

Remembered forever? Only a slight exaggeration

George Washington Williams was one of the county's greatest

One of York County's most distinguished sons was George Washington Williams (1808-1868). Williams had the reputation of being one of the state's best lawyers and public servants.

Biographies of Williams state that he brought the county such honor that he will be remembered forever. Those predictions may not be accurate, but his life is worth a review. Williams represents some of the county's and state's best leadership preceding the Civil War.

Williams was of Welsh descent. His ancestors came to this area from Culpeper County, Va. His father, Fowler Williams, married a Scottish-Irish woman, Nancy Hoey (Huey).

George Williams was born in Belair settlement in the Indian Land of Lancaster County. He began his education at his father's

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school, Belair Academy.

Next, Williams was sent to a school in Lincolnton and then was enrolled in the Ebenezer Academy of York County under the direction of the Rev. Eleazer Harris. He spent two years at the South Carolina College, graduating in 1827, second in his class.

Williams chose Yorkville as his home. He set up a school and began to read law under the direction of Col. Thomas Williams (no relation). At the age of 22, he passed the bar examination and became Col. Williams' partner, a partnership that lasted until 1836, when Col. Williams moved to Alabama.

In 1832, South Carolina was torn over the nullification crisis. A tariff so high it was called the "Tariff of Abominations" was defied by the South Carolina legislature. The state talked secession.

President Andrew Jackson told South Carolinians that if they at-

tempted to prevent the collection of duties at the port of Charleston, federal troops would enforce the tariff.

Williams rejected the states' rights position and announced himself a unionist like Jackson. Williams never changed his mind and even during the Civil War he maintained the respect of his fellow citizens.

After Col. Williams departed, George Williams had a series of law partners. One was John Alston, later president of Mount Zion College. Later Williams went into partnership with William Clawson, who remained a partner until he became the commissioner for equity, a type of judge, for York District. In 1846, Williams' brother-in-law, Col. William C. Beatty, became his partner.

Beatty and Williams set up a county newspaper, the Yorkville Patriot, to further their cause.

Of Williams' abilities, one biographer described him this way: "The prominent characteristics of his mind, in its legal bearing, were a wonderful power of analysis, a remarkably ready perception of the salient points in the

case and a memory that seemed to retain everything he had learned..."

Williams was elected to the S.C. House of Representatives in 1838 and served several terms at different intervals. When the Civil War was over, Williams was elected to the first postwar government, but lost his seat as a result of the Reconstruction acts.

The Republican legislature that took over in 1868 chose Williams as one of the state's 12 district judges, but Williams was not in good health and declined. He died in Columbia on Dec. 2, 1868.

This column was originally published Oct. 23, 1987. Louise Pettus is a retired Winthrop University history professor. Her column appears Sundays.



