

NTARY

After war, Roddey regrouped

■ Young merchant was broke in 1866.

One of Rock Hill's early business leaders, William L. Roddey, was born Aug. 10, 1834, at Roddey's plantation, about 7 miles south of Rock Hill, the son of John and Mary G. Wylie Roddey.

When he was 16 he went to work as a mercantile clerk in Lewisville, Chester County.

In the same pattern of William Henry Belk and many other early merchants, Roddey worked hard, earned the secrets of merchandising, saved his money, waited to marry and in a few years opened a store of his own. He was 26 when he married Anna Cousart Baskin, the daughter of a prominent Chester family. The day of their wedding, South Carolina seceded from the Union.

Roddey entered the ranks of the 24th S.C. regiment as a first lieutenant and eventually became Capt. Roddey, a title he would carry the rest of his life even though, in the closing months of the war, he was appointed colonel.

Wounded at Chickamauga, Roddey returned to battle in Dalton, Ga., where he suffered a head wound and was left for dead on the battlefield. Captured by federal troops, he was held at Johnson's Island prison camp for three months after the war's end.

When Roddey returned to Lewisville, he found that he could not collect what was owed him nor pay his own debts. He borrowed \$2,000, paid off his debts and with a few hundred dollars left, moved to Rock Hill, where he was a



Nearby history

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partner in Wylie, Roddey and Augurs for six years.

Joseph Wylie managed the Chester store and W.L. Roddey the Rock Hill store. From then on it was a great success story. (A biographer wrote that Roddey was penniless in 1866 and when he died was the largest taxpayer in York County.)

His second business was W.L. Roddey & Co. The store was of brick construction, a rarity in 1882. With partners J.E. Roddey, J.F. Reid and S.L. Reid, Capt. Roddey operated the largest, most prosperous store in town. Soon Capt. Roddey and son, William Joseph Roddey, opened the first bank in Rock Hill — First National Bank, which evolved into National Union Bank.

Roddey retired from active involvement in the mercantile business in 1887.

In 1894 the Roddey store was reorganized, and R.E. Saddler, Oran S. Poe and John A. Black were brought into the business with Roddey's sons and the Reids.

After Capt. Roddey's death in 1909, the store continued as Roddey-Poe Mercantile Company. In 1925 the building and goods were bought by Belk Brothers of Char-

lotte and became a part of the Belk department store chain.

Capt. Roddey turned to other enterprises. He became the largest stockholder in Victoria Mill. In 1901 he founded a newspaper named The Journal, soon renamed The Record.

He was treasurer of the Land and Town Site Company that developed Rock Hill's first subdivision, Oakland. He also set up a construction company in 1903 to build India Hook Dam, designed by his son-in-law, W.C. Whitener. (Another son-in-law was Frank Dowd, publisher of The Charlotte Observer.)

Roddey, who has been characterized as "broad-minded, public-spirited, generous and scrupulously honest," served many years as a Rock Hill school trustee, backed the \$60,000 bond that Rock Hill put up to entice Winthrop College and donated 2 acres of land to Clinton Junior College, among many acts of charity.

In a time when most men chewed tobacco and drank heartily, Capt. Roddey was noted for never using either tobacco or alcohol. He owned the first automobile in Rock Hill.

When Capt. Roddey died June 10, 1909, he was a member of the Neely's Creek Associate Reformed Church, but the funeral was held at the ARP church in Rock Hill.

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