

Explore Regional History Through These Small Towns in South Carolina's Lake Hartwell Country

By Jason Barnette

In the mid-1700s, the expanding colonial frontier collided with the Cherokees. That was most apparent in the northwestern corner of South Carolina in the Lower Towns, a collection of Cherokee villages. At the onset of the American Revolution, the conflict reached a zenith – and in less than a year, there were no more Cherokees in South Carolina.

In the Lake Hartwell Country, an achingly beautiful corner of the state at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, you can explore the history of the Cherokee Campaign, and Patriot leaders like Andrew Williamson and Andrew Pickens, and enjoy the atmosphere of charming mountain towns.

Find out where you need to go, where to find the best food, and how to plan a fantastic weekend getaway to Lake Hartwell Country.

Friday

3 p.m. – Take a Guided Tour of the Woodburn House

The Woodburn House wasn't built until 1830 – almost fifty years after the Revolutionary War. But it was built by a prominent South Carolina politician and soldier of the revolution: Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. Born in Charleston in 1746, Pinckney enjoyed a typical English education for people of his class. Returning from Europe in 1769, he was elected to the Commons House of Assembly – the colonial government.

But by 1775, his position changed drastically. He was an ardent Patriot and served in the South Carolina Provincial Congress. He was appointed colonel of the 1st South Carolina Regiment and took part in the Battle of Sullivan's Island. Then, he traveled north to serve as General George Washington's aide-de-camp in New York and New Jersey. After his capture at the Fall of Charleston in 1780, Pinckney's Revolutionary War service ended.

By the late 1700s, wealthy Charlestonians discovered a cool area in the backcountry near the Savannah River. In 1790, they founded the town of Pendleton and began building country mansions where they could escape from the coast from time to time. The Federal-style Woodburn House was modest compared to other Charleston homes, but it was a grand home in the backcountry.

Schedule a guided tour with the Pendleton Historic Foundation to explore the furnished house, learn the stories of generations to live there, and discover the 44,000-gallon cistern hidden beneath the house.

130 History Lane, Pendleton, SC 29670 | 864-646-7249 | [Pendleton Historic Foundation](#)

5 p.m. – Dinner at Sardi's Den

Sardi's Den isn't just the best barbecue restaurant in Clemson – it's one of the best in the entire state. With forty years of restaurant experience, Mike McHenry teamed up with Irv Harrington to open the small family restaurant. Mike works most days of the week, arriving early to smoke fresh meats every day – nothing is carried over to the next day. With homemade sauces, tender barbecue, and everything cooked to order, it's one of the most satisfying meals you'll find in Clemson.

520 Old Greenville Highway, Clemson, SC | 864-654-7427 | [Sardi's Den](#)

7 p.m. – Dive into Drinks Downtown

Clemson is a college town, and college towns have great bars. The “downtown” area stretches a few blocks along the two-lane College Avenue, where you'll find plenty of bars. [TD's](#) is a traditional bar with dark wood flooring, paneled walls, and interesting booths tucked inside alcoves with more seating on a second floor above. [Loose Change Bar & Grill](#) offers a modern design with concrete floors, brick walls, and lightweight aluminum stools and chairs. [Charleston Sports Pub](#) features a full menu served at high-top tables, or you can just stroll over to the bar for a great selection of beer on tap. If you're



This stone structure, located on the campus of Clemson University, marks the site of Fort Rutledge.

not a Tigers fan, don't tell anyone when you visit [Tiger Town Tavern](#). The pool hall opened in 1977, making it one of Clemson's longest-running bars. And they're diehard Clemson Tigers fans.

Saturday

9 a.m. – Daytrip to Walhalla

Walhalla is only a twenty-minute drive from Clemson, and worth it for a chance to experience the gateway town to South Carolina's foothills. When you arrive in the small downtown, the gentle peaks of the Appalachian Mountains cover the horizon.

