

FERGUSON BARBER
by Louise Pettus

When Ferguson Barber died in Rock Hill in May 1908, his obituary stated that he was the "largest and most successful land owner in York County."

Barber, a native of Chester County, was born in 1832 on Rock Creek about three miles from Richburg, the son of Alexander and Sarah Barber.

He was noted as a planter who very early practiced diversification of crops, terracing, and strip farming. Strip farming was the practice of alternating crops in bands, or strips, so that crop pests would not widely spread. Commercial fertilizers and chemical pesticides did not exist. Barber plowed under green crops and rotated his fields.

Some time before the Civil War, Barber's leg was badly broken by a horse. He stayed in bed for 9 months and remained a cripple for life. Twice he tried to join the Confederacy but was rejected.

In 1867 Barber moved to Rock Hill. He had an interest in several mercantile houses as well as managing several large farms in the county.

In 1882 he returned to Chester County and organized a group of investors who set up the Fishing Creek Manufacturing Company on the west bank of the creek at the village of Lando. Barber was elected president. Within a few years the company went bankrupt. Barber bought the mill and renamed it Lewisville Cotton Mill. In 1898 he went bankrupt. According to Wade Roddey, Barber was the victim of "unscrupulous selling agents."

The Lewisville Mills ended up in the hands of Benjamin Dawson Heath. Heath, a native of upper Lancaster County, had made a fortune from numerous business enterprises, including the Bank of Charlotte (now NCNB), which he founded. Heath changed the name of the mill to Manetta.

Wade Roddey said that Barber could have taken advantage of the bankruptcy laws but that his wife, Elizabeth Watson Barber, was a stout Christian who believed that every penny had to be repaid. The couple sold their fine Richburg home and much of their land and moved to the country and started over.

Barber moved back to Rock Hill. He bought more land and held the majority interest in the Mutual Dry Goods Company of Rock Hill.

Barber was said to have never touched tobacco or whiskey. This alone would mark him as different from most of the men of his day. When the State Dispensary was created in 1892--allowing the state to manufacture and sell alcohol--Barber was violently opposed.

There was a dispensary shop in Tirzah but none in Rock Hill and that largely because of Barber's opposition. Wade Roddey said he vividly remembered the day Rock Hill voted on the issue: "Venerable old Mr. Ferguson H. Barber was early at the voting place, took his seat in a chair and just sat there all day from the time the polls opened until the close. . . . As far as I know he never made any appeal to any of the voters, he just sat there. . . . and stroked that long white beard and when the voting was over Rock Hill had turned thumbs down on whiskey."

Roddey continued, "Prior to the day of voting Mr. Barber had told his friends that he had lived in two whiskey drinking towns, Helena, Arkansas and Rock Hill; and that the only difference was that in Helena, Ark., they threw the murdered men in the Mississippi River while in Rock Hill they gave them a decent burial."

The Record editor wrote about Barber at the time of his death: "Firm always in his convictions and often blunt in his expression of them--when he was a friend to man or cause he could be depended on to the last hour."