

'Father Of Rock Hill'

YORK OBSERVER Sunday, November 5, 1989 91

Nurtured Town 17 Years

James Morrow Ivy Crucial To Development

Old accounts often call James Morrow Ivy the "Father of Rock Hill." It seems strange there is no marker, no street, no park or anything else to commemorate his memory in the town where he had such impact in the latter part of the 19th century.



Nearby
History

**Louise
Pettus**

A small park at Charlotte Avenue and Cedar Street once was named for him, but somehow the name got changed over the years. Ivy donated the land for this park, a small triangle dominated by children's playground equipment.

Who was James Morrow Ivy? He was born Nov. 5, 1838, son of the Rev. Adam Ivy, founder of three Methodist churches, and Ann Morrow of Indian Land in Lancaster County. His father was a planter with nearly 1,500 acres of land who held a major interest in the Turkey Head Mills, a large flour mill on the Catawba River.

Young Ivy was sent to Rock Hill to study under Gen. J.A. Alston, W.H. Thomasson and Col. J.M. White. The next year Alston moved to Winnsboro to head Mount Zion Academy, a distinguished school in its day. Young Ivy followed Alston but stayed only one session. He then enrolled in John R. Shurley's school at Ebenezer, another fine preparatory school.

From Ebenezer Academy, Ivy went to South Carolina College — older and better prepared than most of his classmates. He was a class leader, and when the Civil War broke out became sergeant of the militia company formed by the students and several professors. Ivy witnessed the Fort Sumter bombardment.

Ivy's company became part of Hampton's Legion. He was badly wounded in the shoulder at the Battle of Seven Pines and never recovered the use of his left arm. Out of the Army he married Ann Connor, daughter of one of his commanding officers, and for a time managed her father's business in Lincoln County, N.C.

When his father-in-law died in 1869, Ivy returned to Rock Hill. He established J.M. Ivy and Co. Over the years he had various partners.

In 1877, he merged his firm with Fewell Merchandise. Fewell concentrated on the retail market and Ivy centered his attention on an extensive fertilizer business, banking, and primarily on the buying and selling of cotton.

James Morrow Ivy is thought to have been the first Piedmont merchant to delve into the cotton futures market. According to the Yorkville Enquirer, July 10, 1879: "He began his purchases by this method as early as 1872, and has continued to study, improve and develop the system. It is the system of selling in advance, and purchasing and selling to cover, that has enabled him to deal so largely in spot cotton, and with comparatively, perfect security. . . ."

It was not perfect security. Eventually Ivy lost his entire estate on the futures market in cotton. He could not control worldwide depression and eastern banks' usurious rates.

It was the cotton market developed by Ivy that was the basis for Rock Hill's early growth. Before Ivy came on the Rock Hill scene, the town's merchants were handling about 2,000 bales annually. Within seven years, Ivy was shipping more than 12,000 bales alone. The bales went north by rail.

Ivy was twice elected intendant, or mayor, of Rock Hill. If he saw a business floundering and considered it worthwhile, Ivy would buy it out, reorganize the business and get it on a safe footing. Then he would sell the business to others. He was something of a one-man economic development corporation.

In this way Ivy ended up owning a drugstore known as Ivy & Robertson. He founded a newspaper, the Lantern, in order to have a place to advertise his goods. Eventually, in a series of changes, the newspaper became the Herald.

Ivy initiated the drive that culminated in the establishment of the first steam engine-powered mill in the upcountry, the Rock Hill Cotton Mill. He bought only a few shares of stock in the mill he organized.

Ivy was only 48 years old when he died unexpectedly on Sept. 11, 1886. Looking back, we can say that the 17 years James Morrow Ivy spent in Rock Hill were a key factor in the town's economic development.