

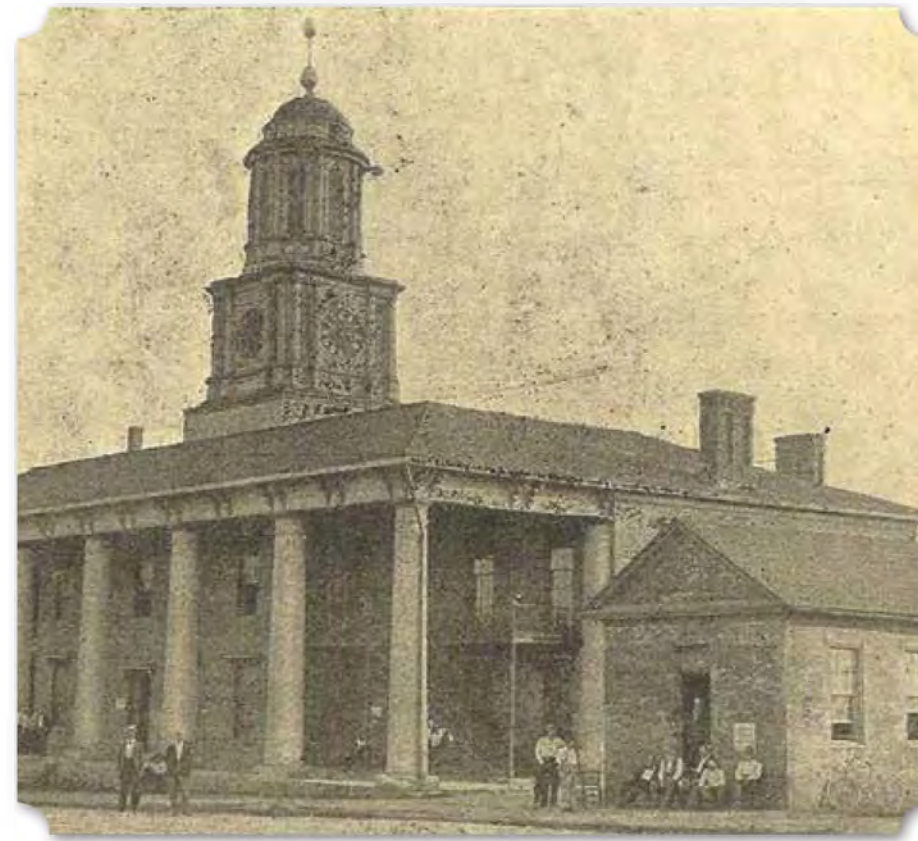
The barbershop was added to the church and pool hall as a significant social refuge still relied on today. The barbers of Florence represent a widely varying set of experiences through the turn of the century.

Research has uncovered at least seven barbers in Florence's African American history. The area's earliest known professional barber of color was John H. Rapier, Sr. (1808-1869). Like many successful people of color in North Alabama, Rapier was the son of a slave named Sally and a wealthy white businessman named Richard Rapier. John accompanied Richard Rapier everywhere and served as an assistant of sorts. When Richard Rapier died in 1826, he stipulated in his will that John be allotted \$1000 and his freedom, which was granted by the courts in 1829. By the age of 21, John Rapier was a free, light-skinned man with some funds to start a life of his own. Within a few years, Rapier had established himself in Florence, married a free woman, fathered several children, and opened a barber shop on Court Street. From at least 1831 to 1857, Rapier was Florence's only barber. His substantial success allowed him the financial independence to own the building on Court Street, a house on Cedar Street, property in Alabama, Minnesota Territory, and Canada, and to send his four free-born children to school in Nashville, Tennessee.

John H. Rapier, Sr. had two half-brothers, James and Henry, whose mother was also Sally and their fathers prominent white men. While the brothers did not live or work in Florence, they were both freedmen and barbers. Barbering was a skill often shared by family members. Fathers would teach sons, and brothers would share the profession. Even John H. Rapier Sr.'s granddaughter became a hairdresser, or beautician, among her many entrepreneurial ventures.

Bessie Rapier Foster (1882-1962) was the granddaughter of John H. Rapier, Sr. and his second wife, an enslaved woman named Lucretia McAlister (1825-between 1860-1869). She became Florence's first known businesswoman of color. Ms. Foster was truly an entrepreneur; at one time or another, she was a hairdresser/beautician, chiropodist, theater owner, and billiard hall owner. Although she was successful in many of her ventures, she was also generous to her community and

was known in Florence as hardworking and thrifty. In 1916, Ms. Foster opened a theater for people of color on Sweetwater Street, present day Dr. Hicks Boulevard, known as the Pastime Theatre for Negroes. She was involved in the founding of Blessed Martin De Porres Catholic Mission on West College Street in the 1950s. She owned and operated the Improved Pool Room in 1960. All of these business and philanthropic ventures provided people of the community places to gather, socialize, and worship.



(Above) John H. Rapier Sr.'s Barbershop next to the Courthouse, Circa. 1900 (Florence-Lauderdale Public Library)

The second barber to set up shop in Florence was James G. Goin (c.1834-after 1892). Goin was also a freeman whose father was most likely a white man. He is known to have married a woman named Mary Jane Legwood in Lawrence County in 1855, then moved to Florence sometime about 1857. Goin eventually set up a barber shop in Florence and became Rapier's business rival. In 1871, a third barber joined the profession in Florence, and he and Goin went into business together.



(Left) Photograph of Bessie Rapier Foster (Florence-Lauderdale Public Library) (Below) Excerpt of 1913 Florence City Directory for Manicurists – Ms. Foster is Denoted as a Person of Color by * (Ancestry.com, U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995) (Bottom) Excerpt of 1920 Florence City Directory for Hairdressers – People of Color, such as Ms. Foster, are Denoted by * (Ancestry.com, U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995)

***MAGAZINES**
STUTTS J W DRUG CO, 101 N Court
MANICURES
 *Foster Bessie, 101½ S Court
***MANUFACTURERS—COTTON GOODS**
ASHCRAFT COTTON MILLS, Terrace cor Oak

HAIR DRESSERS
 *Foster Bessie, 105½ S Court
 Shaw T B Mrs, Reeder Annex
HARDWARE—WHOLESALE
PUTTEET A T, 216-218 N Court

Also, during Reconstruction, Mr. Goin made a run for Lauderdale County Sheriff. While his campaign was not successful, he must have been well-liked enough around town to have tried for such a position. By 1880, James Goin was no longer in Florence. A man by that name was enumerated on the Evansville, Indiana census in 1880 living with his brother and working as a white-washer. Mr. Goin came back to Alabama by 1892, but to Birmingham, not Florence.

Interestingly, James Goin filed a case with the Southern Claims Commission after the Civil War. Looking for compensation for goods and property lost during the war, Mr. Goin's statement reveals an interesting