

**First Families**  
**of**  
**Newberry County**  
**South Carolina**  
**Volume 1**

By John Rigdon

2            First Families of Newberry County

First Families of Newberry County Vol. 1

By John Rigdon

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## Overview

The First Families of Newberry County, SC is an on-going project to research and publish information on the first families of Newberry, South Carolina. Today Newberry County has a population of 38,000 people.

This project focuses on the families who were in Newberry County area prior to 1800. Unlike many other counties in the state, the County of Newberry has retained its original boundaries through the years. Before the year 1785, Newberry County was a part of Ninety-Six District, which then included a very extensive territory in the upper part of the State. In 1785 Ninety-Six was divided into the Counties of Edgefield, Abbeville, Newberry, Laurens, Union, and Spartanburg.

Newberry County was formed from the Ninety Six District in 1785. Prior to its formal founding, the area was the site of several American Revolutionary War battles: Williams' Plantation, Dec. 31, 1780; Mud Lick, March 2, 1781; and Bush River, May 1781.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sciway.net/hist/amrev/engagements.html>

town of Newberry was founded in 1789 as the county seat.

On January 1, 1800, Newberry District created from Ninety-Six District, with the same boundaries as Newberry County. Between January 1, 1800, and April 16, 1868, judicial districts were the principal administrative subdivisions of the state, while counties survived mostly as geographical references.<sup>2</sup>

On April 16, 1868, Newberry District was eliminated when the new state constitution abolished all judicial districts. Newberry County continued and assumed all functions of local government from both judicial districts and parishes.<sup>3</sup>

Newberry, like other parts of the middle sections of the State, was settled by people representing the various nationalities of Europe-English, Scotch, Irish, Welch, German, Dutch, and French-English predominating so greatly as to make the English language the language of the country. Like other parts of the upper

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<sup>2</sup> S.C. Acts 1798, pp. 37-44

<sup>3</sup> Swindler, 8:497

country, Newberry received many settlers from the North, from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina; and also perhaps some few from colonies farther North. Some also came from Georgia, as in the early days of that Colony, there were laws prohibiting the sale and use of rum and other ardent spirits, and also the introduction of African slaves. Many Georgia settlers, not liking these laws, moved over into Carolina where the use of both was allowed, No matter from what region they came, nor of what nationality, they were a hardy, brave, energetic, industrious, adventurous set of men, such as pioneers must always be.

The origin of the name Newberry is unknown. It is likely an alternate spelling for the English town "Newbury," but the popular notion has always been that the surrounding fields and forests were as pretty as a "new berry."

Large scale cotton farming replaced small farms in the nineteenth century, and the coming of the railroad made Newberry a leading cotton market. Cotton was the primary crop grown in Newberry County before the Civil War and there were a number of plantations throughout the county. Newberry became a thriving trade center once the railroad arrived in the early 1850s. Lutheran-supported Newberry College was established in 1856.

The Civil War not only interrupted growth in the county, it changed its social order. The first cotton mills were introduced in the county in the 1880s. <sup>4</sup> Jurist John Belton O'Neill (1795-1863), historian David Duncan Wallace (1874-1951) and S.C. Governor and U. S. Senator Coleman Livingston Blease (1868-1942) were all Newberry County natives.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the town of Newberry, the following towns and communities are found in the county.

- Little Mountain
- Peak
- Pomaria
- Prosperity
- Silverstreet
- Whitmire

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.newberrycounty.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.statelibrary.sc.gov/newberry-county>

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