

Whitaker, Spier ^[1]

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18 July 1798–2 Dec. 1869

Spier Whitaker, lawyer and politician, the sixth of ten children, was born in Enfield to Matthew Cary and Elizabeth Coffield Whitaker. Called David Spier Coffield Whitaker, he dropped David and Coffield from his name. Spier was a name in his mother's family. He was imbued with a deep sense of duty and honor as a result of his father's having been a Patriot soldier during the Revolutionary War ^[2] and seriously wounded at the Battle of Guilford Court House ^[3].

Spier Whitaker is best remembered as a distinguished lawyer and southern gentleman. Early in life he decided to pursue the study and practice of law as a profession. While completing a law course at The University of North Carolina ^[4] in 1817, he was active in the Philanthropic Society, where he gained experience in debating. The combination of oratorical ability and a solid grounding in law contributed to his success as an attorney.

In the 1830s he became active in politics. As a Democrat ^[5], he was elected in 1838 to the North Carolina House of Representatives by one vote. The apex of his political career, meager as it was, occurred in 1842, when the General Assembly ^[6] selected him to be state attorney general. His bid in 1846 for a second four-year term was unsuccessful. His flourishing law practice, however, afforded him the opportunity by the late 1830s to become a prominent stockholder in the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad ^[7].

On 30 Dec. 1819, at age twenty-one, he married Elizabeth F. Lewis. They had seven sons, Matthew (1820–97), Exum Lewis (1823–47), John Henry (1827–63), Charles (b. 1832), William (1836–62), David Coffield (1838–65), and Spier (1841–1901), and four daughters, Anne Harrison (b. 1825), Elizabeth West (1830–55), Mary (1834–55), and Lucy (b. 1844). By the end of the Civil War ^[8] only five of their eleven children were still living.

Whitaker's forays into the realm of military service were neither as glorious as his ancestors' nor as tragic as his sons'. In 1831 he commanded an indeterminate number of men who set out towards Southampton County, Va., to help suppress the rebellion of enslaved people to free themselves from their enslavers led by Nat Turner ^[9]. When news of Turner's capture reached them by express rider, they returned home. Nevertheless, for his service Whitaker acquired the title of colonel of the militia and henceforth insisted on being referred to as Colonel Whitaker. At the outset of the Civil War he offered to lead men into battle but was denied an active role in the conflict. Governor Henry T. Clark ^[10] thought that he was too old to fight and instead offered him a position as his aide. Whitaker assisted the governor in military affairs from July 1861 until September 1862.

In 1854 Whitaker had moved his family to Davenport, Iowa, to join his nephew, Judge James Grant ^[11], in a successful law practice. He retired in 1860. Feeling that it was his duty to help protect the state that had given his family so much, however, he returned to North Carolina for the duration of the Civil War. Afterwards he spent the rest of his life in Iowa.

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