

Incorporating Rock Hill
Agnes Love

The town of Rock Hill developed around the railroad in north central South Carolina during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1851 Alexander Templeton Black (1798-1875) deeded land from his 448.5-acre plantation to the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad for right of way and a depot. The flint hill that had to be excavated to construct the railroad gave the area the name "Rock Hill", and a post office by that name was established there on April 17, 1852. Alexander Black also created and sold 23 lots on Main Street and established a village. Between 1855 and 1869, there were three petitions to incorporate Rock Hill and two counter-petitions addressed to the South Carolina General Assembly.

The first petition to incorporate the part of the village of Rock Hill near the depot and including the lots drawn off in the survey was dated October 19, 1855.

To the Honorable the members of the Senate and House of Representatives now met and sitting in General Assembly

We the undersigned citizens and owners of Lots and Lands in and about Rock Hill Depot of the South Carolina and Charlotte Rail Road in York District...would petition your honorable bodies for a charter incorporating the same as the village of Rock Hill of which Rock Hill Depot is the center. Agreeable to a plat of survey made by John Roddy Deputy Surveyor Sept. 24, 1855, herewith annexed with such powers and privileges and under such liabilities and restraints as other corporate villages of the state and your petitioners will ever pray etc. J. Lawrence Moore landowner, Hugh Simpson lot owner, H. L. Broach lot owner, S. S. Elam lot owner, James M. Johnson land owner and lot owner, E. W. Platt lot owner, R. C. Robison lot owner, D. C. Roddy lot owner, Roddy and Co lot owner, A. T. Black land and lot owner, W. W. Moore lot owner, William C. McCloud lot owner, Wm Hamilton lot owner, Wm P. Broach lot owner, Broach, Massey and Co. lot owner, Simpson and Turner lot owner, Isom Kirkpatrick land owner, Wm H Neel land owner, John Johnson lot owner, John Y. Mills citizen, G. W. Broach citizen, B. M. Kerr citizen, D. D. Richardson citizen, G. E. M. Steele citizen, W. L. Roach citizen.

There is no record that any action was ever taken by the South Carolina General Assembly on this petition, and it is possible that this petition was never sent to the legislature.

The railroad was under construction for six years, and in 1856 David Gordon opened a tavern called Gordon House that had a town well, smokehouse, ice house and served as a village hotel. Once the railroad was completed at Rock Hill, the area drew new citizens from other York County townships and surrounding counties. The end of the war and access to a railroad brought an influx of merchants, tradesmen, doctors and bankers to the area. Many new citizens were former Confederate soldiers who were eager to begin a new life; others were businessmen who saw the opportunities afforded in this village. Rock Hill grew.

In July 1868, another petition to incorporate the city of Rock Hill was prepared for the South Carolina General Assembly. The area of the proposed incorporation in this petition was larger with Gordon's Hotel as its center and including a section of the railroad, the group of businesses along Main Street and near the railroad, as well as farms.

To the Honorable General Assembly of the State of South Carolina now in session,

The undersigned petitioners, Citizens of Rock Hill SC, respectfully ask your Honorable Body to pass an act to incorporate the village of Rock Hill SC, the incorporation to include one square mile having Gordons Hotel for the center...Your petitioners show that the incorporation of the Village would greatly promote the interest of the Citizens, without injury of any Law abiding Citizens...therefore, we hope that our petition may be granted. M. W. Russell, W. L. Roddey, C. E. Cobb, Howard Davis, James S. White, G. A. Dunlap, L. G. Keesler, J. P. Wilson, G. J. Freeland, Dock Patton, (P. C.), Thomas Morehead, (P. C.), D. Gordon, S. W. Gilespie, A. Friedheim, Iredell Jones, William Ryan, G. W. Thomason, William Robinson, (P. C.), Charles Wylie, (P.C.), W. R. Henry, D. A. Button, John J. Roach, W. L. Roach, R. M. Kerr, Joseph B. Button, F. M. Davie, (P.C.), W. M. Taylor, B. F. Little, O. G. Stuart, O. Sitgraves, James Daniel, J. A. Walker, R. R. Barr, G. K. Linder, L. P. Sadler, Andy Starr, (P. C.), Sam C. McCullough, R. B. McMair, Tom Steele, (P.C.), John Ratteree, W. G. Finley, J. B. Marks, Owen Matthews, Willie Jones, Adam Gist, (P.C.), L. D. Dearman, W. D. Marks, J. P. Aycock.

Notably absent from this petition were the signatures of the founder of Rock Hill, Alexander Templeton Black, and other large property owners, but the petition was signed by the principal town merchants: A. Friedheim, W. L. Roddey, and J. R. Allen. Among the merchants, tradesmen, laborers, and property owners who signed the petition were eight “persons of color”.

This petition for incorporation met immediately with opposition, and a counter-petition was filed on July 20, 1868 by those who feared a controlling council and greater taxation.

