

RUFUS BARRINGER.

From: J.B. Alexander, A History of Mecklenberg County from 1740 to 1900

Rufus Barringer, fourth son of Paul Barringer and Elizabeth Brandon, was born at Poplar Grove, Cabarrus county, December 2, 1821.

He was prepared for college by R. I. McDowell at Sugar Creek Academy and graduated at Chapel Hill in 1842. He read law with his brother, D. M. Barringer, and then under Judge Pearson, practicing in Cabarrus and neighboring counties. He, like his father, was Whig in politics. He was a member of the House of Commons in 1848, and of the State Senate in 1849, and was a Bell and Everett elector in 1860. Like his father, he was strongly opposed to secession and predicted that it would result in long and bloody war. Seeing that war was inevitable, he warned the Legislature to arm the State and prepare for the support of troops, himself volunteering for the war and meaning it.

His great-grandfather, Caleb Blackwelder, gave six sons to his country during the Revolution. His grand-father, John Paul Barringer, suffered from the Tories; his uncle, John Barringer, was captain of a company; his father volunteered for the war of 1812, and his maternal ancestors were active in defence of the country. Nothing less could be expected of Rufus Barringer than that at the fall of Sumter, he should respond to the call of his country and volunteer for her defence. He enlisted for the war in the Cabarrus Rangers April 19, 1861, and was chosen captain of the company, which became Company F, First North Carolina Cavalry, Ninth State Troops. His commission bears date of May 16, 1861. Under fine drilling and through the excellent discipline of Robert Ransom, its first Colonel, this regiment became the best in the Confederate service. Under Hampton and Fitzhugh Lee, its history was glorious in every campaign.

In an old paper there is found an item headed "Won't Go to Congress." "While others are trying to get out of the army by being elected to Congress, Maj. Rufus Barringer refuses to go to Congress to remain with the army. Maj. Barringer is right, for the country needs all able-bodied men in the field. We copy his letter.

"Orange Court House, Va., Oct. 17, 1863,

"I have recently received numerous solicitations to become a candidate for Congress in the Eighth District. These solicitations I have uniformly declined. Within the last few days I have learned that many of my friends still propose voting for me, whether a candidate or not. Whilst I am deeply grateful to all who have thus manifested an interest in my behalf and propose giving me this testimonial of their confidence, I deem it due alike to them and to myself to state, that for many reasons I much prefer my name should not be thus used.

"I entered the army from a sense of duty alone, counting the cost and knowing the sacrifices.

"Our great object is not yet obtained and I do not consider it consistent with my obligations here to accept any civil or political office during the war. I think it better for those in service to stand by their colors whilst those at home should all unite in a cordial and earnest support of the

authorities in feeding, clothing and otherwise sustaining the gallant men (and their families) who are fighting not only for our rights, but for the safety of our homes and firesides. My chief desire is to see all party bickerings allayed. The army is not faint-hearted and will nobly perform its duty to the country.

“If croakers, grumblers and growlers who torment themselves and all around them with imaginary evils, could only lay aside their fears. If hoarders, speculators and money makers could only be educated to forget their selfish ends for a season. If conscripts, skulkers and deserters could only be got to their commands and all come up to the work like patriots and men, the army, by the blessing of God, would soon secure us victory and peace. Oh! that those men would reflect upon the error of their way and open their hearts to the call of their bleeding country. My prayers are that all dissensions amongst us in North Carolina may be healed and that headed by our sworn and chosen leaders, President Davis and Governor Vance, the party, appealing alike to our duty, our honor, our interest and our safety would now consecrate themselves to their country.”

