

Barrow, Robert Ruffin ^[1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1979; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, April 2023

1798–27 July 1875



Robert Ruffin Barrow. Portrait painted by Rudolph Bohunek, between 1909-1913.

Courtesy of the Encyclopedia of Louisiana.

^[2]Robert Ruffin Barrow, planter, secessionist, and Confederate financier, was born in Halifax County ^[3], the eldest child of Bartholomew Barrow and his first wife, Ascension Slatter, daughter of James Slatter and Charity Cotten. He was reared in North Carolina a few miles east of Enfield and accompanied his father to Louisiana in 1820. He settled in Terrebonne Parish in 1829 and called his home Residence. Before the Civil War ^[4], he built an agricultural empire equaled by few planters of the antebellum ^[5] South. At the time of the war, he owned sixteen plantations in three Louisiana parishes, large land holdings in Texas, and enslaved over seven hundred people across all of the holdings. Barrow did not confine his interests solely to planting but was involved also with the political issues of his day and the coming of the Civil War. He wrote and published many pamphlets on national and regional events and politics, several of which have survived. In a twenty-page pamphlet, On the Political Parties Of the Country ^[6], he decried secession as a means of settling the South's problems.

When war came, Barrow was sixty-three years old and did not serve in the Confederate Army ^[7]. He did support the Confederacy, however, by financing the construction of the Pioneer, ^[8] one of the first submarines ever designed. The builder of the Pioneer was Captain Horace Hunley, Barrow's brother-in-law. The boat was launched on Lake Pontchartrain near New Orleans in February 1862 and was demonstrated with partial success. It sank on one of its early trials, however, and was raised, only to be immersed again to prevent its capture by Admiral Farragut ^[9] of the Union navy. After the war it was recovered from the bottom of Lake Pontchartrain and was exhibited in Jackson Square, New Orleans. Later in the war, Hunley built other submarines, one of which, the Hunley ^[10], sank the Federal warship Housatonic ^[11] at Charleston, S.C.

In 1850, at the age of fifty-two, Barrow married Volumnia Washington Hunley of Smith County, Tenn. They made their home at Residence, near Houma, La., and had two children, Roberta and Robert R., Jr., who both married and left descendants. Barrow died in New Orleans and was first buried in Girod Cemetery there; his remains were later removed to Magnolia Cemetery at Houma.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

This person enslaved and owned other people. Many Black and African people, their descendants, and some others were enslaved in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865. It was common for wealthy landowners, entrepreneurs, politicians, institutions, and others to enslave people and use enslaved labor during this

period. To read more about the enslavement and transportation of African people to North Carolina, visit <https://aahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-0> [12]. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery> [13]. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

References:

William Barrow Floyd, *The Barrow Family of Old Louisiana* (1963).

Additional Resources:

"Robert R. Barrow." *Slave Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States* 1850. Lafourche Crossing, Lafourche, Louisiana, United States. National Archives Microfilm Publication M432. Roll 244. Accessed April 20, 2023 from <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MVZX-R5S> [14].

Robert Ruffin Barrow search results in WorldCat: https://www.worldcat.org/search?q=au%3ABarrow%2C+Robert+Ruffin.&qt=hot_author [15]

Robert Ruffin Barrow Papers, 1811-1858 (collection no. 02407-z). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/b/Barrow,Robert_Ruffin.html [16] (accessed April 2, 2013).

William Barrow Floyd, *The Barrow Family of Old Louisiana* (1963): <https://www.worldcat.org/title/barrow-family-of-old-louisiana/oclc/7891831> [17]

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