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A face from the past

Who was William Rosamond—Furman student, carpenter, soldier of the Civil War?

One of the more unique artifacts in Furman’s Special Collections and Archives is a plaster life mask of William Nathaniel Rosamond, a ministerial student who attended Furman in 1855. According to a 1941 newspaper article, the casting was made that same year at Gower, Cox and Markley’s coach factory in Greenville, by a fellow student. The cast was presented to the Furman Museum on the downtown campus in 1940 by Rosamond’s daughter, Ida Anne Rosamond.

William Rosamond was born in Greenville about 1836. Before attending Furman, he worked in his father’s Greenville carpentry shop alongside four apprentices. Rosamond married Nancy Caroline Westmoreland (1835–1904) about 1857, and they had three children while they lived in Greenville: Fannie, Ida, and Sidney.

A tintype showing Rosamond in uniform was given to the Furman library in 1967. According to military records, Rosamond served in the Civil War in the 16th SC Infantry Regiment, Greenville, entering at the rank of sergeant and leaving service with the rank of private.

Newspaper accounts and business advertisements give clues about Rosamond’s life after the Civil War. He moved his family to Mexico, MO, between 1872 and 1876, and his wife ran a millinery shop while Rosamond was an agent for the Walton Tub Washing Machine and Centennial Wringer Company, though his profession is listed as “carpenter” on the 1880 US Census. Rosamond died on February 20, 1897, and is buried in Mexico, MO, alongside his wife and his daughter, Fannie. His son Sidney and daughter Ida are buried in Greenville County.

The life mask and tintype of Rosamond are currently on display in the James B. Duke Library as part of our fall exhibition, “We Are Furman: Alumni Collections in Special Collections and Archives,” and can be viewed whenever the library is open, through the end of December.