"I find it requires great care, attention and activity to attend properly to a Carolina Estate."

Eliza Lucas Pinckney

Letters & Memoranda, 1740-1762

Eliza Lucas Pinckney (ca. 1722-1793) is renowned for introducing the cultivation of indigo for dye to the American colonies. Born in the West Indies where her father, a British army officer, was based, she was educated in England and moved with her family to South Carolina in 1738. As a teenager she managed her father's plantation while he was away and, years later, managed her husband's plantation after his death. Her rich letters and memoranda reveal her autonomy, perseverance, and downright grit as she forged an unique life for an elite colonial woman.

May 2, 1740 letter to her friend Mrs. Boddicott in England

Age 18

I flatter myself it will be a satisfaction to you to hear I like this part of the world, as my lott has fallen here — which I really do. I prefer England to it, 'tis true, but think Carolina greatly preferable to the West Indies, and was my Papa here I should be very happy.

We have a very good acquaintance from whom we have received much friendship and Civility. Charles Town, the principal one in this province, is a polite, agreeable place. The people live very Gentile and very much in the English taste. The Country is in General fertile and abounds with Venison and wild fowl; the Venison is much higher flavoured than in England but 'tis seldom fatt.

My Papa and Mama’s great indulgence to me leaves it to me to chose our place of residence either in town or Country,¹ but I think it more prudent as well as most agreeable to my Mama and self to be in the Country during my Father’s absence. We are 17 mile by land and 6 by water from Charles Town — where we have about 6 agreeable families around us with whom we live in great harmony.

I have a little library well furnished (for my papa has left me most of his books) in which I spend part of my time. My Musick and the Garden, which I am very fond of, take up the rest of my time that is not employed in business, of which my father has left me a pretty good share — and indeed, 'twas unavoidable as my Mama’s bad state of health prevents her going through any fatigue.

I have the business of 3 plantations to transact, which requires much writing and more business and fatigue of other sorts than you can imagine. But least you should imagine it too burthensom to a girl at my early time of life, give me leave to answer you: I assure you I think myself happy that I can be useful to so good a father, and by rising very early I find I can go through much business. But least you should think I shall be quite moaped with this way of life I am to inform you there is two worthy Ladies in Charles Town, Mrs. Pinckney² and Mrs. Cleland, who are partial enough to me to be always pleased to have me with them, and insist upon my making their houses my home when in town and press me to relax a little much oftener than 'tis in my honor to accept of their obliging intreaties. But I some times am with one or the other for 3 weeks or a month at a time, and then enjoy all the pleasures Charles Town affords, but nothing gives me more than subscribing my self

Dear Madam,

Yr. most affectionet and most obliged humble Servt.

Eliza. Lucas

¹ Colonel Lucas owned property in Charleston as well as his nearby plantation.
² Elizabeth Lamb Pinckney, the first wife of Charles Pinckney, died in 1744. Eliza Lucas married Pinckney the following spring.
**July 1740 memorandum**

Age 18

Wrote my Father a very long letter on his plantation affairs and on his change of commissions with Major Heron; on the Augustine Expedition; on the pains I had taken to bring the Indigo, Ginger, Cotton and Lucerne and Casada to perfection, and had greater hopes from the Indigo (if I could have the seed earlier next year from the West India’s) than any of the rest of the things I had tryd.

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**1740 letter to her father, in Antigua on military duty**

Age 18

I want [lack] words to Express the concern we are under at not hearing from you. The dangerous situation you are in terrifies us beyond expression and is increased by the fearful apprehensions of [your] being ordered to some place of immediate danger. . . . I know how ready you are to fight in a just cause as well as the love you bear your Country in preference to every other regard . . . .

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**April 23, 1741 memorandum**

Age 19

Wrote to my Father informing him of the loss of a Negroe man — also the boat being overset in Santilina Sound and 20 barrels of Rice lost. Told him of our making a new garden and all conveniences we can to receive him when we are so happy to see him. Also about Starrat and pitch and Tarr.

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**June 4, 1741 letter to her father in Antigua**

Age 19

Never were letters more welcome than yours of Feb. 19th and 20th and March the 15th and 21st, which came almost together. It was near 6 months since we had the pleasure of a line from you. Our fears increased apace and we dreaded some fatal accident befallen, but hearing of your recovery from a dangerous fitt of Illness has more than equaled, great as it was, our former Anxiety. Nor shall we ever think ourselves sufficiently thankful to Almighty God for the continuance of so great a blessing.

