

## “The Rainbow of Promise”

This section will help you meet the following objectives:

**8.3.03** Identify and evaluate the impact of individual reformers and groups and their programs.

**8.3.08** Examine the impact of national events on North Carolina.



**Above:** Christopher Bechtler opened a private mint in 1831.

### Did You Know?

A mint is a place where coins are made. Coins were made at the Charlotte Mint until the state seceded in 1861.

### As you read, look for:

- North Carolina’s own gold rush
- improvements in transportation and education
- the shift of power from the Whigs to the Democrats
- vocabulary terms **superintendent of public instruction, literate, free suffrage**

**North Carolina’s awakening was notable** in ways other than just education and economics. The number of people who lived in towns doubled. Between 1835 and 1850, the number of newspapers published in the state more than doubled. After 1850, Raleigh and Fayetteville had daily newspapers. By that time, there was much more to read about, for North Carolinians had begun to move forward in their daily lives.

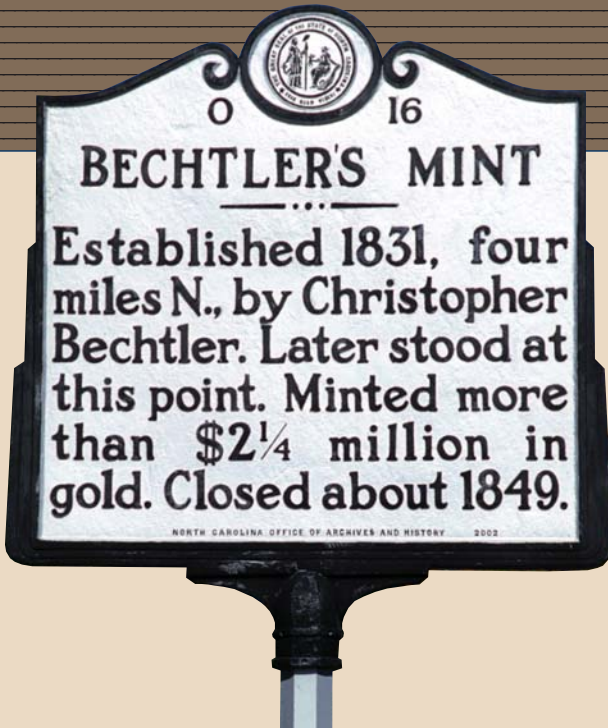
They began to brag that “the Old North State” was no longer asleep. They had “the first state university in the nation,” the “most elegant state capitol in the country,” a “plentiful and varied” soil, and “a steady, sober, industrious population.” Mary Bayard Clarke, one of the first poets in the state, extolled, “Old Rip is awakening . . . his years of slumber, at last have gone by, and the rainbow of promise illuminates the sky.”

### Mining

The discovery of gold in California in 1849 excited the whole nation, and a few North Carolinians headed west to seek their fortune. Others, however, stayed home to do the same thing.

North Carolina had been known as a gold-producing state ever since the Reeds opened their mine in Cabarrus County in the early 1800s. Prospectors rushed to the area to pan for gold in Uwharrie streams. By the 1830s, mine owners were sinking shafts deep into the ground. At one time, fifty mines were in operation. Several mines were dug under the town of Charlotte. So much gold was found in the state that the federal government established a branch of the United States Mint here in 1837. West of Charlotte, so much gold was found in streams that Christopher Bechtler, and later his son and his nephew, ran a private mint near Rutherfordton from 1831 to 1849.

# HISTORY BY THE HIGHWAY



## Bechtler's Mint

**Evidence that North Carolina had the first "gold rush"** in the nation can be seen at the Mint Museum in Charlotte. Some of the choicest coins are those stamped by the private Bechtler Mint in Rutherfordton. For more than twenty years, Christopher Bechtler, a German immigrant, made \$2.50 and \$5.00 gold pieces for miners from all over the foothills. He minted the first gold dollar in the nation. In ten years, he processed more than \$3 million in gold into coins and bullion. The opening of the Mint in Charlotte in 1837 cut down on his trade, and the business soon closed after his death.

**Below:** This is Christopher Bechtler's house in Rutherfordton. He did some of his minting here.





**Top:** The U.S. Mint in Charlotte was moved to its present location in 1933, where it is part of the Mint Museum. **Above:** The discovery of gold in Cabarrus County brought miners to the state.

