

THE FOSTER FAMILY OF LANCASTER COUNTY

By Paul Gettys

The files of D. Lindsay Pettus, long-time president of the Lancaster County Society for Historical Preservation, contain a number of original items related to the Foster family of the Waxhaws and Lancaster. This short paper uses some of these documents and other sources to provide a brief sketch of this important family. It is not intended as a full genealogical study, and additional information is welcomed.

Near Landsford on the Catawba River in the Waxhaws section of Lancaster County, there is a location known as Fosters Crossroads. The present-day roads involved are Riverside Road in a north-south direction and Landsford Road to the west and Old Hickory Road to the east. Fosters Crossroads marks the location of the farm of the Foster family, who moved into the Waxhaws area in the mi-1750s.

Henry Foster and his wife Ann Dunlop (Dunlap) Foster came from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania to Lancaster County, South Carolina. When they arrived, they had at least one son, John, who had been baptized at Paxton, Pennsylvania in 1753. By 1756, a second son had been born. He was named Joseph and was baptized at Waxhaw Presbyterian Church by Rev. Robert Miller.¹ On October 30, 1761, the family bought 150 acres of land from George and Mary Douglass.² They gradually expanded their land holdings. The family built a home very near the river at Landsford.³ Henry Foster farmed the family's plantation and was active in Waxhaw Presbyterian Church and other local organizations. Henry's wife Ann died in 1795 and he died on December 19, 1797.⁴

The location of the original home site on the river was unfortunate. Diseases such as malaria and yellow fever were prevalent, both spread by mosquitoes. A study of the graves at Waxhaw Cemetery shows that at least eight Fosters died at young ages between 1764 and 1843. This was also true of the Leckie family, who lived across the river in Chester County. Robert Leckie came

¹ Louise Pettus, *The Waxhaws*, 1993, page 6.

² Pettus, page 128. This appears to be the first acquisition of land by the family. I have not attempted a full review of the land holdings of the Foster family.

³ A house labeled "Foster" is shown on Mill's Atlas of South Carolina (1825) located directly on the Catawba River at Landsford in Lancaster County.

⁴ Most death dates are taken from tombstones at Waxhaw Presbyterian Church Cemetery. A listing of the tombstones was published by Nancy Crockett and Mamie Gettys Atkinson.

to do the stone work and other construction work at the Landsford Canal, located just across the river from the Foster farm. He lost his two-year old son and wife in 1822 and his aunt in 1823 to a fever. They are also buried in the Waxhaw Cemetery in a special enclosure.

The Fosters eventually moved their home site to a high point which is the current location of Fosters Crossroads. John (1753-1812), the son of Henry and Ann Dunlop Foster, married Mary Atkins (1749-1801) and lived at the farm. According to documents submitted to the DAR, he served in the American Revolution in the South Carolina Light Dragoons under Lt. Col. Henry Hampton. Their son, John Foster (1785-1868), married Ann Kelsey Cantzon (1795-1846). They lost several children to disease, but had two sons who survived to adulthood. The Cantzon family is shown in Mill's Atlas (1825) as living south of the Fosters on the Catawba River. John was a prominent farmer, as the 1850 Census showed that he had twenty slaves. He also was active in Waxhaw Presbyterian Church, and in the 1850s, he served as Clerk of Session. In 1855, he was elected president of the new chapter of the American Bible Society which was organized at Waxhaw.⁵ In the 1860 Census, John Foster is listed with real estate valued at \$39,600 and personal wealth valued at \$5,000. His wife Ann had died in 1846, and he is shown in both the 1850 and 1860 Census reports as living with his two surviving sons, John Cantzon and Joseph Henry Foster.

The proximity of the family land to the Landsford area of the Catawba River provided economic opportunities. On the map prepared by Tom Mayhew entitled "Early Landholders on the Catawba River in the Fort Lawn Vicinity," there is a reference to "Foster's Old Ford" on the Chester County side of the river. This is located on land granted to William Taylor in 1754 and is located just south of Davie Island. Evidently there was a ford in the river which connected to the Foster land on the Lancaster County side. This ford is called Johnston's Ford on the Mill's Atlas map (1825). John Foster (1785-1868) operated a grist mill on the river just south of the Landsford Road crossing on the Lancaster County side. His land is shown on Mill's Atlas (1825) and his house is located on the Catawba River at this point. It is likely that his mill was built in the 1850s, as it is recorded in an 1860 manufacturing index. The site of the mill is currently on property owned by the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and is managed as an undeveloped section of Landsford Canal State Park. The remains of the mill include a headrace, stone mill foundation, a tailrace, a road trace, and a possible mill worker's house. The water channel or raceway is about 1,640 feet long. The foundation of the mill consists of three parallel walls, and the mill probably had two tub wheels.⁶

⁵ *The Lancaster Ledger*, July 25, 1825 contains an article describing the organization of the Bible Society chapter.