I sympathize most sincerely with the Inhabitance of Antigua in so great a Calamity as the scarcity of provisions and the want of the Necessarys of life to the poorer sort. We shall send all we can get of all sorts of provisions particularly what you write for. I wrote this day to Starrat for a barrel [of] butter.

We expect the boat dayly from Garden Hill [plantation] when I shall be able to give you an account of affairs there. The Cotton, Guiney corn, and most of the Ginger planted here was cutt off by a frost. I

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3 The unsuccessful expedition by Gen. Oglethorpe of Georgia, with forces from the Carolinas and Virginia, to destroy the Spanish fort at St. Augustine (Florida; see map, p. 1).

4 Lucerne is an alfalfa. “Casada” is probably cassava, a plant with a fleshy rootstock which was cultivated in the tropics where it was a staple food. Apparently cotton was raised on the Lucas plantations for some years. . . . [Elise Pinckney note continues, p. 8].

5 Saint Helena Sound, some forty miles down the coast from Charleston, is still pronounced by some natives the way Eliza phonetically spelled it. The boat was doubtless loaded with produce from Garden Hill on the Combahee, which flows into the sound. [Elise Pinckney note, p. 13]

6 Starrat was the overseer on the Waccamaw plantation. [Elise Pinckney note, p. 13]

7 Pitch, tar and turpentine were the crucial “naval stores,” all produced from pine trees, used in shipbuilding.
wrote you in [a] former letter we had a fine Crop of Indigo Seed upon the ground, and since informed you the frost took it before it was dry. I picked out the best of it and had it planted but there is not more than a hundred bushes of is come up — which proves the more unluckey as you have sent a man to make it. I make no doubt Indigo will prove a very valuable Commodity in time if we could have the seed from the west Indias [in] time enough to plant the latter end of March, that the seed might be dry enough to gather before our frost. I am sorry we lost this season. We can do nothing towards it now but make the works ready for next year. The Lucern is yet but dwindlering, but Mr. Hunt tells me ’tis always so here the first year.

The death of my Grandmamma was, as you imagine, very shocking and grievous to my Mama, but I hope the considerations of the misery’s that attend so advanced an age will help time to wear it off.

I am very much obliged to you for the present you were so good to send me of the fifty pound bill of Exchange which I duely received.

We hear Carthagene is taken.  

Mr. Wallis is dead. Capt. Norberry was lately killed in a duel by Capt. Dobrusee, whose life was dispaired of by the wounds he received. He is much blamed for querreling with such a brawling man as Norberry who was disregarded by every body. Norberry has left a wife and 3 or 4 children in very bad circumstances to lament his rashness.

Mama tenders you her affections and Polly joyns in duty with

My Dr. Papa
E. Lucas

July 1741__memorandum  Age 19

Wrote to my Eldest brother upon his going into the Army. After an apology for a girl at my early time of life presuming to advise and urge him to beware of false notions of honour. That he makes proper distinctions between Courage and rashness, Justice and revenge. Acknowledged his letter of the 28th of October. Recommended to him upon his first entrance into life to be particularly careful of his duty to his Creator, for nothing but an early piety and steady Virtue can make him happy.

September 20, 1741__memorandum  Age 19

Wrote to my father on plantation business and concerning a planter’s importing Negros for his own use. Colo[nel]. Pinckney thinks not, but thinks it was proposed in the Assembly and rejected. [He] promised to look over the Act and let me know. Also informed my father of the alteration ’tis soposed there will be in the value of our money — occasioned by a late Act of Parliament that Extends to all America — which is to dissolve all private banks, I think by the 30th of last month, or be liable to lose their Estates, and put themselves out of the King’s protection. Informed him of the Tyranical Government at Georgia.  

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8 The success of the English fleet at Cartagena had been erroneously reported in the South Carolina Gazette, April 30-May 7, 1741. [Elise Pinckney note continues, p. 16]
9 This colony was still under military government headed by General Oglethorpe and officers he appointed. [Elise Pinckney note continues, p. 22]
October 14, 1741__memorandum Age 19

Wrote to my father informing him we made 20 w[eight] of Indigo and expected 10 more. 'Tis not quite dry or I should have sent him some. Now desire he will send us a hundred weight of seed to plant in the spring.

