

Encomium for Charles Burke Baxley, Esq.

“I never heard that,” was a common cadence with which this practical lawyer and self-taught historian responded to new information about the American Revolution in South Carolina. He both challenged the statement maker to support it and welcomed the newbie into the fellowship of the Southern Campaigns. This is how Charles B. Baxley operated with both hands – one gladly shaking an entry to join our exploits and the other cautioning you to rise to ever higher and increasing standards. He would push, exacerbate, pull, and uplift you. The Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution was created in 2004 by Charles Baxley and David Reuwer when they delineated the tripod elements of scholarship, fellowship and fun. Charles defined scholarship as building blocks of historic research, inquisition and field evidence; fellowship as to include anyone who would cite source material gone before us while presently lifting others up around us; and fun as joyfully sharing one another’s knowledgeable victories as we pursued historic adventures.

The substantive virtue Charles practiced daily was broad inclusion – come and join us! There was always another chair at the table and more room for additional players according to him. However, you had to participate somehow, to care about the commonweal, and to help others with their project needs and requests. You had to give as well as take.

Charles suffered from PAD – project aggrandizement disorder – in that he cajoled and made each of us go deeper when all the rest of us thought it had been done. He could come up with endless lists of questions when everyone else considered the subject utterly exhausted. History was neither boring, stale nor irrelevant the way Charles viewed and worked it. History is an experience, as much about the present as it was about the past. We must place our “boots on the ground” – the actual locatable sites – in order to fulfill our duties of scholarship and fellowship. Only when a little more (or a lot) is known and understood, that we can pass on, have we accomplished the tasks before us responsibly to the future generations. Charles achieved much of this by writing, sending and responding to multiplicative emails and countless phone calls while sitting in his “war room” den at home late into the night and wee morning hours.

Charles was inherently an encourager of others making us to think hard about their historic project, to question everything, to counsel with others, to be in mentorship, and to explore new thinking about what one is doing. His queries to you could sometimes be unnerving but if you really worked for the answers, the growth toward historic truth was rewarding. No wonder he was awarded the Order of the Palmetto by Governor Mark Sanford in 2006; no surprise in 2022 that Governor Henry McMaster appointed him the Chairman of the South Carolina American Revolution Sestercentennial Commission (SC250). He was one of the key people who took on the gigantuan task of restoring South Carolina’s Revolutionary battlefield stories into their proper place in American history since 1856 when Senator Andrew Butler vociferously debated Charles Sumner of Massachusetts on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

It is true that he liked chairing the Round Tables with intervening commentary and being the centrifugal point-man in most other Revolutionary War conversations. His verbal editorials were always engaging and usually enlightening.

He liked playing “director” and was sincerely effectual at connecting people with other people and endeavors with other projects. His brain was way ahead of most other thinking minds, historically, and he courteously provoked when he did. Perhaps no other single person currently had as much comprehensive breadth-and-depth knowledge about the Revolution in SC as Charles. "Learning is not virtue but the means to bring us an acquaintance with it. Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful. Let these be your motives to action through life, the relief of the distressed, the detection of frauds, the defeat of oppression, and diffusion of happiness," professed 38-year-old General Nathanael Greene, final military commander of the Southern Department during the Revolution. Charles embodied this learning for 70 plus years and shared this way to live with all the rest of us. If you were not about doing a task, he would assign you one. Charles often related that we were only as good as our current task, project or mission and persuasively demanded that we focus on it for the purpose of sharing it with others.

Our State has lost one most caring advocate of the Revolutionary founding 1770-1783 era – a hero of history. For him, it was about accurately working the historic puzzle and conclusively moving the story forward in truth. Most substantively, many of us State residents, numerous thousands of 250th out-of-state tourists, and untold future generations of all Americans will HEAR and HAVE HEARD of South Carolina’s significant persons, places, battles, and events of the Southern Campaigns because of Charles B. Baxley. Mirroring Christopher Gadsden, he lived for “What I can do for my country, I will do.”

David Paul Reuwer