

Foard, Osborne Giles ^[1]

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5 Feb. 1820–13 Oct. 1882

See also: [Foard, John Frederick](#) ^[2] (from the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*)

Osborne Giles Foard, planter-enslaver, state legislator, contractor, local official, and religious lay leader, was born in the fork of the Yadkin and South Yadkin rivers in what is now southern [Davie County](#) ^[3], the second of three children of Frederick (1783–1831) and Eunice Doomas Bradshaw (1792–1830) Foard. Having been orphaned in 1831, he went with his two brothers to live with his uncle, John Foard (1790–1866), at South River. He received his formal education in 1832, and possibly 1833/34, near Mocksville from the mysterious schoolmaster, [Peter Stuart Ney](#) ^[4]. Shortly afterward, he went to Salisbury where he worked as a clerk in a general merchandise store owned by his older brother, Robert Wyatte Foard (1811–76).

On 15 December 1838, with his brother Robert, Foard purchased from [Thomas Gilchrist Polk](#) ^[5], brother of President [James Knox Polk](#) ^[6], 1,268 acres of land in western [Rowan County](#) ^[7] near present-day Cleveland. Here he soon built a Greek Revival plantation home, later known as Rowan Mills, and eventually purchased his brother's interest in the land. In order to care for his household, the health of the people he enslaved, and the surrounding community, Foard secured the medical services of Dr. Matthew A. Locke, paid him a regular salary, and provided him with living quarters and an office on the plantation. Later, he brought his ailing schoolmaster friend, Ney, to live on the property. While there, Ney instructed the children of the Third Creek community. Shortly before his death in 1846, Ney claimed that he was really Michael Ney, marshal of the empire under Napoleon Bonaparte of France. Foard administered Ney's meager estate and erected a tombstone at his grave in the Third Creek Presbyterian Church cemetery.

Before 1856, Foard and his brother John built a five-story steam flour mill on Osborne's plantation and became the largest flour producers in the county. According to the 1860 census, this mill—known as Rowan Mills—produced 5,000 barrels of flour, which was more than three times that of the nearest competitor for that year. In 1856, the nearby community of Cowansville (now Cleveland) had its name changed to Rowan Mills with Foard as the postmaster. Foard was one of the first [tobacco](#) ^[8] growers of the region, and he was instrumental in forming a county agricultural society. In 1851, with his brother, Dr. [John Frederick Foard](#) ^[2] (1827–1909), he formed a corporation to build the Salisbury and Taylorsville [plank road](#) ^[9], a toll road from Salisbury to Third Creek. The venture proved to be unsuccessful due to unforeseen costs of construction and upkeep. Foard also was one of the original backers in the movement to construct the [North Carolina Railroad](#) ^[10] from Goldsboro to Charlotte and the [Western North Carolina Railroad](#) ^[11] from Salisbury to Asheville. He supported both of these projects politically and financially, and contracted to build portions of the railroads at a profit.

In 1861, he moved his household to Olin in [Redell County](#) ^[12] and lived there until after the [Civil War](#) ^[13], when he returned to his plantation at Rowan Mills. Olin had become a center for the formation of a Methodist college, and Foard loaned the project a large sum that he never fully recovered after it failed.

In 1871, Foard was residing in Newton where he served a term as mayor from 1873 to 1875. In 1878, he was appointed to serve an unexpired term as justice of the peace for Newton Township; he was reappointed in 1881 and served until his death. Twice elected as Rowan County's representative to [the legislature](#) ^[14], he served in 1850 as a member of the [Whig party](#) ^[15] and in 1866 as a [Democrat](#) ^[16].

Foard had joined the Methodist church in 1837 and, together with his brother John and Elkana D. Austin, formed and built Ebenezer Methodist Church. He also organized, built, and maintained a Methodist [camp meeting](#) ^[17] ground on his plantation and was a leader and supporter of the [Sons of Temperance](#) ^[18] movement.

He was married three times, first, on 22 November 1838 to Lucile L. Ellis (1818–45), sister of Governor [John Willis Ellis](#) ^[19]. They had three children, but none lived past the age of two. His second marriage was on 15 January 1846 to Ann Foster Cowan (1821–54). To this union were born four children: Robert Osborne, Ann Elizabeth, Mary Alice, and Hubbard Milton. His third marriage was to Elizabeth Ann Allison (1831–97) on 11 October 1854, and they had nine children: Dr. Frederick Theophilus, Lelia Doomas, Orston Bradshaw, John Fletcher, Lucy Lee, Charles Deems, Minnie Bosanquet, Lillian Allison, and Ella Giles.

Foard died from complications of pneumonia and was buried in the Eastview Cemetery, Newton.

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