January 1742__memorandum Age 20

Wrote to my father a letter consisting of 7 sides of paper — about the Exchange with Colo. Heron, the purchasing [of] his house at Georgia, the Tyranical Government at Georgia. . . .

Informed him I had begun to learn musick again with Mr. Pacheble, as he desired, and should endeavour to make myself mistress of the Harpsicord. Begged the favour of him to send to England for Dr. Pepashe’s Cantantas, Weldon’s Anthems, Knoller’s rules for tuning.

Concerning seling off all the Cows belonging to Woppon [Wappoo] Estate. About the Jerusalem thorn; shall try deferent soils for the Lucern grass this year. The ginger turns out but poorly. We [lack] want a supply of Indigo seed. . . .

Congratulate my father on my brother’s recovery from the small pox, and having a commission. An account of the Crops made at each of the Plantations.

c. April 1742__letter to Miss Bartlett on her daily routine Age 20

. . .

In general then I rise at five o’Clock in the morning, read till Seven, then take a walk in the garden or field, see that the Servants [slaves] are at their respective business, then to breakfast. The first hour after breakfast is spent at my musick, the next is constantly employed in recollecting something I have learned least for want of practise it should be quite lost, such as French and short hand. After that I devote the rest of the time till I dress for dinner to our little Polly and two black girls who I teach to read, and if I have my paps’s approbation (my Mamas I have got) I intend [them] for school mistres’s for the rest of the Negroe children — another scheme you see.

But to proceed, the first hour after dinner as the first after breakfast at musick, the rest of the afternoon in Needle work till candle light, and from that time to bed time read or write. . . . Mondays my musick Master is here. Tuesdays my friend Mrs. Chardon (about 3 miles distant) and I are constantly engaged to each other, she at our house one Tuesday—I at hers the next and this is one of the happiest days I spend at Woppoe. Thursday the whole day except what the necessary affairs of the family take up is spent in writing, either on the business of the plantations, or letters to my friends. Every other Fryday, if no company, we go a vizeting so that I go abroad once a week and no oftener.

c. May 1742__letter to Miss Bartlett Age 20

. . .

Wont you laugh at me if I tell you I am so busey in providing for Posterity I hardly allow my self time to Eat or sleep and can but just snatch a minnet to write you and a friend or two now. I am making a large plantation of Oaks which I look upon as my own property, whether my father gives me the land or not; and therefore I design many years hence when oaks are more valueable than they are now — which you know they will be when we come to build fleets. I intend, I say 2 thirds of the produce of my oaks for a charity (I’ll let you know my scheme another time) and the other 3rd for those that shall have the trouble of putting my design in Execution. I sopose according to custom you will show this to your Uncle

10 Charles Theodore Pachebel was one of the outstanding early musicians in Charleston. Known through concerts given in Boston, New York, and Newport, he came to Charleston by the mid-1730s. [Elise Pinckney note continues, p. 26]
11 Young George Lucas was listed in the Gentleman's Magazine of August, 1741, p. 442, as an ensign in “Dalzell's Foot.” [Elise Pinckney note, p. 25]
12 The suggested method of having Negroes teaching Negroes was very advanced for this time. [Elise Pinckney note continues, p. 34]
13 The live oak was valued in shipbuilding. Robert Johnson had reported to the Board of Trade, Jan. 2, 1729, that it “is much wanted in his Majesty's Docks and is the best Oak in the World for that Service, and of all his Majesty's Dominions in America, only grown in Carolina.” Records in British Public Record Office Relating to South Carolina, microfilm, Charleston Library Society, Charleston, S.C. 16: 29, 30. [Elise Pinckney note, p. 38]
and Aunt. “She is [a] good girl,” says Mrs. Pinckney. “She is never Idle and always means well.” “Tell the little Visionary,” says your Uncle, “come to town and partake of some of the amusements suitable to her time of life.” Pray tell him I think these so, and what he may now think whims and projects may turn out well by and by. Out of many surely one may hitt . . .

