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Mills, John Haymes [1]

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9 July 1831–15 Dec. 1898

John Haymes Mills, educator and founder of orphanages, was born in Halifax County, Va., the son of John Garland and Martha Williams Haymes Mills. The Mills family descended from Sir John Mills of England. John H. Mills's great-great-grandfather, John Mills, settled in Hanover County, Va. Mills's father, John Garland, the fifth son of Robert and Mary Mills, was born on 12 Mar. 1804; he was a farmer and a Baptist [2]minister in Hanover County, Va. John H. Mills grew up as a sturdy farmer's boy in an enslaving family. After his education at a local academy, his father decided that Mills would attend Wake Forest College [3]. Mills made himself a trunk, got aboard a batteau, and went down the Dan andRoanoke river [4]s to Gaston, where he took the train for Wake Forest.

At college the six-foot-two-inch "Jack" participated in debates and was graduated with honors and a B.A. degree in 1854. Three years later he received an M.A. degree from Wake Forest. He taught in an academy in Milton, and when this proved unprofitable, he moved to Melrose Academy near his home in Halifax, Va. In January 1855 Mills began teaching mathematics in Oxford Female Seminary, Oxford [5], under Dr. Samuel Wait [6]. Wait retired in 1858, and since the institution was in debt, the trustees sold the buildings and grounds to Mills. He was president of Oxford Female Seminary from 1858 to 1866 through the trying Civil War [7] period. In 1866 he sold the property and for one year conducted his school at St. John's College, which had been built in Oxford by the Masons [8]of the state but since then abandoned.

In 1867 he purchased the *Biblical Recorder* in Raleigh. An early biographer said that during his editorship, from 1868 to 1873, Mills's discussion of issues was strong and he often disposed of his adversary in a short paragraph or even in one epigrammatic sentence. The *Recorder* had few long editorials and certainly not a dull one under his administration. He made a live paper that enjoyed a wide circulation, not only among Baptists but also among people of other faiths.

While editor of the *Biblical Recorder*, Mills traveled throughout North Carolina observing the hardships that had resulted from the Civil War. These privations had fallen mainly on women and children, particularly indigent orphans. As Mills saw the wretched condition of the orphaned children and remembered the orphaned boy who had grown up with his family in Virginia, he felt compelled to help them. When the Grand Lodge of Masons met in Raleigh to decide what to do with the buildings of St. John's College in Oxford, he pleaded with the lodge to establish an orphanage on the site. As a result of his efforts, the lodge set aside two thousand dollars and the legislature in 1873 made a small appropriation, thus making it possible for the facility to open with Mills as its first manager. This was the first orphanage in North Carolina.

Mills "struggled for 11 years against poverty, indifference, and sometimes hostility." His health was broken and he resigned. After resting for a short time at his farm near Thomasville, he began to agitate for the formation of a Baptist orphanage [9]. Although the Baptist State Convention opposed his proposal at its annual meeting in 1884, the North Carolina Baptist Orphanage Association was formed that year and Mills began traveling across the state to raise money. On 12 Jan. 1885 he became the general manager of the Baptist Orphanage of North Carolina, established at Thomasville, and on 14 July 1887 he began publishing *Charity and Children*, the institution's newspaper. Mills introduced the cottage unit system at the orphanage; he also established a school and a church. In 1895 he retired to his farm near Thomasville.

In June 1898 Mills gave specific directions regarding his funeral and burial. In December he was taken ill and died a few days after his brother had visited him. Following a Masonic funeral service, Mills was buried in a plain white oak coffin in the Rich Fork cemetery.

On 28 Feb. 1856 he married Elizabeth N. Williams, a teacher at the Oxford Female Institute. They had one child, Martha (Mrs. J. D. Newton).

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