⁶ An archaeological assessment of the mill is included in the *Catawba River Valley Grist Mill Survey*, conducted by Legacy Research Associates and published by the Catawba Regional Council of Governments, the Katawba Valley Land Trust, and the SC Department Archives and History in 2000, pages 35-38.

Because the family lost at least six children to disease, they moved to a high point away from the river, perceived to be a healthier location, the site which would become known as Foster's Crossroads. Neither the house on the river nor the crossroads house is still in existence, and no photos are known to exist. John and Ann Cantzon Foster had two known sons who reached adulthood. John Foster died on June 28, 1868 and was buried next to his wife at Waxhaw Presbyterian Church Cemetery.

John Cantzon Foster was born on October 12, 1832 at the family home on the Catawba River. He was afforded a strong education, studying at the Mount Zion Institute in Winnsboro and graduating from the South Carolina College (now USC) in 1855.⁷ From family correspondence, we also know that he studied for a year prior to college in Columbia, Tennessee, living with a relative Henry Foster.⁸ Soon after his graduation from college, he married Margaret Theresa Hood in 1856, and they had a daughter, Annie. Tragedy struck when Margaret died on January 27, 1859 aged just under twenty. John C. Foster would remain a widower for the rest of his life. When the Civil War began, he volunteered with a cavalry company from Lancaster. Among the family papers is a letter written from John Foster, father of Captain Foster to him on September 28, 1863 when he was camped near Pocatigo, South Carolina. His father discussed the farm activities, describing the process of making molasses and the excellent cotton crop being harvested. He ended, "My son, we ought to Pray earnestly for ourselves and for our government."⁹ John C. Foster served throughout the war, and was named Captain of Company H, 4th Battalion of Butler's Brigade. He was described as "perfectly fearless under fire."¹⁰ On September 4, 1865, Captain Foster signed an allegiance oath, witnessed by John W. Twitty, Clerk at Lancaster Court House. On the oath form, he is described as 32 years old, five feet nine inches tall, of dark complexion, and with the occupation of farmer.¹¹ Captain Foster was soon elected an elder in the Waxhaw Presbyterian Church. He later went out west and then lived in Wildwood, Florida for several years.¹² He returned to Lancaster and is shown in the 1880 Census as a farmer living with his daughter Annie. Among family papers is a store account for Captain Foster with the firm of Twitty and Ivy for the year 1880. This account shows extensive purchases of household goods and fabrics, probably for the benefit of Annie.¹³ Property tax receipts for 1881 show that Captain Foster owned a lot in Lancaster and Annie Foster owned 112 acres of land.¹⁴ Records for the 1890 Census are lost. In the 1900 and 1910 Census reports, Captain Foster is shown living with his daughter Annie and her family on White Street in

⁷ Various facts about his life are taken from a Memorial adopted by the Session of the Lancaster Presbyterian Church on January 8, 1911.

⁸ Letter dated February 17, 1849 from Henry Foster, a cousin, to John Foster, Lindsay Pettus Foster collection.

⁹ Letter dated September 28, 1863 from John Foster to J. C. Foster; Lindsay Pettus Foster collection.

¹⁰ Session Memorial.

¹¹ Original in the Lindsay Pettus Foster collection.

¹² Letter from Rev. C. W. Humphries, former pastor in Florida to Annie, his daughter, dated October 6, 1910, Lindsay Pettus Foster collection.

¹³ Copy of the ledger covers the year 1880, Lindsay Pettus Foster collection.

¹⁴ Original tax receipts in the Lindsay Pettus Foster collection signed by W. B. Dunlap, County Treasurer.