Among his most prized treasures were letters of commendation from R. E. Lee, Hampton and Fitz. Lee to the “Old First.” He was promoted Major August 26, 1863; Lieutenant-Colonel October 17, 1863, and Brigadier-General June, 1864, his brigade consisting of the First, Second, Third and Fifth Regiments. Gen. Barringer was in seventy-six actions and was thrice wounded most severely at Brandy Station. He was conspicuous at the battles of Willis’ Church, Brandy Station, Auburn Mills, Buckland Races, where he led the charge, and Davis’ Farm, where he commanded. He commanded a division at Reams’ Station. His brigade was distinguished at Chamberlain Run, the last decided Confederate victory, where it forded a stream one hundred yards wide, saddle girth deep, under a galling fire, and drove back a division of Federal cavalry, March 31, 1865. On April 3rd, at Namozine Church, he was taken prisoner by a party of “Jesse Scouts” disguised as Confederates. (Among the scouts were Col. Young and Capt. Rowland.) He was taken to City Point with Gens. Ewell and Custis Lee. Lincoln in Congress had desked with his elder brother, D. M. Barringer, and he asked for an interview, stating that he had “never before met a live Confederate general in full uniform.” His party was sent to the old capitol prison and after Lincoln’s death, transferred to Fort Delaware, remaining in confinement until August 5, 1865.

“His courage, efficiency and military services won him a place alongside of the foremost cavalry leaders of the day.” But he cared for no honors which he could not share with “the brave and self-sacrificing private of North Carolina, the glory of the Confederate Army,” as he was wont to say, and he was ever anxious that justice should be given them in history. On one of his last days he pleaded with an honored Confederate captain to write of the brave deeds of his regiment, but was answered, “No, General; I have been thirty years trying to forget the war.” This met with the response, “You are wrong, all wrong; it is due to yourself, as to them, that history give them the honor to which they are entitled by their bravery and self-sacrifice.”

His whole heart was in the honor of his State in war and in peace. He was eager to have the true record published, but he himself felt unequal to any part of the work. Finally, in November, 1894, Judge Clark plead with him, saying: “You are very busy; only busy men have the energy and talent for the work. Your record as a soldier satisfies me you will not decline this part of

duty. I respectfully request that you write the history of the Ninth Regiment, N.C.S.T. (First Cavalry). Please acknowledge your acceptance of this assignment to duty, the last which the Confederate soldier can ask of you.” Though on his sick bed, he called for notes, clippings, rosters, etc., and as a labor of love, wrote the article for the Regimental History, dictating to his wife, but correcting the proofs himself.

As Gen. Barringer said, he “staked all and lost all” by the war. He then resumed the practice of law, removed to Charlotte in 1866 and formed partnership with Judge James Osborne, giving the closest attention to business and making his client’s interest his own.

He disliked litigation and used his influence with his clients for compromise. For object lesson to this effect, he kept hanging in his office a print of two farmers quarreling over a cow; one had the cow by the tail and the other had her by the horns, while the lawyer sat quietly on his stool getting all the milk. I copy from his journal January, 1844, his first court : “I had one case of some importance. We agreed to leave it to arbitration. I got my client off remarkably well. He had been sued for \$300, but the plaintiff did not get a cent. I got a fee of \$5.00.” Seeing that he put his whole soul into the case of his client, one asked him how he felt when he lost a case. “I do the best that is in me for my client, and then accept the consequences.” Just so he had done with the result of the war.

Being convinced that it was wisest for the South to accept the reconstruction acts of 1867, he allied himself with the Republican party, and though very sensitive to the opinions of his fellow men, he was tenacious of his principles and no amount of ridicule or opposition could make him swerve from what he considered the part of duty. But “during the most violent and bitter struggle in the State, political difference detracted nothing in the public estimation from the substantial worth of his personal character.” And when in 1875, the State Convention was held to amend the Constitution, he was elected as a Republican from the Democratic county of Mecklenburg; and in 1880, though defeated for Lieutenant-Governor, he went far ahead of his party in his own county.

In 1884, Gen. Barringer retired from the active practice of law and devoted himself to his farming interests and to literary pursuits.