ca. June 1742__letter to Miss Bartlett on preparing her will  

Age 20

We have some in this Neighborhood who have a little Land and a few slaves and Cattle to give their children that never think of making a will till they come upon a sick bed and find it to expensive to send to town for a Lawyer. If You will not laugh too immoderately at me I’ll Trust you with a secrett. I have made two wills already. I know I have done no harm for I coned my lesson very perfect and know how to convey by will Estates real and personal and never forget in its proper place, him and his heirs for Ever, nor that ’tis to be signed by 3 Witnesses in presence of one another. . . .

ca. June 1, 1742__letter to her father  

Age 20

The quantity of Indigo I mentioned was produced of half an acre or rather more. The works being new and not dry enough in time the Indigo stood till many of the leaves droped. We shall be glad of the seed as soon as possible.14

January 7, 1743__memorandum  

Age 21

Wrote to my father concerning my brother Tommy, his Nurse, his pretty stile in writing, &c. Inform him of some negroes detected going to Augustine.15 They accuse Mol[att]o Quash.16 I was at his tryal when he proved him self quite Innocent. The ring leader is to be hanged and one Whyped. . . .

February 10, 1743__letter to her father, lieutenant governor of Antigua  

Age 21

I received the friendly congratulations of Miss Dunbar on your being made Lieut. Col. and Gov. of Antigua with a very gentile present to Polly and another to myself. My brother seems mortified at being left behind and not suffered [allowed] to attend you on this expedition. His going would doubtless have improved him in military affairs, but I hope his staying will be no disservice to his morals as it may teach him to bear disappointments and curb too ambitious aspireings in his young tho’ good mind—a useful piece of knowledge in human life and perhaps requires as much true fortitude as facing an enemy.

But to cease moralizing and attend to business. The [rice] crop at Garden Hill turned out ill, but a hundred and sixty barrels; and at Wappo [plantation] only 43. The price is so very low as thirty shillings per hundred. We have sent very little to town yet for that reason. People differ much in sentiment about the number of ships we are still to have.

We have not heard from England for more than three months. What can keep the shipping? We conjecture ’tis an embargo.

In my letter of the 3rd of Feb. I desired to know if you aproved of settleing a plantation to the North near Major Pawly. Please to let us know in your next if we will have your approbation and it shall be done in the fall.

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14 “[I]t was not until 1744 that indigo from Wappoo [plantation] proved that Carolina lands could grow a promising grade, one that could sell in a competitive market. . . . In 1745, [Eliza] Lucas, after five years of investing in indigo experiments in Carolina, was at last able to realize a considerable income from this crop.” [Elise Pinckney, Biographical Sketch, pp. xviii, xix]

15 The South Carolina Council Journals have repeated references to the Spaniards at St. Augustine encouraging Carolina slaves to escape to that garrison. [Elise Pinckney note continues, p. 57]

16 He can be identified as the same “Mullatto Quash” listed among the twenty working slaves at Wappoo included in Eliza’s dowry, and also referred to as “Quasy, a Carpenter” (1746) and “Quash, a Carpenter, since baptized by the name of John Williams” (1749). [Elise Pinckney note continues, pp. 57-58]
We expect a Vizet from the Spainards this Summer. Mr. Oglethorp harrases them much at their forts in St. Augustine. He has lately killed some and took two prisoners. . . .

In 1745 Eliza Lucas married Charles Pinckney of Charleston, and in 1753 they moved to England with their two sons, where Pinckney served as a colonial agent. One month after their return to South Carolina in 1758, Charles Pinckney died of malaria, and Eliza again was in charge of managing the family plantations. Her young daughter was with her; her sons had remained in school in England.

**August 1758—letter to the headmaster of her sons’ school in England** Age 36

This informs you of the greatest misfortune that could have happened to me and my dear children on this side Eternity! I am to tell you, hard as the task is, that my dear, dear Mr. Pinckney, the best of men, of husbands and of fathers, is no more! Comfort, good Sir, Comfort the tender hearts of my dear children.17 God Almighty bless them, and if he has any more blessings for me in this world may He give it me in them and their sister.

The inclosed [letter] for the dear boys be so good to give them when you think it a proper time. What anguish do I and shall I feel for my poor Infants when they hear the most afflicting sound that could ever reach them!

