

Drew, William ^[1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1986

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ca. 1770–8 May 1827

William Drew, attorney general and legislator, was probably born in [Bertie County](#) ^[2], the son of [John Drew](#) ^[3] and his wife Patience Brewer. His grandfather, William Drew of Surry County, Va., acquired large tracts of land in the [Roanoke River](#) ^[4] section but never lived in North Carolina. There is no information on the younger Drew's early life. In 1792 he became a member of the Royal White Hart Masonic Lodge in [Halifax](#) ^[5]. He represented the borough of Halifax in the legislature in 1803, 1809, 1813, 1814, and 1816. In 1816 he was elected attorney general of the state, a position he held until November 1825.

William Drew and his father shared the enthusiasm then prevalent in the Roanoke River section for breeding and racing thoroughbred stock. *Solicitor*, bred by John Drew of [Halifax County](#) ^[6] and foaled in 1783, "won upwards of one hundred races in Virginia and North Carolina." This horse was certified in the *American Race Turf Register* by William Drew of Halifax Town in 1824. Another noted horse owned by John Drew, the imported *Silver*, was bred by the Duke of Grafton and foaled in 1789. It became the property of a Lord Sackville who sold him to Drew. Several other horses were certified by William Drew in the *Register*; this does not indicate ownership but does imply Drew was an authority on the subject.

From the records of Halifax County, it appears that William Drew acted as attorney for many of the prominent citizens of the town of Halifax. He never married and became bankrupt shortly before his death. His will, dated 8 Apr. 1827 and probated in Halifax in May of the same year, bequeathed his secretary, gold watch, and bedstead "now at Mr. Calvert's in Northampton Court House" to his friend Mrs. Mary Stith for her kindness and attention to him in his last illness. Mrs. Stith, known in her youth as "the Divine Polly Long," was the leading resident in Halifax Town at this time.

[John W. Moore](#) ^[7], in his *History of North Carolina*, said that William Drew realized the truth of Dryden's aphorism regarding the close alliance sometimes existing between a great wit and a madman. The historian went on to say that Drew's eloquence and learning were such that his eccentricities did not prevent him from being elected to positions of public trust. The reference Moore gave for this evaluation of Drew was "personal observation."

References:

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John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina* (1851).

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[8]

[Public officials](#) ^[9]

Authors:

[Smith, Claiborne T., Jr.](#) ^[10]

Origin - location:

[Bertie County](#) ^[11]

[Halifax County](#) ^[12]

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Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/drew-william> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/bertie> [3] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/drew-john> [4]

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