He was much interested in general education, made it a point of paying tuition for some needy boy or girl, and was largely influential in establishing the graded school in Charlotte in 1874, advocating an industrial feature in connection with it. He was also a warm advocate for the Agricultural and Mechanical College, and was numbered among the first trustees. He was for years trustee of Davidson College. He and Dr. Hutchison and Col. Myers were for a number of years trustees of the Biddle University, which was included in the home mission work of the Northern Presbyterian Board. He was greatly interested in watching the result of educating the colored man. One who was intimately associated said : “The one thing about Gen. Barringer that struck me above all others, was his love for his fellow men. He was a man of broad and true thought. We had never had any conversation, but what he spoke of the different classes and how to better their conditions.

“He was always thinking of how to better conditions, and was filled with a high sense of duty.

His thoughts went out beyond himself.

“Another thing that impressed me about Gen. Barringer was, that while I never knew him in perfect health, he never grew old.

“He sympathized with the thoughts and schemes of every man. All schemes ecclesiastical and social, he entered into with zeal and interest. He was largely influential in the establishment of the library in Charlotte, and of the Historical Society, contributing freely to both.”

I quote from another that knew him well: “Gen. Barringer was a remarkable man in many respects. He was one of the most liberal and generous citizens Charlotte had. His hand was always in his pocket to give to any good cause and his gifts were munificent. He was eminently a just man and was business to the core. He required the last farthing promised or agreed to be paid, not for money's sake, but for the sake of the agreement, and yet the next moment would give freely to some good cause.”

He was a student and devoted much time to political economy. He had great faith in the “power of the press,” and frequently wrote for the papers on various subjects. He was progressive in his ideas beyond the times.

Besides the history of the First North Carolina Cavalry, he published a pamphlet for the Historical Society on “The North Carolina Railroad,” one on “The Battle of Ramsour's Mill,” and a series of “Sketches on the Old Dutch Side.” These brought him letters from all over the South and West.

One of a large family, happy in each other, he followed in the footsteps of his parents, ruling well his household, in a firmness of love, believing with Ruskin, “There is a something in a good man's home which cannot be renewed in every tenement that rises on its ruin.” A young woman who had been much in his home, said: “When alone in the great crowds of New York battling with poverty, it has rested and comforted me to think of his home and to know that there are such men in the world.”

Gen. Barringer was married three times. His first wife was Eugenia, daughter of Dr. Robt. Hall Morrison. To them were born two children, Anna, who died at maturity, and Paul Brandon Barringer, now of the University of Virginia, with a large family of his own.

The second wife was Rosalie Chunn, of Asheville, who had one son, Rufus Barringer. In 1870 Gen. Barringer married Margaret Long, of Hillsboro, who, with her son, Osmond Long Barringer, lives at the home place in Charlotte.

He was a man who lived not only in the present, but in the future, and on the approach of the three score and ten allotted to man, he felt that the world's work were better done by more active men.

Though not shirking any evident duty, he resigned formally from responsibilities as school trustee, bank director, church elder, etc.

In 1894, he felt his health declining and with his usual methodical care and forethought, he “set his house in order,” arranged his papers and affairs, and instructed his agent, so that no confusion might arise on account of his death. To the end his mind was clear and strong. He read and kept up with current events in the daily papers to the day of his death, February 3, 1895. He bade his family “Farewell,” folded his hands and fell asleep.

Though liberal to all denominations, Gen. Barringer was in faith strongly Calvinistic.

He said: “When a young man and about to connect myself with the church. I resolved to take no man's word, and to search the Scriptures for myself. This I did and to my mind, the Presbyterian doctrine was plainly set forth in every chapter. I have never seen cause to change my belief or to be troubled by any new doctrine.”

He passed through deep waters, but said: “Through it all God sustained me.”

On one of his last days, he said to his pastor: “If you can unfold to me any new truth of that better land, do so.”

The reply was : “I cannot; all I say is, we shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness.” To this he calmly answered : “It is enough.” — *Contributed.*