

W. B. WHITE JR.  
EVENING  
HERALD

### HISTORY OF ROCK HILL'S RATTERREE CORNER

The other day when I saw the Herald's picture of the new parking lot on the corner of East Main and Trade Streets, I was reminded of the interesting history connected with what has been, for over a century, called "the Ratterree corner." I realize that the parking lot covers more than just the corner lot -- it includes the old Roddey property, too -- but I am writing about that section of the parking lot immediately next to the corner.

When Squire John Roddey laid off Main Street for Alexander Templeton Black on November 6-7, 1851, he came up with 23 lots, reaching from the Charlotte & South Carolina Railroad tracks up to what is now the First Presbyterian Church lot, with twelve lots on the north side and eleven lots on the south side of the first surveyed street. At the extreme southwestern corner, Squire Roddey laid off a piece of ground which he divided into two parts and designated "Scrap B."<sup>1</sup> The rectangular Ratterree lot was the southwestern portion of "Scrap B."<sup>2</sup> (Please see attached plat.)

A. T. Black sold this lot -- about 68-75 feet wide and 210-215 feet deep -- on December 24, 1852, to James Finley and John G. Minges for \$100. The deed mentioned that a store house had already been erected on the property and was occupied by Finley and Minges as a tavern and grocery.<sup>3</sup> This frame structure stood on the corner of Main and Trade Streets (Trade was former-

ly called Depot Street and then Railroad Avenue) from 1852 until 1895.<sup>4</sup> (Please see photograph for view of front corner of the little structure, as it appeared about 1894.)<sup>5</sup>

Sometime during 1854 Rock Hill's first murder was committed in the back room of this store.<sup>6</sup> It appears that James Vickers and his brother, Newton, came from Yorkville to the infant village of Rock Hill for the express purpose of killing a man named Dobson, a shoemaker whose shop was probably located in the back room of the building. It is said that while all three of the men were drunk, the brothers perpetrated their crime. At their trial at the county seat, Col. T. N. Dawkins, the solicitor, won a guilty verdict from the jury. Judge J. Belton O'Neill sentenced the brothers to hang at Yorkville on December 29, 1854. Somehow Newton Vickers escaped the hangman's rope. After he was sent to the penitentiary, his sentence was reprieved by the Governor of South Carolina. Vickers disappeared shortly thereafter. One source says he died in the service of the Confederacy; another says that he was never heard of again.<sup>7</sup>

On May 11, 1854, James Finley signed over his interest in the modest business to his partner, Minges.<sup>8</sup> Then, within four months, Minges died intestate, leaving as his heirs his wife, Rebecca E. Minges, and his brothers and sisters. By court order the property was put up for sale to effect a settlement. On February 6, 1855, William H. Neely purchased the lot from the Minges heirs.<sup>9</sup> He continued to operate the business, but he went further. He erected on the back of the lot his residence, a

frame building which faced more on Depot Street than on Main Street.<sup>10</sup> (It should be noted that the back of the lot was at a considerably higher elevation than the front part. In fact, it was the summit of a hill which stretched out north and west from the house site.)<sup>11</sup>

Several years later, John Ratterree and his wife, Martha Workman Ratterree, moved to the village of Rock Hill. He bought the Neely property on September 12, 1863, for \$1600.<sup>12</sup> The corner has since been known as "the Ratterree corner." Ratterree and his family occupied the residence and he at once entered into the business life of Rock Hill. He was successful, acquiring wealth and political power. One writer has called him "the political ~~lord of the community~~" during the years 1876 to 1890.<sup>13</sup>

It is possible that, in the 1870's and 1880's, a second frame building stood on the front of the lot, next to the original structure. Certain it is that Ratterree had his smokehouse, his barn, and several other outbuildings on the back of the lot, behind his house.<sup>14</sup> He later acquired the triangular lot just west of his original lot. This triangle faced Depot Street on the long side and Church Street (now Black Street) on the short side.<sup>15</sup> The little original building continued in use. For a number of years, Miss Octavia Owens rented the structure and conducted a thriving grocery business there. She died in 1889.<sup>16</sup>

On Tuesday morning, January 8, 1895, the historic store building fell victim to the flames. It was then occupied by

J. H. Kerr as a meat market. The basement was Sam Laney's shoe shop. (One writer said that the building had another wing in the 1880's, used as an eating place, and that this portion was torn down in 1887 to arrest the progress of the disastrous fire which destroyed the businesses on the south side of Main Street in that block.)<sup>17</sup>

