Bernard, William Henry [1]

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by Samuel M. Gainor, 1979

1 Jan. 1837–19 Feb. 1918

William Henry Bernard, newspaper editor, was born in Petersburg, Va. His father was Peter Dudley Bernard, a printer and publisher, who owned and edited the *Southern Planter* [2], an agricultural magazine, in Richmond; his mother was Sarah Lloyd White. Bernard's paternal grandfather fought under George Washington [3] in the American Revolution [4] and died from wounds received at the Battle of Brandywine [5]. His maternal grandfather was Thomas Willis White, founder and editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* [6].

The family moved to Richmond soon after Bernard's birth. He was educated at the private schools of Pearman and Fox, the Rumford Military Academy in King William County, and Richmond College [7], where he was one of the editors of the *Star*, a publication of the Mu Sigma Rho Society.

Leaving college at the age of eighteen, before being graduated, Bernard went to Texas in 1855 to study law with William Stedman, a prominent attorney and a native of Chatham County [8]. His interests were in journalism, however, and he soon abandoned the study of law to publish a weekly paper, the *Star Spangled Banner*. Yielding to an inclination for wit, he established *Young America*, a weekly publication of humor. He left Texas in 1858 and returned to Virginia. In 1859 he married Maggie Stedman of Fayetteville and went to live in Helena, Ark.

During this period, Bernard was a member of the Whig party [9], supporting the Union and disinclined to the extreme action favored by the Southern Democrats. But when the Civil War [10] broke out, Bernard chose to support the Confederacy [11]. He moved to Fayetteville [12] in March 1861 and enlisted in Company H, First Regiment, North Carolina Volunteers. He fought at the Battle of Bethel [13], the first engagement of the war. When his regiment was later disbanded, he received an honorable discharge because of physical disability.

Following his discharge, Bernard returned to journalism, working for the *Presbyterian* [14] and the *Daily Telegraph* in Fayetteville until 1865, when he left to found the Wilmington *Dispatch* with Colonel John D. Barry and others. He left this association in 1867 and established the Wilmington *Star* [15], later called the Wilmington *Morning Star*. For the next forty years, Bernard served as editor of this paper and wrote a daily column.

Bernard was an active Democrat [16] and wielded great influence as the editor of one of the state's major newspapers. He never held an elective office but often served as manager of political campaigns. In 1870 there was a majority of Republican [17] voters in New Hanover County [18]. The Republicans believed that the Democrats would not submit a party ticket for the election and thus had several candidates for several offices. Bernard and other members of the Democrats' county executive committee, however, composed a ticket that was kept secret until the morning of the election, when it was distributed to all the polling places in the county. This tactic won for the Democrats a seat in both the state house and the state senate, as well as the election of some county officials. Bernard also helped to elect the Democrat Alfred N. Waddell [19] to Congress in this same year and then managed his reelection in 1874. He served as chairman of the county executive committee for several years. In 1891 he managed John D. Bellamy's election to the legislature. During the next ten years, Bernard was a member of the state Democratic executive committee.

Bernard, an Episcopalian [20], was buried in Oakdale Cemetery, Wilmington. He was survived by two sons and three daughters: Mrs. R. A. Kingsbury, E. H., Maggie A., Mrs. Malcolm McKay, and William S.

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