

Heitman, John Franklin ^[1]

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by Larry E. Tise, 1988

17 Apr. 1840–15 June 1904

John Franklin Heitman, educator, clergyman, editor, and historian, was born in [Davidson County](#) ^[2] near Lexington, the son of Henry and Eve McRary Heitman. In 1861 he entered [Trinity College](#) ^[3] around which most of his career would revolve. His first year at Trinity, then located in [Randolph County](#) ^[4], was cut short when he joined a stream of other students who entered military duty in the service of the Confederacy. In the spring of 1862 he enrolled as first sergeant in Company H, Forty-eighth Regiment of North Carolina troops; by the end of the war he had advanced to captain. He was wounded at Fredericksburg on 13 Dec. 1863 and was twice hospitalized due to illness. On 6 Apr. 1864 he was captured at Appomattox and detained on Johnson's Island until his release on 18 June 1865. His exploits in the last year of the war are chronicled in a diary now in the Duke University Archives.

Upon his return to Davidson County, Heitman spent a year operating a sawmill business and teaching school before completing his education at Trinity. Receiving the A.M. degree in 1868, he began a career in teaching and as a clergyman in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. During his service in the North Carolina Conference, he held several distinguished pastorates, including that of Winston Station, later Centenary in Winston-Salem (1873–76) during its formative years. In 1881 he left the parish ministry to enter business in Chapel Hill. Among his pursuits was the establishment of the *North Carolina Education Journal*, which he edited and published monthly from 1881 through 1885 as the "organ of the [North Carolina State Teachers Association](#) ^[5]."

In 1883, when he was appointed professor at Trinity College, Heitman moved the *Education Journal* and his other business interests back to Randolph County. From his arrival at Trinity until the college was relocated in Durham in 1892, he devoted himself to saving the school from financial collapse. Although his fields of scholarship were German, Greek, metaphysics, and theology, his greatest contributions were in the area of college administration. Upon the resignation of [Marquis Lafayette Wood](#) ^[6] from the presidency of Trinity in December 1884, Heitman was appointed chairman of the faculty and served for three years as virtual president of the institution. Working closely with a three-member committee of management named by the college trustees, Heitman doubled the enrollment, increased church support, collected overdue bills, and entered into a lucrative contract with the U.S. Department of the Interior for the education of Indian students at Trinity.

Except for an embarrassing personal crisis which became a public scandal involving his brother Charles, an attorney in Lexington who fled to Canada to escape debtors, it is likely that Heitman would have succeeded to the presidency of Trinity. Instead, the trustees passed over Heitman in favor of [John F. Crowell](#) ^[7]. Heitman, nevertheless, remained on the faculty until the school moved. When the move occurred, he chose to stay behind as the headmaster of Trinity High School on the old college campus. When the high school was also moved to Durham in 1899, Heitman moved with it, finishing his career as its head. During his last two years in Randolph County, he launched a second monthly paper, the *North Carolina Home Journal*, which was "designed to be a pleasant, as well as useful, visitor to all North Carolina homes." The paper concluded with his move to Durham.

Heitman's contributions to history were made largely in connection with his editorship of the *North Carolina Educational Journal* and the *North Carolina Home Journal*. Both publications contained numerous accounts and biographical sketches relating to North Carolina history written by Heitman. Noting the absence of a readable, reliable, and popular history of the state, in January 1884 he began writing and publishing in monthly installments a new history of North Carolina. Arranging the state's past into eight general periods from 1492 to the present (1884), Heitman began issuing the new history in monthly pieces of approximately 3,000 words. By the time the *Educational Journal* ceased publication at the end of 1885, he had covered the Introductory Period (1492–1663), the [Proprietary](#) ^[8] Period (1663–1729), and a part of the Royal Period (1729–August 1774). The history was continued unbroken in the first issue of the *Home Journal* in 1897 and in all subsequent issues until December 1898 when it, too, ended. By that time Heitman had brought his narrative through August 1774 and the First [Provincial Congress](#) ^[9] at New Bern. Whether he continued his history is unknown; his manuscript has not been located. By the time of the last issue of the *Home Journal*, however, he had written nearly 100,000 words of what appears to be an original and in many cases a carefully researched history of North Carolina.

Heitman married Emma Carr, sister of Durham tobacco manufacturer [Julian Shakespeare Carr](#) ^[10], with whom he carried on a lively and enlightening correspondence. The Heitmans were the parents of Eva (Mrs. W. Bivens), Polly (Mrs. R. B. Terry), and John, who never married. He and his wife were buried in Trinity Cemetery, Trinity.

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