

Lemly, Samuel ^[1]

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1 Mar. 1791–14 Jan. 1848

Samuel Lemly, builder and architect, was prominent in Rowan County ^[2] from 1817 to 1841. Little is known about him and only three structures can be definitely attributed to his genius. He probably lived first in Craven County ^[3], whose records for 1816 list him as a house joiner. In 1817, according to county records, he purchased land in Rowan. The 1820 census of that county reveals that Lemly had a household of twelve, indicating that a number of apprentices lived in his home. The court records show that at one time or another he trained seven apprentices in the carpentry trade. But he is chiefly known as a builder, and during the time he spent in Salisbury he trained many young men in the trade. When Michael Davis, a man who built many fine homes in Salisbury, died in 1881, the editor of the local newspaper wrote that he had trained under Samuel Lemly, "at that time a master builder here."

Lemly's work in Salisbury drew attention from county officials, who in 1824 appointed him commissioner of public buildings. During the same year he was awarded a contract to erect a bridge over the South Yadkin River ^[4] between Second Creek and the confluence of the South Yadkin and the Yadkin at a place commonly called "The Point." In building the bridge, Lemly followed the design of Ithiel Town ^[5]'s "Patent Bridge." Covered with shingles and made from heart of pine, it has long since disappeared. Lemly was so fond of Town's work that he named a son after him.

In 1825 the newly organized Presbyterians ^[6] selected Lemly to build their church. The cornerstone was laid in solemn ceremonies on 30 August, and the building was completed in 1826. The main entrance was on West Innes Street through a Greek revival portico supported by Ionic columns. Over the portico was a domed belfry and dark green shutters flanked the double-range windows. This building was replaced by a new church in 1892. Lemly, with Jacob Stirewalt, also designed and built the Cabarrus County ^[7] Courthouse erected in 1824. This structure, of which no description remains, burned on 15 Feb. 1875.

While in Salisbury, Lemly distinguished himself in military and church affairs as well. He joined the local military ^[8] company, becoming adjutant (1829) and then colonel (1831) of the Sixty-third Regiment, North Carolina Militia. A dedicated member of the First Presbyterian Church, he served as an elder from 1832 to 1841 and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Sunday school, the Rowan Bible Society, and the Temperance Society.

Lemly became associated with Charles Fisher ^[9], a leading statesman of Rowan County ^[2], in two enterprises. The first was a foundry at the falls of the South Yadkin River near the present site of Cooleemee ^[10]. The second was a partnership in a plantation in Mississippi; under the terms of the partnership, which was to last for seven years, each would contribute an equal amount of land and enslaved people to work the property. Apparently the scheme succeeded, for in 1841 Lemly packed his family into two or three heavy wagons drawn by four horses each and moved to Mississippi. He died in Jackson, Miss., leaving a widow and eight children.

Samuel Lemly married Elizabeth Furr, the daughter of Tobias Furr, on 2 Jan. 1811. A daughter Mary Elizabeth married John I. Shaver, for many years mayor of Salisbury and the town's wealthiest citizen. One son, Samuel, Jr., married Emeline Steele of York District, S.C. Another son, Henry A., married Amanda, the daughter of Joseph Conrad of Stokes County ^[11]; their son, William A. Lemly, became a prominent banker in Winston-Salem.

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Additional Resources:

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