I remember poor Tommy [her brother]; upon the first talk of our coming to Carolina early one morning as he lay abed, and I alone with him, without any discourse leading to it, told me he had a favour to beg of me, which was: If we went to Carolina and his dear papa should dye there that he might never know it, and that he would ask his papa the same favour if I dyed there. I think my poor dear Charles has expressed something of the same sentiment, and I am sure he has not less filial affection and sensibility than his brother. I therefore submit it to you and Mrs. Evance whether to let them know it now, or not — for I am not capable to think for my self. . . .

**March 14, 1760—letter to Mr. Morley, a family friend in England** Age 38

. . .

The beginning of this Year there was such a fine prospect on our plantations of a great Crop that I was hopeful of clearing all the mony that was due upon the Estate, but the great drought in most parts of the Country, such as I never remember her, disapointed those expectations so much that all that we make

17 Having returned to South Carolina with the intention of selling their properties and returning to England, the Pinckneys had left their sons in a boarding school in England.
from the planting interest will hardly defray the charges of the plantations. And upon our arrival here we
found they wanted [lacked] but every thing and [were] every way in bad order, with ignorant or dishonest
Over Seers.

My Nephew had no management of the planting interest, and my brother who had, by a stroak of the
palsey, had been long incapable of all business. I thank God there is now a good prospect of things
being defferently conducted. I have prevailed upon a conscientious good man (who by his industry and
honesty has raised a fine fortune for 2 orphan children my dear Mr. Pinckney was guardian too) to
undertake the direction and inspection of the overseers. He is an excellent planter, a Dutchman, originally
Servant and Overseer to Mr. Golightly, who has been much solicited to undertake for many Gentlemen;
but as he has no family but a wife and is comfortable enough in his circumstances, refuses to do it for any
but women and children that are not able to do it for themselves. So that if it please God to prosper us and
grant good Seasons, I hope to clear all next year.

I find it requires great care, attention and activity to attend properly to a Carolina Estate, tho’ but a
moderate one, to do ones duty and make it turn to account, that I find I have as much business as I can go
through of one sort or other. Perhaps ’tis better for me, and I believe it is. Had there not been a necessity
for it, I might have sunk to the grave by this time in that Lethargy of stupidity which had seized me after
my mind had been violently agitated by the greatest shock it ever felt. But a variety of imployment gives
my thoughts a relief from melloncholy subjects, tho’ ’tis but a temporary one, and gives me air and
exercise, which I believe I should not have had resolution enough to take if I had not been roused to it by
motives of duty and parental affection. . . .

March 15, 1760__letter to Mrs. Evance, a family friend in England Age 38

...A great cloud seems at present to hang over this province [colony]. We are continually insulted by
the Indians on our back settlements, and a violent kind of small pox rages in Charles Town that almost
puts a stop to all business. Several of those I have to transact business with are fled into the Country, but
by the Divine blessing I hope a month or two will change the prospect. We expect shortly troops from
Gen. Amherst, which I trust will be able to manage these savage Enemies. And the small pox, as it does
not spread in the Country, must be soon over for want of subjects.

I am now at Belmost to keep my people out of the way of the violent distemper for the poor blacks
have died very fast even by inocculations. But the people in Charles Town were inocculations mad, I
think I may call it, and rushed into it with such precipititation that I think it impossible they could have had
either a proper preparation or attendance had there been 10 Doctors in town to one. The Doctors could not
help it — the people would not be said nay. . . .

June 19, 1760__letter to Mrs. Evance, a family friend in England Age 38

...I am just going out of town for a little air and Exercise, having, I thank God, finished my superinten-
dency over a little small pox Hospital, a very small one indeed as it did not consist of more than 15
patients, not as the Doctor was informed 200, which is more than our whole number. I lost one only — a
valuable Carpenter who took it the natural way. Many poor wretches in the beginning I believe died for
want of proper nursing. . . .

ca. February/March 1761__letter to Mrs. King in England Age 39

’Tis with great regret I send Mr. King so small a collection of seeds, especially as I have an
opportunity to send them by a private hand; but I was taken in Sept. with a most sever fever which held

\[18\] William Pinckney was incapacitated by a paralytic stroke in 1758 but lived until 1766. [Elise Pinckney note continues, p. 144]
\[19\] This epidemic, said to have been brought back by Governor Lyttleton's troops from the Indian country, was possibly the worst in Charleston's
history, in spite of thousands of inoculations by physicians. [Elise Pinckney note continues, pp. 147-148]
\[20\] This sentence is crossed out. [Elise Pinckney note, p. 153]
me many days without intermission and seized my spirits in such a manner as brought me to the Verge of
the grave 3 times in 2 months, and several relapses afterwards has confined me to my chamber 4 months.