Lancaster. She had married Paul Moore in 1881. Moore worked as a bookkeeper and later was Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas for Lancaster County. The Moore family had at least five children, so Captain Foster was finally able to experience family life with a house full of children. Captain Foster's occupation is shown as Landlord in 1900 and as Farmer in 1910. On his return to Lancaster, Captain Foster joined the Lancaster Presbyterian Church and was soon elected an elder. He served in this position from 1889 to 1909, and served as Clerk of Session for eleven years. Like his father, Captain Foster also became active in the American Bible Society. In 1904, he received a large certificate giving him a life membership in recognition for a gift of \$30 to the Lancaster Bible Society.¹⁵ He was named as a commissioner to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian denomination in 1898 and traveled to New Orleans for the meeting. He was serving as a commissioner again in 1910 when he became ill. Captain Foster died on September 30, 1910 and the age of 78, and is buried at Waxhaw Cemetery.

Dr. Joseph Henry Foster (1835-1885) was the younger son of John and Ann Cantzon Foster. He was born on April 20, 1835 at the family home. Like his brother, he had excellent educational opportunities. He studied in a neighborhood school, then was sent with his brother John to the Mount Zion Institute in Winnsboro. He then attended South Carolina College (now USC) and graduated in the same class as his brother in 1855. He studied medicine in Charleston (now the Medical University of South Carolina) and finished his studies at the New Orleans School of Medicine in 1860. In the 1860 Census, he is listed as living at the family farm with his father and brother and is already described as a physician. Like his brother, he volunteered for service in the Confederate Army, serving first with the Lancaster Greys on the South Carolina coast and in Virginia. In 1862, he was promoted to the rank of Surgeon and served with the 5th South Carolina Volunteers until the end of the war. He returned home and began practicing medicine. When his father died in 1868, Joseph inherited the family home, while his brother John inherited other parts of the farm. In 1869, he married Charlotte Brown, daughter of Daniel Washington Brown and Elizabeth Amanda Barnes Brown. The couple later moved to Lancaster, where they had a home at the corner of Dunlap and Catawba Streets. The couple had at least seven children. Dr. Foster died at the age of 50 on May 23, 1885. An undated clipping from the *Lancaster News* stated, "Between the years 1865-1885, one of the best-known men in the county and village of Lancaster was Dr. Joe [Foster]. An old-time family doctor, physician, nurse, and friend, he was loved by one and all as he traveled over the rutted dirt roads in his horse and buggy to the homes of the sick."¹⁶ Charlotte Foster, known as Lottie, died at her home on Dunlap Street in Lancaster in March 1918 at the age of 69. The obituary lists eight children alive at the time of her death.¹⁷ Among the children of the family were Eloise Foster (1872-1923), Gertrude Foster (1876-1951), Dr. Carl Adkins Foster (1879-1935), Ralph Kelsey Foster (1884-1956), Natalie Foster, Jessie

¹⁵ Original framed certificate is in the Lindsay Pettus Foster collection.

¹⁶ News clipping from an undated edition of the *Lancaster News* gives details on his life, Lindsay Pettus Foster collection.

¹⁷ *Lancaster News*, March 22, 1918.

Foster, Dr. John Cantzon Foster, and J. Harry Foster. Gertrude was a math teacher at USC. Ralph was an athletic director and football coach at The Citadel.¹⁸ At his death in 1956, he was living at 1616 College Street in Columbia. Carl was a physician who was living at 1819 Senate Street in Columbia at his death in 1935. His sister Eloise lived at the same address. Dr. Joseph Henry Foster and some members of his family are buried at the Old Presbyterian Church cemetery on West Gay Street in Lancaster.¹⁹

Ownership of the family land at Fosters Crossroads ended in 1899, when Charlotte Foster, the widow of Dr. Joseph Henry Foster, sold the land, called the “Foster Home Place,” to Col. Leroy Springs. He had plans to harness the hydroelectric potential of the shoals at Landsford on the Catawba River, and purchased a number of parcels of land on both sides of the river. He planned to use the power generated in a new textile mill. The plans for the dam at Landsford were abandoned, and a steam-driven power unit was built at the mill in Lancaster.²⁰

Today, Fosters Crossroads is shown as a location on numerous maps of Lancaster County. At least 23 members of the family are buried at Waxhaw Presbyterian Church Cemetery and others are buried at the Old Presbyterian Church Cemetery on West Gay Street in Lancaster.

¹⁸ *Lancaster News*, November 25, 1908.

¹⁹ Some information is from death certificates for the various family members.

²⁰ Pettus, *The Waxhaws*, page 112. A more complete description of the Landsford Water Power Company is found in *The Springs Story: The First Hundred Years*, Louise Pettus and Martha Bishop, printed in 1987 by Springs Industries, Inc., page 58.