

Hughes, Samuel Wellwood ^[1]

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by Mary Claire Engstrom, 1988

4 Mar. 1815–2 Oct. 1884

Samuel Wellwood Hughes, Presbyterian educator and churchman, was born near Cedar Grove, [Orange County](#) ^[2], the third of fourteen children of pioneer teacher Joseph Dunn Hughes (15 Feb. 1785–20 May 1844) of [Rowan County](#) ^[3] and the grandson of Timothy Hughes of Rowan. Joseph D. Hughes married at least twice, and his first wife may have been Mary W[ellwood] (1788–25 Sept. 1829). His will mentions a wife, Sarah, and her four children.

According to family tradition, in the early 1800s the Reverend Samuel Paisley (later pastor of Old Eno Presbyterian Church) heard of Joseph D. Hughes's success as a teacher in Rowan County and invited him to establish a school in the Old Eno community of northern Orange County. A deed to Joseph Dunn Hughes "of Orange County," dated 25 Mar. 1810, for 136 acres of land on the east bank of the Eno River, indicates that he was already a resident of Orange in 1810. Hughes, who became known as "the Father of Schools in Northern Orange," began in his own modest Eno River farmhouse what is said to have been the first organized school in the area. His pupils were his own children and those of neighboring farmers. His avowed purpose was simply "to rescue them from ignorance."

Samuel Wellwood Hughes, born on the Eno farm, attended his father's school and absorbed the plain [Presbyterian](#) ^[4] lessons of discipline, diligence, and honesty that were to become the underlying principles of his own school. Later he attended the [Bingham School](#) ^[5] on "Academy Square" in northern Hillsborough and for a short time taught there. A Bingham School advertisement in the *Raleigh Register* of 27 June 1839 lists S. W. Hughes as a member of the English Department with A. H. Ray; the other two teachers were [W. J.](#) ^[6] and J. A. Bingham. Afterwards, Hughes worked his way through Hampden-Sydney College, Farmville, Va. Family tradition says that on one occasion he walked home from Farmville, a distance of 160 miles.

On his death at age fifty-nine, Joseph Dunn Hughes named Samuel as one of his executors. Six months later, in December 1844, the son married Elizabeth Jesse Hughes (11 Mar. 1816–24 Oct. 1859), of Prince Edward County, Va., sister of Judge Robert W. Hughes of the U.S. Court of Virginia; they had seven children. In January 1845, at age thirty, Samuel W. Hughes opened his own school, first called the "Cedar Grove Academy" and later simply "[Hughes' Academy](#)" ^[7], which apparently moved several times. It is known to have operated in the 1860s in a small log house above the intersection at Ira Ellis's (later Nelson P. Hall's) Mill on the Eno below Fairfield Presbyterian Church and, still later, farther up the Eno at the old Joseph Dunn Hughes farmstead. There, a new two-frame school was built, together with various outbuildings to house students. The surviving frame structure is now owned by the [Hillsborough Historical Society](#). ^[8]

Like his father before him and his revered Bingham mentors, Hughes appears to have been a master teacher in the old austere Scots Presbyterian mold. His academy, advertised in flyers as a "Classical and Mathematical School," was modeled directly on the Bingham School in Hillsborough and was to some degree an extension of it. Although full programs in Greek and Latin were offered (tuition, \$25), students might take only the English courses (tuition, \$15). The Hughes Academy also accepted neighboring girls as had Joseph Dunn Hughes's little school; one of its most distinguished graduates was [Annie Lavalette Hughes](#) ^[9], daughter of Samuel, later the co-principal with Miss Emma Scales of the Reidsville Female Seminary. The Hughes Academy, incorporated in 1851, apparently never employed more than one assistant at a time. Three of these were the Reverend A[rchibald] Currie (1852), S. M. Wells (1855–56), and H. A. Rogers (1858). Enrollment usually ranged between thirty-five and forty students per session, although it is said to have reached one hundred just before the Civil War ("the number of his pupils often exceeded his wishes," according to the S. W. Hughes Family Papers).

No catalogue of the Hughes Academy was ever issued, and no records or roll books have survived. Some forty-eight former students are known, however, including [Needham Bryant Cobb](#) ^[10], [D. I. Craig](#) ^[11], James Lauchlin Currie, Thomas Murphy Jordan, A. L. Phillips, [Robert W. Scott](#) ^[12], [Spier Whitaker](#) ^[13], [George Tayloe Winston](#) ^[14], and [Patrick Henry Winston](#) ^[15]. The academy seems to have been particularly successful in offering solid preparatory training to future physicians, ministers, educators, and leaders in government and law. Its graduates were accepted at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[16] without examination.

On 12 Mar. 1850 Hughes was appointed to Orange County's first examining board for teachers, together with [Cadwallader Jones](#) ^[17], [Dr. Alexander Wilson](#) ^[18], the Reverend J. B. Donnelly, and the Reverend L. K. Willie. In February 1852, Hughes was appointed to an eight-man Board of Superintendents of the Common Schools. Like his father, he served Old Eno Presbyterian Church as a ruling elder and as stated clerk of the session.

On 11 July 1862 Hughes married as his second wife Margaret J. Murray (29 Feb. 1836–29 Jan. 1924), the daughter of Eli Murray of [Alamance County](#) ^[19]. By this marriage he had six children. Early in the 1880s two strokes curtailed his teaching

activities, but even in his final weeks students stood around his bed to recite their lessons in the old Joseph Dunn Hughes farmhouse. A third stroke proved fatal. Hughes was buried in the Old Eno Cemetery, where some twenty members of the large Hughes family had preceded him. Twenty-two later Hughes burials were recorded at New Eno Cemetery, Cedar Grove.

After Hughes's death, his academy was moved to Cedar Grove, where it reopened as the "Cedar Grove Academy" under the principalship of Benjamin C. Patton. Annie Lavalette Hughes returned from Reidsville to take charge of it in 1901, and it continued until after 1914.

A daguerrotype, tintype, and early photograph of Hughes show him to have been an imposing, massive man with black hair and blue eyes. A large picture now hangs in the Orange County Historical Museum.

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Additional Resources:

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