As soon as I was able I inquired how my directions were observed concerning the Seeds, and tho’ I
had sent positive orders to 3 places for different sorts of seeds, they were observed but at one. Poor Mr.
Drayton had also promised me a large quantity of Magnolia and Bay seed, but he was taken ill about the
same time I was, and died. I am a good deal mortified at the disappointment as there will be a year lost by
it, but please God I live this year, I will endeavour to make amends and not only send the Seeds but plant
a nursery here to be sent you in plants at 2 year old. And I think I know a method that will preserve the
trees very well, but which means I imagine you will save 2 if not 3 years growth in your trees, for I
believe a tree will grow as much in 2 years here as in 4 or 5 in England.

April 13, 1761—letter to Mrs. King, a family friend in England

... Our hopes and Expectations are a good deal raised by the great fleet we are told that is bound from
England for America this spring. We flatter ourselves they will take The Mississippi in their way, which
if they succeed in this manner will put an end to all our Indian Warrs, as they could never molest us if the French
from thence did not supply them with arms and Ammunition. Our army has marched for the Cheerokee
nation. They consist of regular troops and provincials. ’Tis a disagreeable Service but they have this to
comfort them, that whether they are successful or other ways they may be pretty sure of gathering Laurels
from the bounty of the English new writers; for after the inconveniences upon the last Cheerokee expeditions,
there surely can nothing be done there that don’t merit praise.

If the 50 Mohocks arrive safe that we expect from Genl. Amherst, I hope we shall be able to quel
those Barbarians; for the Mohocks are very fine men — five of them are now here — and they are looked
upon by the rest of the Indians with both dread and respect for they think them the greatest warriors in the
world.

February 1762—letter to Mr. Keate, a family friend in England

... What great doings you have had in England since I left it. You people that live in the great world in the
midst of Scenes of Entertainment and pleasure abroad, of improving studies and polite amusement at home,
must be very good to think of your friends in this remote Corner of the Globe. I really think it a great virtue
in you; and if I could conceal the selfish principle by which I am actuated I could with a better grace attempt
to persuade you that there is so much merit in setting down at home and writing now and then to an old
woman in the Wilds of America that I believe I should take you off an hour some times from attending
Matines[e] and the other gay scenes you frequent.

How different is the life we live here; vizeting is the great and almost only amusement of late years.
However, as to my own particular, I live agreeable enough to my own taste, as much so as I can separated
from my dear boys.

I love a Garden and a book; and they are all my amusement except I include one of the greatest
Businesses of my life (my attention to my dear little girl) under that article. For a pleasure it certainly is &c.
especially to a mind so tractable and a temper so sweet as hers. For, I thank God, I have an excellent soil to
work upon, and by the Divine Grace hope the fruit will be answerable to my endeavors in the cultivation.

Eliza Pinckney’s last letter in this letterbook is dated February 27, 1762. She lived in South Carolina for thirty more years,
dying of cancer on May 26, 1793 in Philadelphia, where she had gone for treatment. At her funeral in Philadelphia, Presi-
dent George Washington served as one of her pallbearers.

21 Thomas Drayton (c. 1700-1760) lived at Magnolia plantation on the Ashley River. [Elise Pinckney note continues, p. 162]
22 Early in January, 1761, Lieutenant Colonel James Grant arrived with 1,200 regulars. Together with the troops left by Montgomery to guard the
frontier and the South Carolina militia, Grant commanded 2,250 effective. In June and July Grant’s army burned fifteen towns and all crops in the
Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee valleys. Those Indians not killed were driven into the mountains to starve. A peace treaty was finally signed with
the Cherokees on December 18. [Elise Pinckney note continues, pp. 165-166]
23 Elise Pinckney, Biographical Sketch, pp. xxiv.