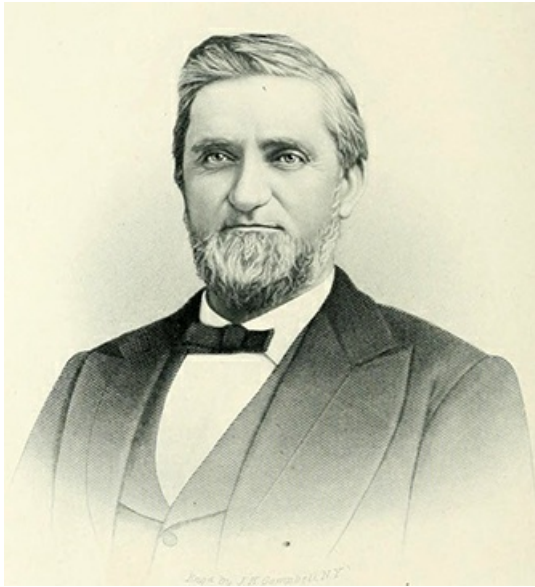


Faircloth, William Turner ^[1]

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by Paul E. Kuhl, 1986; Revised by SLNC Government & Heritage Library, June 2023

8 Jan. 1829–29 Dec. 1900



An engraving of William Turner Faircloth published in 1892. Image from the Internet Archive.

^[2]William Turner Faircloth, lawyer, Confederate officer, legislator, and judge, was born at the family farm on Otter Creek in Edgecombe County ^[3], the son of William and Susan Edwards Faircloth. He was the oldest of five children including S. E., Bennett, Mary, and Martha. At twenty-one, Faircloth enrolled at Wake Forest College ^[4] and taught school during the vacations. After graduating at the head of his class in June 1854, he attended Richmond M. Pearson ^[5]'s law school at Richmond Hill in Yadkin County ^[6]. He was licensed to practice on 1 Jan. 1856 and moved to Snow Hill, Greene County ^[7], where he served as county solicitor until May 1856. He then moved to Goldsboro, Wayne County ^[8], and practiced law until June 1861.

Although a Whig ^[9] and Unionist ^[10], Faircloth aligned himself with North Carolina when the crisis at Fort Sumter precipitated the state's secession. Appointed first lieutenant on 16 May 1861, he helped organize the Rip Van Winkle Company in Wayne County and had his rank confirmed by election on 16 July. The company was accepted into state service at Camp Mason in Wayne County as Company C of the Second Regiment, North Carolina Infantry, on 21 Aug. 1861; it was transferred to the Second Corps, Army of the Potomac, on 23 September. After being stationed at Middleton in Hyde County ^[11] and Garysburg in Northampton County ^[12], the regiment went to Virginia in November or December 1861 and drilled at Camp Potomac. Faircloth was promoted to captain and assistant quartermaster on 14 Mar. 1862; he served in that capacity and rank throughout the Civil War. In May 1862 the Second Regiment was moved to Camp Wyatt in New Hanover County ^[13], N.C., to help defend Fort Fisher from the expedition of Ambrose E. Burnside. When Robert E. Lee was named commander of the Army of Northern Virginia on 1 June, the Second Regiment was made part of the Second Corps and joined Lee's forces in time for the Seven Days' Battle, which began on 25 June at Oak Grove, Va.

Except for a convalescent period at Goldsboro in August 1862 and at Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond, Va., Captain Faircloth remained with the Army of Northern Virginia throughout the war. The Second Regiment, North Carolina Infantry, participated in the major battles of South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Spottsylvania, Winchester, and the siege of Petersburg. Upon his surrender at Appomattox Court House on 9 Apr. 1865, Faircloth was paroled. He then returned to Goldsboro and resumed his law practice.

After obtaining a pardon, Faircloth was elected as a Wayne County delegate to the state constitutional convention ^[14], which met from 2–20 Oct. 1865 and from 24 May to 25 June 1866. While voting with the majority in the repudiation of secession and the approval of the new constitution, he did not identify himself with either the Republican or Democratic party. Faircloth was also a member of the state legislature from 27 Nov. 1865 to 12 Mar. 1866. The legislature elected him solicitor of the Third Judicial District, a position he held until July 1868, when the Republican administration of William W. Holden ^[15] took office.

Faircloth returned to his law practice and on 10 Jan. 1869 married Eveline Eliza Wooten (13 Nov. 1833–8 Nov. 1904), a

daughter of Council and Eliza Wooten of Mosely Hall (now LaGrange) in Lenoir County ^[16]. They had no children.

Faircloth did not reenter politics until 1874. In that year he applied for an appointment to a vacant associate judgeship of the North Carolina Supreme Court ^[17] and was told to identify himself more closely with the Republican party ^[18]. He campaigned for Republican candidates in the 1874 elections and in 1875 was elected as a delegate to the state constitutional convention that met at Raleigh from 6 Sept. to 11 Oct. 1875. In November he was appointed associate justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court by Governor Curtis H. Brogden ^[19] and held court until the term expired in the fall of 1878. He was the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor in 1884 and canvassed the state from Cherokee to Currituck in an unsuccessful bid. Four years later he was the Republican nominee for associate justice of the state supreme court and again lost the election.

In the election of 1894 Populists in North Carolina fused their ticket ^[20] with the Republican party. Without his knowledge or approval, Populists nominated Faircloth for chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, and, almost simultaneously, a conference of Republican leaders asked him to run for the same post on the Republican ticket. Having accepted one party's nomination, he accepted the other's and was elected to an eight-year term.

In addition to his legal practice and political activity, Faircloth was a businessman and an active supporter of the Baptist church and higher education in North Carolina. He was a major stockholder and onetime director of the Bank of Wayne in Goldsboro and was on the directing boards of the Wilmington and Weldon and the Atlantic and North Carolina railroads. Other major investments included one-third ownership of Goldsboro's Hotel Gregory, stock in the Goldsboro Furniture Factory, and real estate in Goldsboro and in Wayne County.

A member of the First Missionary Baptist Church in Goldsboro, Faircloth served on the board of trustees of Wake Forest College (1891–1900), the Baptist Orphanage at Thomasville (1889–95), and Meredith College ^[21] (1891–1900). He was also an attorney for the Baptist Orphanage (1885–1900). Buildings constructed partly from his legacy at the orphanage and at Meredith College now bear his name. His law library was given to Wake Forest's law school. He served North Carolina as a trustee for the state psychiatric hospital and for The University of North Carolina ^[22] (1874–1895). In 1895, The University of North Carolina conferred upon him the honorary degree of doctor of laws.

Faircloth was regarded by fellow members of the bar and associates on the bench as a thoroughly knowledgeable, conservative, commonsense man of the law. After five years as chief justice, his health deteriorated, and shortly after the 1900 session he died of a stroke in his Goldsboro home. He was buried in Fairview Cemetery in LaGrange.

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