, and relatives rendered distinguished service to their state and country, in our opinion, "Edgewood" and the adjoining plantations lend themselves to sectional or state treatment rather

than to national treatment. "Edgewood" enters the national picture only by virtue of being the home of the Civil War governor of South Carolina. The events of this war as pertaining to South Carolina can be more dramatically illustrated at Fort Sumter and Charleston.

Present Ownership: The 10,000 acres embraced by the proposed boundaries of the Francis W. Pickens Park include several tracts owned variously. A complete list of the owners has already been furnished by the Department by the F. W. Pickens Park Committee. "Edgewood" is owned by the Receivers of the Peoples State Bank of South Carolina at Columbia. The former James C. Brooks plantation is owned and occupied by a descendant, J. C. Morgan, of Edgefield County, S. C. The old Simkins-Tompkins place is now owned by R. T. Hill and is occupied by negro tenant farmers.

Appraisal: Options on 10,000 acres, more or less, have been secured by the F. W. Pickens Park Committee, at an average price of from \$10, to \$12, per acre. Lands under cultivation and lands near the town of Edgefield would be more costly.

Sponsorship: The Francis W. Pickens Park Committee, J. Strom Thurmond, Chairman, Mrs. Helen Nicholson, vice-chairman, Mrs. Sophie M. Fair, secretary, Christine T. Holland, T. M. Nelson, H. P. J. L'Heureux, T. B. Greineker, Mrs. Salley Simkins, and Clinton D. Grady. It is understood the county is greatly interested in the project. It is improbable that local funds can be raised for land purchase, and the committee plans to acquire the area through the Resettlement Administration, if possible. A member of the committee remarked that they would try hard to make the area a National Park, and if that failed, they would attempt to make it a State Park.

Restoration: The rebuilding of Edgewood mansion and the restoration of the plantation, the restoration and repair of the buildings on adjoining plantations, and the proper treatment of roads in the area would entail an expenditure of from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000. This project would require the services of architects, landscape architects, engineers, and considerable skilled labor.

Maintenance and Income: Maintenance on a development of this nature would necessarily be high. The only

income would have to be derived from admission fees or fees from recreational facilities. There are no scenic features in the area and it is not likely that recreational facilities would be used by other than local citizens. The population of Edgefield County is 11,000 of which a considerable number are negroes.

Previous treatment of area: None. There is a tablet in the town of Edgefield recording the names of governors and lieutenant governors from Edgefield county.

Suggested Treatment: In our opinion the state of South Carolina or the town or county of Edgefield might acquire the site of Edgewood mansion with four or five surrounding acres on the hill top, together with the old avenue. No attempt should be made to rebuild the mansion, but the garden, grounds, and avenue might be restored and a suitable tablet erected on the site of the mansion.

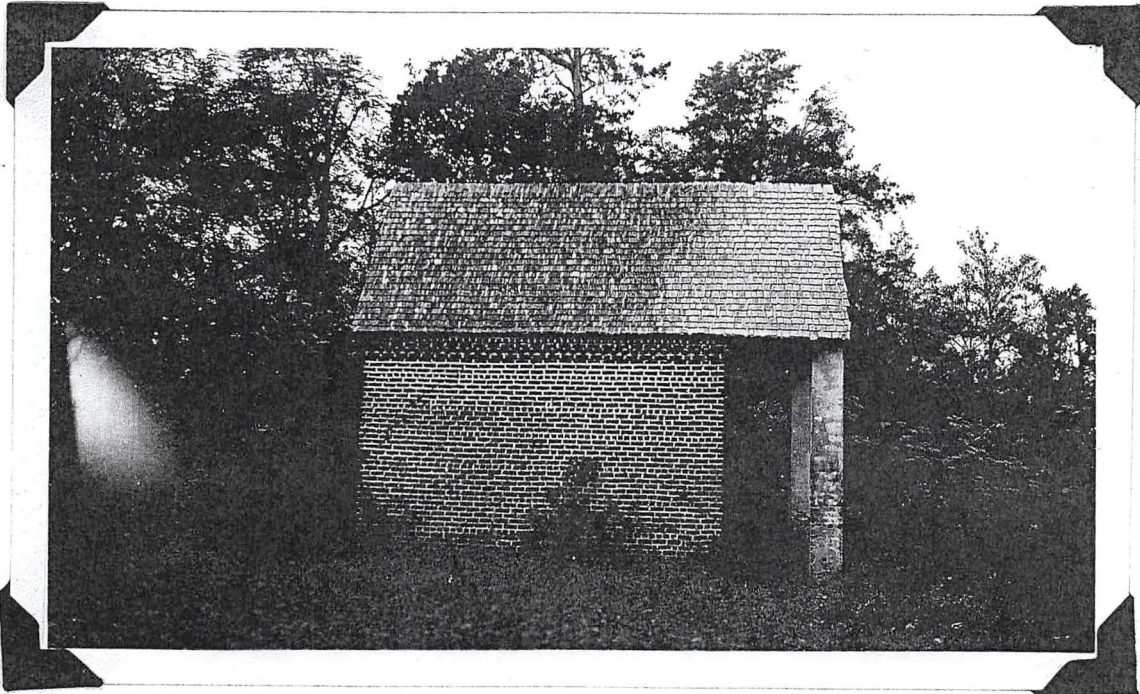
Were the larger scheme of development to be carried out, the cost of land purchase, restoration, and repairs, and of subsequent maintenance would be exceedingly great. On the other hand, if a purely recreational development were planned with little or no restoration, the historic aspect of the site would be overshadowed. If the area were acquired through the Resettlement Administration and the arable land of the old plantations withdrawn from cultivation, the aspect of the site would be completely changed within a few years through rapid natural reforestation, and the historic significance would be entirely lost.

Museum: If the state of South Carolina or the town or county of Edgefield were to develop the home site of Edgewood (4 or 5 acres), it would be of interest to assemble a small museum collection of photographs, documents, and personal effects pertaining to the life of Francis W. Pickens. This collection could be housed in the small brick building, said to be the plantation smoke house. It would be of interest also to assemble plans, photographs, and drawings of the Edgewood mansion.

Research required: Sufficient historical research should be done in order that a pamphlet could be prepared that would give a concise description of the life and services of Francis W. Pickens, and the life at Edgewood and the adjoining plantations.

Bibliographical references: There is no published history of Edgefield county. Considerable manuscript material such as deeds and wills are to be found in the Edgefield county court house. Much of this material has been transcribed by the Francis W. Pickens Park Committee and copies furnished the Department. An account of "Edgewood" by John Kinnard Aull was published in four installments in The State, Columbia, S. C., 1929, copies of which have been furnished the Department

Photographs:



The only building now standing on the Francis W. Pickens Plantation, "Edgewood". This building might be used as a small museum. Other photographs have been furnished the Department by the Francis W. Pickens Park Committee.

Maps: A map of the area showing boundary lines and other features has been furnished the Department by the Francis W. Pickens Park Committee.

Sincerely yours,

Herbert E. Kahler by R.B.L.

Herbert E. Kahler, Superintendent,
Fort Marion National Monument.

Ralston B. Lattimore

Ralston B. Lattimore, Acting Supt.
Fort Pulaski National Monument.