

Turmoil

In Charleston on December 27, 1860, following Major Anderson's occupation of Fort Sumter, newly elected Governor Francis W. Pickens ordered the South Carolina militia to seize remaining federal properties in Charleston Harbor. Although the governorship was mainly ceremonial, Pickens acted against the state legislature's objections. The first target was Castle Pinckney, taken by around 150 militia members who, after scaling the fort's walls, found it nearly empty, occupied only by a lieutenant and some workmen. They raised the palmetto flag, much to the dismay of Kate Skillen, the young daughter of the ordnance sergeant, who lamented the flag's introduction.

Watching from Fort Sumter, Anderson's soldiers found amusement in the occupation of vacant forts, with Pvt. John Thompson humorously noting the militia's valor in taking an unoccupied fort. That evening, the militia also seized Fort Moultrie without resistance and captured Charleston's federal arsenal amidst rising tension. Captain Foster reported the excitement in the city, with friends suggesting he leave due to fears he would incite violence.

Meanwhile, Mary Chesnut had returned to Charleston after Christmas, meeting her husband James, a delegate to the secession convention. They stayed at a well-appointed boarding house, where news of Anderson's move to Sumter stirred fear and excitement, prompting other states to secure federal properties to hasten their secession efforts. Mary reflected on her upbringing in pro-states' rights households, expressing doubts about the capabilities of South Carolina's leadership, criticizing the aging politicians in charge.

Anderson's actions angered Carolina commissioners in Washington, who viewed his move as a betrayal and wrote to President Buchanan, insisting on the withdrawal of federal forces from the harbor, claiming it hindered negotiations. However, Buchanan, recognizing the urgency of the situation and the actions taken by state authorities, refused to withdraw the troops. The discord continued to escalate, with commissioners accusing Anderson of waging war and the state merely acting in self-defense, ultimately making civil war appear inevitable. Buchanan declined to accept their letter, solidifying the tensions between federal authorities and South Carolina .