The most famous mine site became Gold Hill, started in 1842 at the edge of the Uwharries in Rowan County. At the height of activities during the 1850s, Gold Hill had fifteen mines in the space of a square mile. Shafts were dug down eight hundred feet. More than three thousand people worked the mines in rotating shifts. The gold was processed out of the ore using seven steam engines. Many of the miners were immigrants from Europe, including experienced miners from Cornwall, England.

North Carolinians tried to mine other valuable products. Iron ore was taken out of the Cranberry Mine, located in the mountains, west of the present town of Spruce Pine. Several iron furnaces were operated near the “Ore Bank” on the South Fork of the Catawba River. These furnaces produced iron plugs that blacksmiths could use to make tools and household items. The largest operation was at the Vesuvius Furnace in Lincoln County. North Carolina’s first coal mine opened in 1855 at Cumnock, in what became Lee County. The Egypt Mine, as it was called, operated through the Civil War.

## Railroad Fever

Everyone became caught up in the excitement over railroads. The decision by the legislature to fund the North Carolina Railroad benefited the whole state. When the line was completed from Goldsboro to Charlotte, farmers and millers in the west could for the first time send their goods all the way to Wilmington at a reasonable cost.

By the late 1850s, the state had chartered the Western Railroad, which was to go from Salisbury to Asheville. Within five years, the line was open all the way to Morganton. A line from Wilmington was laid through Charlotte to Lincolnton and Rutherfordton. One ambitious company hoping to lay a line from Charleston through North Carolina and across the Appalachians named itself the Atlantic, Tennessee, and Ohio Railroad. The line never got beyond Taylorsville in Alexander County.

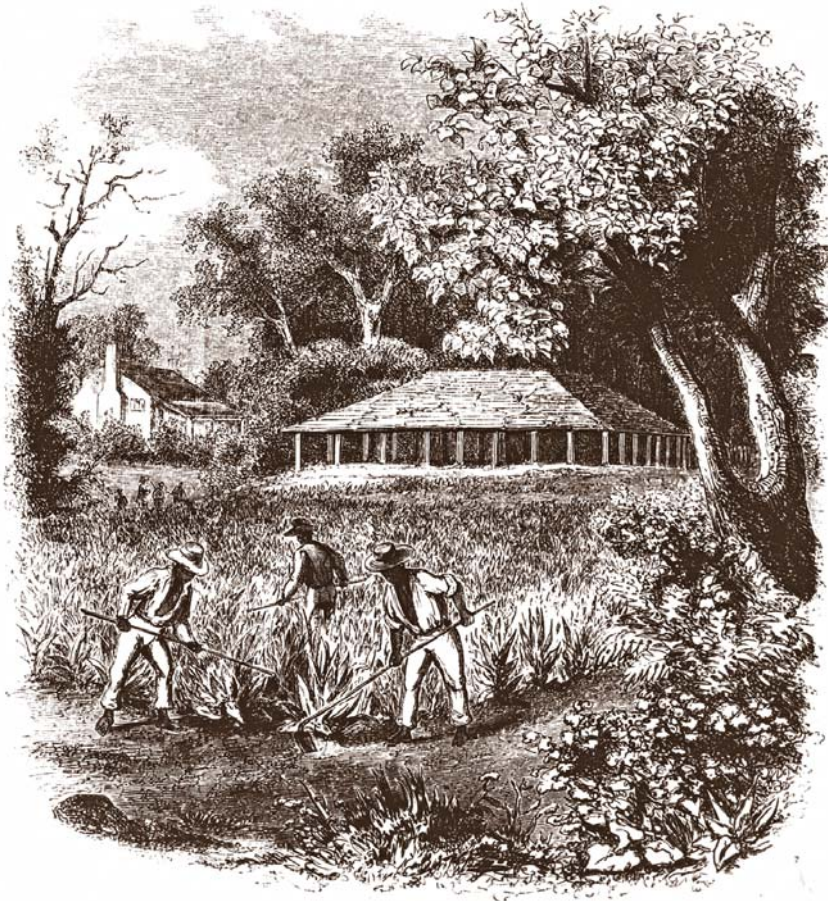
Former Governor Morehead headed an effort to run a rail line from Goldsboro to a site near Beaufort. He called the new community at the end of the line Morehead City. The completion of the line encouraged Beaufort fishermen to ship oysters on ice to Raleigh and other towns.