John Ratterree, after the fire of 1895, put up several small frame buildings on Main Street for temporary use as store rooms.<sup>18</sup> Then in the early part of 1900 the family decided to erect a large (75 by 100 feet) brick office and store building. The first floor was to have three store rooms and the second floor sixteen rooms for offices. The architect was H. E. White.<sup>19</sup> A. E. Ratterree and Pride Ratterree, sons of John and Martha, had the old residence razed to make room for their new building.<sup>20</sup> When the brick structure was begun, the frame buildings erected after the 1895 fire were rolled down to the Ratterree property on Depot Street.<sup>21</sup> The brick building was used continuously from 1900 until it was destroyed in a spectacular \$200,000 fire on the night of October 12-13, 1953. Ratterree Drug Company was then occupying the structure, together with several other establishments.<sup>22</sup>

In 1912 the Ratterree brothers put up a second handsome brick store building, on their triangular lot facing Depot Street. Julian S. Starr was architect.<sup>23</sup> This building, along with the one which replaced the building ~~which replaced the building~~ ~~which replaced the building~~ burned in 1953 (facing Main Street), was taken down in 1972-73 as part of the Urban Renewal program.

But there is more to the story than this. It was the rocky knoll on whose summit the Ratterree residence stood which gave Rock Hill its name in 1851. J. Lawrence Moore and Col. Edward Avery named the railroad depot for the hill through which railroad track crews had to blast a roadbed as they completed the line to Rock Hill.<sup>24</sup> The hill was covered with innumerable boulders, which gradually disappeared through the years. The last boulder was crushed in April, 1905.<sup>25</sup> And now, in the summer of 1973, the grading machine has obliterated the last vestiges of the old hill which gave Rock Hill its name. The Ratterree corner has certainly played its part in our history. Thank you for letting me set down these facts that may prove of interest to those citizens who come after us.

## NOTES

1. The original plat by Squire John Roddey is a part of the excellent South Carolina Collection of the Rock Hill Public Library, Rock Hill, S. C. The attached plat is an adaption of Squire Roddey's plats of 1851 and 1856 and was prepared by the author for use with this paper.

2. York County (S.C.) Deed Book S, pp. 898-899.

3. Ibid.

4. The Rock Hill Herald, January 9, 1895, p. 3, c. 2.

5. W. J. Cherry, A Hand-Book of the City of Rock Hill (Charlotte, N.C.: Queen City Publishing Co., 1895), photograph facing page 9.

6. Herald, loc. cit.

7. Herald, April 24, 1901, p. 3.

8. York County Deed Book S, p. 899.

9. 4th Book Real Estate, York District, S.C., pp. 187-89.

10. Herald, January 6, 1900, p. 3, c. 2.

11. Personal interview with Andrew Rembert Barrett, April 4, 1973. Mr. Barrett remembers well the old Ratterree house and the hill on which it was built. Mr. Barrett is now well over ninety years of age.

12. York County Deed Book S, p. 900.

13. Herald, August 11, 1897, p. 3, c. 2.

14. Herald, March 31, 1900, p. 3, c. 1.

15. See attached plat.

16. Herald, May 9, 1889, p. 3, c. 2.

17. Herald, January 9, 1895, p. 3, c. 2.

18. Herald, March 31, 1900, p. 3, c. 1.

19. Herald, February 7, 1900, p. 3, c. 1.

20. Herald, January 6, 1900, p. 3, c. 2.

NOTES (continued...)

21. Herald, March 31, 1900, p. 3, c. 1.

22. The Evening Herald, October 13, 1953, p. 1.

23. The Rock Hill Herald, October 2, 1912, p. 1, c. 5.  
In the course of this construction, the Ratterrees exchanged property with the City of Rock Hill in order for the City to be able to straighten Black Street and in order for the Ratterrees to get most of their Railroad Avenue (Trade Street) property in the same block with their Main Street property. The brothers tore down the wooden shacks behind their new Railroad Avenue building and put up several additional brick store rooms. The author remembers reading the cement wall plaque set into the side of the 1912 structure, reciting that Julian S. Starr was the architect.

24. Herald, March 28, 1889, p. 3, c. 2.

25. Herald, April 29, 1905, p. 2, c. 1.