

Primary Source: UNC Dismisses Benjamin Hedrick ^[1]

Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick was a chemistry professor at UNC Chapel Hill who voiced his support of the Republican anti-slavery candidate John C. Frémont when several of his students inquired as to who he would vote for in the upcoming (1856) election. Word of Hedrick's support of Frémont spread through the campus and beyond. Two articles were published in the North Carolina Standard -- a conservative Democratic newspaper edited by William Woods Holden, himself a fervent supporter of slavery -- admonishing Hedrick. Although Hedrick was not explicitly named in either editorial, it was clear he was the target.

Hedrick responded with the intention of defending his position in a way that would be well-received by his fellow North Carolinians. His October 1, 1856 response added fuel to the flame rather than extinguishing it as he had planned. University members were especially incensed by his public response, and within a week a meeting was scheduled amongst faculty to discuss Hedrick's fate at the university. The proceedings of that meeting are below.

Proceedings of the Faculty of the University of North Carolina, October 6, 1856.

The Faculty met under a summons from the President at 12 o'clock. A.M.

All the members were present.

The President stated to the Faculty, that in accordance with the course which he deemed his duty to pursue, with reference to the selection of a chaplain, to deliver the valedictory sermon to the Senior Class at the last commencement, he felt himself called upon to direct their attention to the publication of Professor Hedrick in the North Carolina Standard of Saturday ^[2]. Very few remarks in addition to those submitted to the Senior Class on that occasion, will suffice ^[3] in relation to the present subject.

In an institution sustained like this by all denominations and parties, nothing should be permitted to be done, calculated to disturb the harmonious intercourse of those who support, and those who direct and govern it. Mr Hedrick's testimony, as student and Professor, that he "know of no institution North or South, from which partisan politics and sectarian religion are so carefully excluded", will be received with perfect credence ^[4] by our graduates, and by all familiar with the state of things among us.

To secure an end so essential to the reputation, prosperity and usefulness of the University, cautious forbearance ^[5] has been practised by the Faculty and enjoined upon the students in relation to these subjects. The sermons, delivered on the Sabbath in the college chapel, have been confined to an exhibition of the leading doctrines of Christianity, with respect to which, no difference of opinion exists among us, and no student during the last twenty years, has been permitted to discuss upon the public stage, any question of party politics. This course, upon the part of all, has been regarded as not merely necessary to internal harmony and quiet, in unison with kind feelings and good taste, but as due to numbers of persons of different tenets and opinions, who honour us by their attendance upon our public exercises, and have a right to respectful considerations.

On motion of Dr Mitchell, seconded by Prof Fetter, the President's communication was referred to a committee consisting of Dr Mitchell, Dr Phillips, and Prof Hubbard, who reported the following Resolutions:

Resolved

1. That the course pursued by Prof Hedrick, as set forth in his publications in the North Carolina Standard of the 4th inst. is not warranted by our usages, and that the political opinions expressed are not those entertained by any other member of this body.
2. That while we feel bound to declare our sentiments ^[6] freely upon this occasion, we entertain none other than feelings of personal respect and kindness for the subject of them, and sincerely regret the indiscretion into which he seems in this instance to have fallen.

After a brief discussion, the Resolutions were adopted by the following vote:

Aye -- Messrs. Mitchell, Phillips, Fetter Hubbard, Wheat, Shipp, C. Phillips, Brown, Pool, Lucas, Battle and Wetmore.

Nay -- Mr Herrisse, who said he voted in the negative "simply on the ground that the Faculty is neither charged with Black Republicanism, nor like to be suspected of it."

Primary Source Citation:

"Document, Proceedings of the Faculty." October 6, 1856. UNC Libraries. <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/145>
^[7] (accessed May 7, 2019)

Additional Resources:

The Benjamin Hedrick Ordeal: A Portait of Antebellum Politics and Debates Over Slavery^[8], a resource created by students and staff of North Carolina State University's History Department.

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The Benjamin Hedrick Ordeal: A Portrait of Antebellum Politics and Debates Over Slavery [8], a resource created by students and staff of North Carolina State University's History Department.

Primary Sources:

"Professor Hedrick's Defence" [23] from the October 4, 1856 edition of *The North Carolina Standard*.

Letter from Hedrick to Governor Bragg [24] dated October 6, 1856.

Proceedings of the Faculty ^[25] from October 6, 1856 meeting discussing the future of Hedrick at UNC.

Letter from University President David L. Swain to Trustee Charles Manly ^[26] dated October 7, 1856.

Letter from Hinton R. Helper to Benjamin S. Hedrick ^[27] dated October 15, 1856. Hinton Helper published *The Impending Crisis of the South* the following year. *The Impending Crisis of the South* pushed for the abolition of slavery and blamed the institution of slavery for lack of southern advancement; many argue that this work played a significant role in the onset of the Civil War.

Letter from Hedrick to Governor Manly ^[28] dated October 28, 1856.

3 January 2018

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