

Spaight, Richard Dobbs Jr. ^[1]

Spaight, Richard Dobbs, Jr.

by Gertrude S. Carraway, 1994; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, March 2023

1796–17 Nov. 1850

See also: [Richard Dobbs Spaight, Jr.](#) ^[2], Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History



Photograph of a portrait of Richard Dobbs Spaight, Junior. Image from the State Archives of North Carolina.

^[3]Richard Dobbs Spaight, Jr., congressman and governor, was the son of [Richard Dobbs, Sr.](#) ^[4], and Mary Jones Leech Spaight, of New Bern. He attended the [New Bern Academy](#) ^[5] under the Reverend [Thomas F. Irving](#) ^[6] and was graduated with high honors in 1813 from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[7]. Admitted to the bar in 1818, he began to practice law in New Bern and represented [Craven County](#) ^[8] in the House of Commons in 1819 and in the senate in 1820–22. He served in the U.S. Congress in 1823–25 but was defeated for reelection. Returning to the state senate, he served for eleven years until he became governor (1835–36). At the [state constitutional convention of 1835](#) ^[9] he was chairman of the rules committee.

Nominated on the Democratic ticket for a second gubernatorial term, he lost to the [Whig](#) ^[10] candidate, [Edward Bishop Dudley](#) ^[11], in the first direct vote of the populace for governor under the new state constitution. He may not have been reelected as a result of his opposition to [internal improvements](#) ^[12] because of competition among various projects.

Retiring from politics, Spaight returned to New Bern, where he engaged chiefly in agricultural pursuits and the management of his extensive properties. In 1842 he was named a councillor of state but declined to accept. He carried on a leisurely law practice, largely for charity. According to [Stephen F. Miller](#) ^[13] in [Recollections of New Bern Fifty Years Ago](#) ^[14], Spaight attended courts in Craven and [Jones](#) ^[15] counties, but "I never heard of his appearing in a case. He was very rich and very diffident and was not destitute of fair abilities. . . . His object in associating with the lawyers from county to county was no doubt to enjoy their society, and to improve his mind by legal discussions which constantly took place in his presence."

Spaight never married. He was an active [Mason](#) ^[16] and a member of [Christ Episcopal Church](#) ^[17]. He was buried in the family cemetery at Cleremont plantation.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

This person enslaved and owned other people. Many Black and African people, their descendants, and some others were enslaved in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865. It was common for wealthy landowners, entrepreneurs, politicians, institutions, and others to enslave people and use enslaved labor during this period. To read more about the enslavement and transportation of African people to North Carolina, visit

<https://aaahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-0> [18]. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery> [19]. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

References:

Samuel A. Ashe, ed., *Biographical History of North Carolina*, vol. 4 [20] (1906).

Gertrude S. Carraway, *Crown of Life* (1940) and *Years of Light* (1944).

John L. Cheney, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Government, 1585–1979* (1981).

Henry A. Grady, "[The Two Spaights](#) [21]" (typescript, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1923).

[Stephen F. Miller], *Recollections of New Bern Fifty Years Ago* [14] (1874).

New Bern, *Eastern Carolina Republican*, 27 Nov. 1850;.

Additional Resources:

"Spaight, Richard Dobbs, Jr., (1796 - 1850)." Biographical Directory of the United States Congress. United States Government. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000694> [22] (accessed March 12, 2013).

Haywood, Marshall De Lancey. "Grand Masters Spaight, Jerkins and Clark." *The North Carolina Booklet* 21, nos. 1,2,3,4 (July-Oct. 1921 - January-April 1922). 68-76.

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State Archives of North Carolina. "Richard Dobbs Spaight, Sr., 1792 - 1795 From the General Negative Collection, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC.; call #: N_53_16_1461 Painting of Richard Dobbs Spaight, Jr." Photograph. Flickr. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/8407659177/> [3] (accessed March 12, 2013).

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