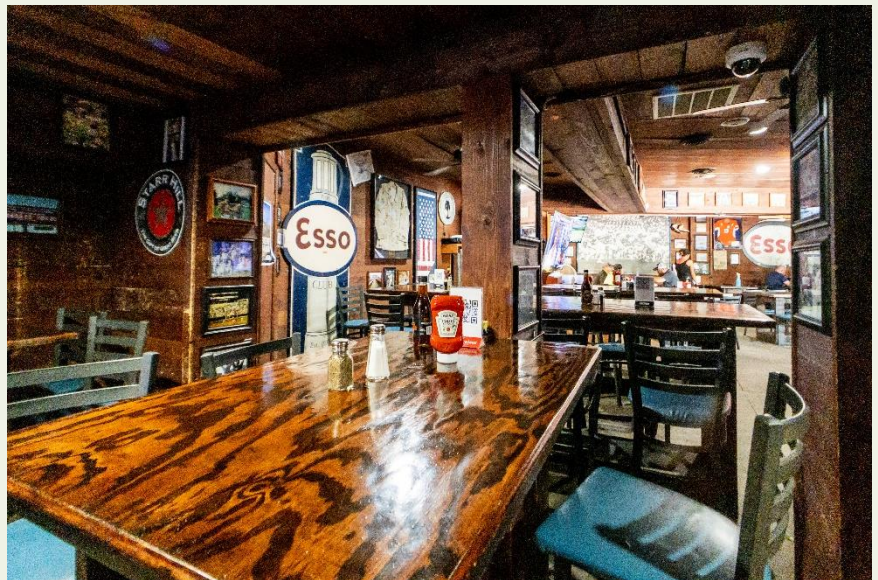
First, visit the [Museum of the Cherokees in South Carolina](#). This fascinating museum explores the history of the Cherokees in the Lower Towns around the present-day area of Clemson, Walhalla, and Keowee. Several exhibits interpret the Cherokee War of 1776, a conflict between the revolutionary Patriots and British-backed Cherokees. Next, explore the [Oconee Military Museum](#) and then the [Oconee History Museum](#). The museums interpret the frontier history of the area from the 1700s to modern times.

Walhalla is a jumping-off point for exploring the foothills nearby. [Stumphouse Tunnel](#), an incomplete train tunnel open to the public, is only twenty minutes from downtown. [Oconee Station State Historic Site](#) preserves a late 1700s trading post and a frontier house built after the Revolutionary War. SC Highway 11, also known as the Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway, is a two-lane road connecting almost a dozen state parks between Walhalla and Gaffney, and it's one of the most scenic drives in the state.

1 p.m. – Lunch at The Esso Club

Eating at The Esso Club is a Clemson tradition – especially on game days. The first iteration of the restaurant and bar began in the 1940s when James Stevenson acquired the first license for a bar in Clemson and opened a bar in the back of his gas station. In the 1970s, Jack Harmon opened a small barbecue joint at the gas station – the first food served at the location.

When Don Quattlebaum bought the service station, bar, and barbecue kitchen in 1985, he stopped serving gas and focused on food and drinks. In 1997, *Sports Illustrated* listed it as the “#2 Must See Sports Bar in the Nation.” Since 2004, The Esso Club has offered a full menu of delicious burgers and sandwiches along with a bar for watching sports. And it's the perfect place to get lunch before continuing your exploration of the town.



129 Old Greenville Highway #1,
Clemson, SC 29631 | 864-654-5120 | [The Esso Club](#)

The Esso Club has been a Clemson tradition since 1933!

2 p.m. – Take a Guided Tour of Fort Hill

Upon his father-in-law's death in 1838, Thomas Green Clemson inherited the 1,100-acre Fort Hill Plantation spread across much of the present-day town. Clemson was the first acting U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, and in 1888 he willed 814 acres to create Clemson University as an agricultural school.

Remarkably, the original plantation house remains, located in the heart of the university's sprawling campus. Take a guided tour of the house, read the interpretive displays to learn about the family's history, and visit Calhoun's Law Office behind the house.

520 Fort Hill Street, Clemson, SC 29634 | 864-656-2475 | [Clemson Historic Properties](#)

4 p.m. – Visit the Site of Fort Rutledge

At the onset of the Revolutionary War, a chief concern among the rebel governments was the role Native Americans might play in the conflict. Would they side with the British as many had in the French and Indian War? Or could they be persuaded to remain neutral?

In June 1776, the governors of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina had their answer when a Cherokee war party led by Dragging Canoe began attacking frontier settlements. South Carolina Governor John Rutledge ordered Colonel Andrew Williamson to muster a militia, march into the Cherokee Lower Towns, and destroy everything in sight.

On August 1, 1776, Williamson led about 300 men in an advance column into an ambush at the Battle of Essenecca. During the battle, Francis Salvador was mortally wounded and became the first Jew to die in South Carolina fighting for independence. After the battle, Williamson leveled Essenecca and built a stockade fort on the site, naming it Fort Rutledge in honor of the state's governor.

