

Percy Wollaston

Percy Wollaston, an early settler in Martin County, had a significant impact on Fairmont and Martin County. Not only was he the first Mayor of Fairmont, he was involved in a number of entrepreneurial endeavors in Fairmont and Martin County as well.

Percy Wollaston, his wife, and his thirteen children lived on Homewood Drive in a house that was built in 1876. It was described as a sixteen room English mansion, and at one time it was considered the finest house in Fairmont.

Wollaston was born in Leeds, England, in 1825. He married Catherine Mossop in 1848, and shortly thereafter moved to the United States. They lived briefly in New York, South Carolina, and then in St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada, where he operated a flour mill. With the exception of one child born in Canada, all his other children were born in England and were also educated there.

The Wollastons moved back to England in 1851, at which time he became involved in the shipping business.

In 1876, they moved to Fairmont. He built a mercantile store at North Avenue and Second Street at a time when there were very few buildings in town. He continued in the mercantile business until 1891.

Wollaston was involved in a number of other entrepreneurial ventures. He established the Merchants and Farmers Bank in 1882, he built a flour mill operated by a 60 foot wind wheel that he ran until 1889, and he was involved in farming, as he owned 460 acres of land.

Mr. Wollaston was also considered to be the leader of the large English Colony that was instrumental in establishing Fairmont as the community it was to eventually become. In addition, he was the first mayor of Fairmont, and was later reelected to that position. He is also credited with founding the Episcopal Church in Fairmont.

Wollaston left Fairmont in 1896 and moved to Victoria, British Columbia. He passed away there on June 30, 1909. He was remembered as a good business man, one who was punctual and orderly in his business matters and his private life as well.

He was especially remembered for his resolve involving the failure of the Merchants and Farmers Bank, of which he was the largest stockholder. It was said that he gave up all his personal property, even his home, in his old age so that all of his creditors would be fully compensated. The June 9, 1909, edition of the *Martin County Sentinel* stated the following about Percy Wollaston in his obituary: “The world is better and happier for the possession of such men, and when they are gone there is deep sorrow and regret felt by all who knew them.” Perhaps some of the titans of business and industry in today’s world would do well to take a lesson from the life of Percy Wollaston, undoubtedly a man of conviction, honor, and integrity.

For more information about Percy Wollaston, the early English Colonists that settled this area, and other Martin County Pioneers, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.