

Mills, Columbus ^[1]

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20 June 1808–10 Dec. 1882

Columbus Mills, physician and regional political leader in western North Carolina in the counties bordering South Carolina, was the son of Col. John Columbus Mills and Sallie Roberson. His grandparents were Eleanor Morris and William Mills, a pioneer ^[2] settler of western North Carolina. He was the great-grandson of Colonel Ambrose Mills, a Loyalist ^[3] officer executed after the Battle of Kings Mountain ^[4]. Columbus Mills represented Rutherford County ^[5] in the state senate in the session of 1846–47. He was elected by the General Assembly ^[6] to a two-year term on the Council of State ^[7] in 1852 (when his home county was reported as being Cleveland) ^[8] but resigned in July 1854 when Rutherford County returned him to the senate. He was reelected and served until 1857, when he once more was chosen a member of the Council of State (with his home again recorded as Cleveland County) ^[8]. Mills served on the Council of State until 1860. In April of that year he was a delegate from North Carolina to the Democratic ^[9] National Convention, held in Charleston, S.C.

While a member of the General Assembly in 1855, Mills was instrumental in having Polk County ^[10] created from portions of Rutherford and Henderson counties. The county seat, Columbus, was incorporated in 1857 and named for him. The town of Mills Spring, incorporated in 1885 (now known as Mill Spring but no longer active as a municipality), was also named after the Mills family.

Mills was well educated, graduating from the Transylvania Medical school located in Kentucky in 1832. His articles appeared in the *New York Post*, and he was a friend of the South Carolina writer, William Gilmore Simms. He contributed mountain lore to Simms, and Mills himself appears as a character in Simms's "How Sharp Snaffles Got His Capital for a Wife" ^[11].

On 17 June 1861, at age fifty-three, Mills volunteered his services to the Sixteenth Regiment of North Carolina Troops and was named regimental surgeon; he resigned in March 1863. During much of the war he served as provost marshal and on one occasion ordered a detail of Confederate cavalry to seize two brothers who were hiding refugees and deserters from the Confederate army. Soon afterwards a band of renegades attacked the Mills home, from which the doctor and his family barely escaped.

Mills had large farming interests. Before the Civil War ^[12], Mills enslaved between sixty and seventy people. Census records indicate that Mills was living in Cabarrus county in 1870. This move was possibly due to a disagreement with another family ^[13] in his native Polk county. Mills served as the President of the "Fair of the Carolinas" (now the North Carolina Sate Fair) ^[14] in 1873. After the Grange ^[15] (also known as the Patrons of Husbandry) was organized in March 1873 as a cooperative means of resolving some of the farmers' problems in the state, Mills was elected to the position of Overseer. His antebellum home stood two miles east of Tryon in Polk County; many years later it was enlarged and converted into Mimosa Inn.

Mills married Susan A. Thompson of Spartanburg, S.C. They had no children. They were both buried in Spartanburg.

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