We the undersigned petitioners, owners of real estate within the corporate limits as set forth by the petitioners for the incorporation of the village of Rock Hill, York County, beg leave to petition your Honorable Body not to grant said application. And wherewith enter our protest against it...This little village with a population of about one hundred is a creature of the C. and L. C. Railroad, and about half of its population is of a transient and floating character...From its rugged situation heavy expenditures might be incurred by a reckless and indiscreet council which would of course cause onerous and burdensome taxation upon a few owners of taxable property within the incorporation. A large proportion of the signers of this Petition are not Tax payers & outside the Corporate limits as set forth. We 7 petitioners will ever pray. Respectfully submitted. July 1868. J. Laurence Moore, David B. Miller, I. C. McFadden, A. T. Black, B. H. Moore, Sam Neely

The 1868 petition to incorporate was not approved.

In early 1869 another petition was prepared that presented a rebuttal to the counter-petition and provided a list of commercial and other nonresidential properties in Rock Hill at the time.

To the Honorable The General Assembly.

Your humble petitioners, the residents of Rock Hill situated in the County of York ...do humble pray your honorable bodies that you do by an act of your assembly incorporate the village of Rock Hill situated as above named as a corporate town or village with such privileges as are usually granted to the same-And with an area of one mile square making Gordons Hotel a center... Rock Hill now contains over 300 inhabitants, two churches, eleven stores, two bar rooms, two hotels, one male and one female school, two carriage shops, three Blacksmiths' shops, three shoe shops, one Tannery, one Cabinet Shop, one Masonic Lodge, and Post Office...The village is the center of a large and flourishing agricultural district and

the necessity for a corporate limit with its necessary privileges is demanded both by the extent and flourishing condition of its residents and the necessity of keeping order within its boundaries...Your petitioners would also beg to state that there is no reasonable objection to their petition being granted but on the contrary that it meets with the approval of all law-abiding citizens, property holders and laborers within its limits. The fifty-seven signatures on this petition included many of those found on the second petition: Allen Jones, J. T. Roddey, I. Jones, G. W. Thomasson, C. E. Cobb, W. J. Roddey, D. Gordon, Robert Gordon, J. A. Walker, M. W. Russell, J. J. Roach, W. L. Roach, William H. Roach, S. W. Gilespie, William Ryan, M. Ryan, R. M. Kerr, D. A. Button, James Daniel, J. B. Button, F. M. Davie, A. M. Black, Samuel McCullough, J. P. Aycock, A. F. Fewell, William Little, B. F. Little, William Taylor, O. G. Stewart, Adam Gist, M. R. Morrison, G. J. Freeland, W. R. Henry, S. G. Keesler, Dock Patton, S. D. Dearman, Andy Starr, William D Marks, Thomas Morehead, Owen Matthews, Charles White, John Ratteree, W. McLeod, W. G. Finley, J.H. Witherspoon, O. Sitgraves, R. R. Barr, J. S. White, Levy Hutchinson, C.J. Pride, Minor Steel, T. N. Dunlap, J. R. London.

Again there was opposition from seven persons who owned a majority of the real estate in the area being incorporated which included not just commercial property but also residences and farms.

To The Honorable General Assembly of South Carolina.

We the undersigned having learned that application is made to your honorable body for the incorporation of the Village of Rock Hill in York County beg leave to enter our protest against its being granted, for the following reasons, vis, Rock Hill is a small and rugged village on the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta Rail Road, with a population not exceeding a hundred or hundred and twenty-five persons-and a larger portion of it of a floating and unsettled character. We are unable to perceive how any particular benefit or advantage to the place with its small population is to be derived from its being incorporated. Its rugged location, heavy waste of earth in part from the railroad and muddy streets render it susceptible of a heavy expenditure of money-and its management placed in the hands of an indiscreet and extravagant council which is probable-would result deleteriously to the great injury of those most interested. From the limits proposed to be embraced in the petition for incorporation many are included in the suburbs who would be subjected to a heavy tax, which they feel they would be unable to meet in addition to their other taxes. We disclaim all idea or intention of interfering in the management of other peoples affairs, if citizen of Rock Hill wish to incorporate their own property let them do so, but we most earnestly protest against them incorporating ours-And we will ever pray. January 12, 1870. Captain A. E. Hutchinson, J. Lawrence Moore, A T. (Alexander Templeton) Black, Dr. R. H. Hope, Ann White, Andrew Hutchinson White, and Elvira Miller (widow of David B. Miller).

The signing to this represent four-fifths of the real estate to be embraced in the proposed corporate limits of Rock Hill.

The report from the South Carolina General Assembly Committee of Incorporation stated, "The petition of Sundry Citizens of Rock Hill for and against the incorporating of the Village, beg leave to report that they have considered the same and recommend that the prayer of the Petitioners asking for the Incorporation of said Village be granted." The 1869 petition to incorporate Rock Hill was approved on February 26, 1870.

