

Turmoil

Turmoil in Charleston began on December 27, 1860, when Major Anderson took control of Fort Sumter, prompting Governor Francis W. Pickens to act swiftly. Despite the largely ceremonial nature of the governorship, Pickens disregarded objections from the state legislature and ordered the South Carolina militia to seize all remaining federal properties in Charleston Harbor. The first target was Castle Pinckney, which was overtaken by around 150 militia members who scaled the fort's walls to find it nearly deserted, occupied only by a lieutenant and a few workers. The militia raised the palmetto flag, a move that deeply upset Kate Skillen, the young daughter of the ordnance sergeant, who found the sight of the flag a bitter symbol of change and unrest.

From their position at Fort Sumter, Anderson's soldiers watched with amusement as the militia took over vacant forts. Pvt. John Thompson humorously commented on the valor displayed by the militia in capturing an unoccupied fort. Later that evening, the militia also took control of Fort Moultrie without any resistance and captured the federal arsenal in Charleston, marking a significant shift in the region's military control. Captain Foster, stationed in the city, reported a growing sense of excitement and unease among the locals, with some suggesting that he should leave to avoid inciting further violence. These actions signified a dramatic escalation in the conflict, as federal properties were swiftly seized, and tensions within Charleston soared, with the potential for violence looming ever closer.

As the situation in Charleston grew more intense, Mary Chesnut returned to the city after spending Christmas away, reuniting with her husband James, who was a delegate to the secession convention. They took residence in a well-appointed boarding house, where news of Anderson's occupation of Fort Sumter further fueled the growing anxiety. The fear and excitement that spread throughout Charleston sparked a wave of

urgency in other Southern states, prompting them to secure federal properties and expedite their own secession processes. Mary, reflecting on her upbringing in pro-states' rights households, voiced doubts about the capabilities of South Carolina's leadership, criticizing the older generation of politicians in charge. Her perspective offered a glimpse into the underlying discontent with the state's political establishment, as she questioned whether the state's leadership could effectively navigate the mounting crisis.

Anderson's actions, particularly his move to Fort Sumter, sparked outrage among the South Carolina commissioners in Washington, who viewed his actions as a direct betrayal. They wrote a letter to President Buchanan, demanding the immediate withdrawal of federal forces from Charleston Harbor, arguing that Anderson's presence was hindering any efforts for peaceful negotiation. However, Buchanan, recognizing the urgency and gravity of the situation, refused to comply with their demands. He stood firm in his decision not to withdraw the troops, understanding the broader implications of such a move. The discord between the state of South Carolina and the federal government grew more intense, with commissioners accusing Anderson of waging war on the South, while asserting that the state's actions were merely defensive. This series of events made the onset of civil war seem increasingly inevitable, as both sides hardened their positions, and any hope for compromise faded.

The escalating tension between South Carolina and the federal government set the stage for a dramatic confrontation. Anderson's actions at Fort Sumter were perceived by the South as a violation of their sovereignty, while the federal government viewed them as a necessary assertion of control over federal property. The refusal of President Buchanan to withdraw federal forces further entrenched the divide, signaling that negotiations had failed and that a military conflict was now on the horizon. The actions of South Carolina, combined with the firm stance of federal officials, made the path to war seem unavoidable. As the situation continued to deteriorate, both sides braced for the impending conflict that would soon engulf the nation, with Charleston at the heart of the unfolding crisis.

In the midst of this turbulent period, the local population of Charleston felt the weight of the growing unrest. The sense of urgency and fear was palpable, with both sides preparing for what was expected to be a pivotal moment in American history. The city became a microcosm of the larger national struggle, with families torn between loyalty to the Union and the call for Southern independence. The division between federal authority and Southern secessionists deepened, and as the days passed, it became increasingly clear that the country was headed toward a devastating civil war. The decisions made during this critical time would shape the future of the United States, and Charleston, as the site of Fort Sumter, would soon become the flashpoint for the conflict that would define the nation for years to come.