When Williamson took his expeditionary force into the Lower Towns, he left a small garrison at Fort Rutledge to guard their rear supplies. Shortly after the expedition returned to the fort in early October, it was abandoned and later demolished.

In 1908, the Daughters of the American Revolution built an interesting memorial on the site where they believed the original fort stood. Today, the site is awkwardly located behind Clemson University's water treatment plant. You can visit the site along Lake Drive, parking in the grass along the road before reaching the plant. Walk across the graveled parking lot into the woods, and you'll find the memorial in the shade of a small forest.



Fort Hill is a National Landmark and the former home of US Vice President John C. Calhoun and Thomas G. Clemson.

5 p.m. – Dinner and Drinks at Sole on the Green

After the short walk to visit Fort Rutledge, drive a short distance back along Lake Drive and turn onto Seasons Drive. [Sole on the Green](#) is a university-owned restaurant and bar with an outdoor terrace overlooking Lake Hartwell – it's one of the best places in Clemson to watch the sunset. Inside, the restaurant is akin to a country club with plush carpeting and cushioned seats, but you don't have to be a member to dine there. The menu includes wings, burgers, and steaks – country club food.

230 Madren Center Drive, Clemson, SC 29634 | 864-656-7444 | [Sole on the Green](#)

Sunday

10 a.m. – Breakfast at Sully's Steamers

Few places are open early on Sundays in Clemson, but [Sully's Steamers](#) is always a guarantee. The restaurant features savory steamed bagel sandwiches – if you've never had a steamed bagel sandwich, please give this a try. The popular chain started in Greenville but now has locations across South Carolina. Seating is limited, so arrive early to guarantee a table to enjoy the steamed sandwich, sides, and hot coffee for breakfast.

385 College Avenue, Clemson, SC | 864-722-9285 | [Sully's Steamers](#)

11 a.m. – Go For a Hike at the South Carolina Botanical Garden

The 295-acre [South Carolina Botanical Garden](#) is almost hidden on the sprawling urban campus of Clemson University. It started as a Camelia garden in the 1950s but has grown to include dozens of themed gardens, a duck pond, and miles of crisscrossing hiking trails. Go for a mid-day hike in the garden before hitting the road and leaving Clemson behind.

150 Discovery Lane, Clemson, SC | 864-656-3405 | [SC Botanical Garden at Clemson University](#)

1 p.m. – Visit Andrew Pickens' Gravesite at Old Stone Church

Andrew Pickens gained his first military experience in the militia at just twenty years old during the Cherokee War from 1759-1761. But after the war, he settled into a life as a farmer and Indian negotiator. After marrying Rebecca Calhoun, he moved to the Long Canes area near present-day Abbeville.

And then the "shot heard 'round the world" changed everything.

Pickens enlisted as a captain of the Ninety Six Militia and took part in the Battle of Ninety Six in 1775. Pickens was among the captains when Colonel Andrew Williamson mustered a militia for an expedition in the Cherokee War of 1776. The "Fighting Elder," a nickname earned from his position in a Presbyterian Church and aptitude at military command, spent most of the Revolutionary War fighting in the Upcountry. In 1781, he led the South Carolina militia at the Battle of Cowpens against Banastre Tarleton and his dreaded dragoons.

After the Revolutionary War, Pickens served in the South Carolina Senate and the United States House of Representatives. In 1805, he retired to his plantation at Tamasee, the site of an interesting encounter during the Cherokee War of 1776. On August 12, Pickens led 35 men into an ambush of some 200 Cherokees. Pickens ordered his men to form two concentric rings, with one ring firing while the other reloaded. The Ring Fight resulted in a dozen dead Patriots but nearly 65 dead Cherokees.

After he died in 1817, Pickens was buried at Old Stone Church. Built in 1789 for the Hopewell Presbyterian congregation, the church is still in use today. The cemetery and grounds are open to the public. Pickens is buried in a well-maintained family plot along with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law.

101 Stone Circle, Clemson, SC | 864-654-2061 | [Old Stone Church](#)



Many prominent South Carolina names can be found on the headstones at Old Stone Church Cemetery

For more information on the Revolutionary War in South Carolina, please visit RevWarSouthCarolina.com



REVWARSouthCAROLINA.COM