

Tucker, Starling ^[1]

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ca. 1766–3 Jan. 1834

Starling Tucker, South Carolina congressman and general, was born in [Halifax County](#) ^[2], N.C. His father, William Willis (Billy) Tucker, whose will of 8 Nov. 1770 was probated at the February 1771 term of Halifax court, left all to Starling's mother, Priscilla Doyle Tucker. If she remarried, the estate was to be divided equally among her and the children: Martha, Mary, Starling, and Fanny. A witness, Henry Haws Tucker, may have been related. For a second husband Priscilla in time chose the Virginian Thomas Clark. Before the household moved to South Carolina at the end of the [American Revolution](#) ^[3], Starling's half-brother William was born.

Endowed with native intelligence but perhaps little formal education, Starling Tucker began farming the Mountain Creek (now Enoree) section of Laurens District (now County) near Tucker's Mill on Enoree River. The ambitious Tucker married Levinia Higgins on 8 Oct. 1789 and eventually owned land on both sides of the stream. The couple and as many as eleven neighboring Higgins households are recorded in the census of 1790. By 1800 Major Starling Tucker, at least on paper, commanded the upper battalion, Enoree Regiment, South Carolina militia. Without ever any enumerated children of their own, the Tuckers at this time had enslaved two people to help with the labor, and by 1820 five individuals of their establishment were engaged in agricultural work and one person performed manufacturing, perhaps milling. *The Biographical Directory of the Senate of the State of South Carolina, 1776–1964* credits Tucker with having become a justice of the peace, a justice of the quorum, and a commissioner of free schools. He represented Laurens in the state house of representatives (1801–6) and state senate (1806–17) until he resigned to go to Congress; he was succeeded as senator by his half brother William Clark, who in 1810 had received a four-year appointment as the state's surveyor general.

The [War of 1812](#) ^[4] did not scathe South Carolina, but it did bring about the chance for Tucker as a lieutenant colonel to train from 1 Mar. to 1 Apr. 1814 at Camp Alston in coastal [Beaufort County](#) ^[5], 210 miles by baggage wagon from his home. Commanding a readiness detachment of the Second Brigade, First Division, South Carolina militia, the backcountry colonel got along well with his men but poorly with Governor Joseph Alston. When Alston had him court-martialed and suspended from authority for ten months, "the whole affair made Starling Tucker subsequently Brigadier of the Tenth Brigade, Major General Fifth Division, and a Member of Congress."

One of the candidates he defeated to get to Washington was Anderson Crenshaw, the first graduate of South Carolina College. Through seven terms, from the Fifteenth Congress through the Twenty-first (1817–31), no representative from South Carolina exceeded Starling Tucker in being consistently returned to Washington. Living there modestly and persuaded "that he rendered his constituents more justice than he should do by talking or trying to talk," he attended punctually and voted regularly, yet in silence until 4 Feb. 1822, when he took the floor of the House of Representatives to denounce an apportionment bill that threatened to short-change South Carolina. Thereafter he was less and less reticent to set forth his thinking, dominated by strict construction of the U.S. Constitution. [Internal improvements](#) ^[6] were his pet anathema. Except in the Fifteenth Congress when assigned to a committee on expenditures in the War Department and in the second session of the Twentieth when assigned to a select committee on the militia, Tucker was uniformly placed on the committee on elections.

Less than three years after retiring from Congress, he died at about age sixty. His wife died on 16 July 1855 in her eighty-sixth year. Their well-preserved twin graves occupied a walled plot on private ground in later wooded surroundings a mile west of Enoree, S.C. Proud of his personal worth and usefulness in life, his Laurens friends had their sentiments inscribed atop the marble over his grave, to the memory of General Sterling Tucker. There is little question, however, that he habitually signed his given name as Starling.

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Starling Tucker file, Tucker's regiment, S.C. militia, War of 1812 (National Archives).

Starling Tucker and Levinia Tucker tombstone inscriptions (transcriptions furnished by Mildred Brownlee, Laurens, S.C.).

U.S. Census records, Laurens District, S.C., 1800, 1810, 1820, and Laurens County, S.C., 1830 (National Archives, microcopies M32, roll 50 M252, roll 61. M33, roll 121 and M19, roll 69).

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Additional Resources:

"Tucker, Starling, (1770 - 1834)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000402> ^[9] (accessed March 25, 2014).

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