The impact of the railroads could be seen in the fields. Planters on the Coastal Plain more than tripled the amount of cotton they grew during the decade. Tobacco farms multiplied in counties along the Virginia line, especially when a railroad reached Danville. Caswell County in particular grew so much tobacco during the 1850s that it became the richest county in the state. In the Uwharries, farmers learned that their flinty soil could grow very fine wheat. Since the depots in Greensboro and Salisbury could ship barrels of grain every day, the productivity of the west grew as well.

In 1850, only the counties along the state lines with South Carolina and Virginia were very prosperous. By 1860, counties in the middle of the state had “entered the market” to make more money. In Wayne



**Left:** With the discovery of a new curing process by a Caswell County slave, tobacco production nearly tripled in the 1850s. **Above:** Slaves picking cotton.





**Above:** The University of North Carolina almost doubled its campus during the decades of reform. To the left is the New West building, to the right the New East. Each housed one of the debating societies of the university on the top floor. They are still there to this day.

County, for example, the nearness of Goldsboro encouraged farmers to grow cotton. Their productivity went from 300 bales in 1850 to 4,000 bales by 1860. In Davidson County, wheat production increased from 80,000 to 250,000 bushels.

### Education and Literacy

By the 1850s, every county developed common schools. In addition, the state had developed a school system to make sure as many white children as possible received a decent education. In 1852, Calvin H. Wiley of Guilford County became the first **superintendent of public instruction**. Wiley introduced standards for teachers and published a magazine to help teachers improve their skills. He also wrote the first textbook on North Carolina history.

In addition to the common schools, there were more than four hundred private academies scattered across the state during the 1850s. Colleges were started in Oxford, Louisburg, Newton, and Raleigh. The Presbyterians started a college for women in Statesville. Among its first teachers were the daughters of Dr. Elisha Mitchell, the University geolo-

### Did You Know?

**In 1860, North Carolina had the best school system in the South. Nearly 120,000 students attended more than 3,000 schools staffed by more than 2,700 licensed teachers.**

gist who had measured the altitude of the highest peak in the Appalachians. The University in Chapel Hill doubled its size with the completion of New West and New East halls.

By the 1850s, more North Carolinians were **literate** (could read and write) than ever before, and they had more of their own literature to read. Many of the early books printed in the state had a religious theme. They were either collections of sermons or a short history of a particular denomination. One of the most popular was a biography of the Reverend David Caldwell. Calvin H. Wiley, the superintendent of public instruction, published novels with the well-known titles of *Alamance* and *Roanoke*. Mary Bayard Clarke in 1854 edited the first collection of North Carolina poetry. Sixty poets were included.

In 1857, Hinton R. Helper of Salisbury published *The Impending Crisis of the South*, the first national bestseller by a North Carolinian. Helper's book criticized the politicians of North Carolina and the rest of the South for their defense of slavery.

## Two-Party Politics

North Carolina's two political parties went through changes in the 1850s. The once-dominant Whigs lost control of the state when their national organization fell apart over the growing slavery controversy. Folks in the

west and the Tidewater still voted for former Whigs, but the Democrats generally ran the state during the 1850s. They developed a majority once William W. Holden, the leading Democratic newspaper editor, convinced them to become supporters of railroads and schools.

The Democrats took advantage of the resentment felt by poor voters that they could not vote in state senate elections. Democrats came to champion **free suffrage**, the

ability of all white males age twenty-one or over to vote in all state elections. This reform did away with the 50-acre land ownership requirement to vote. Western Whigs unwisely opposed the free suffrage amendment to the state constitution, which helped the Democrats in the east.

### Did You Know?

When the free suffrage amendment was ratified, about 125,000 voters received the right to vote for their state senators.

### It's Your Turn

1. Where was a branch of the U.S. Mint established in North Carolina?
2. What impact did the railroads have on agriculture?



**Top:** The poet Mary Bayard Clarke was a descendant of early Albemarle families. She grew up in Raleigh and lived for a while on a Louisiana sugar plantation. She returned to Raleigh during the Civil War. **Above:** Hinton Rowan Helper of Davie County made southerners angry. His book, *The Impending Crisis of the South* (1857), charged that slavery held back the economic progress of the South. The book was banned in North Carolina.