

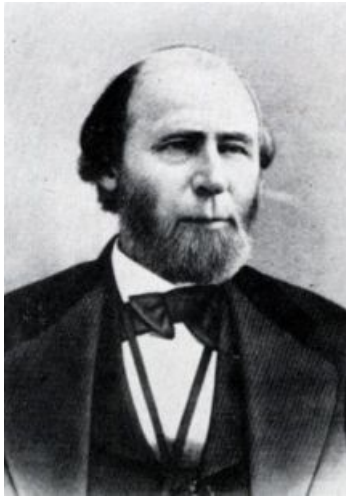
## Scalawag <sup>[1]</sup>

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## Scalawag

by Gordon B. McKinney, 2006



"Portrait of William Woods Holden, governor of North Carolina in 1865 and from 1868 to 1871." Photo courtesy of

LeanNC.

<sup>[2]</sup>"Scalawag" was the derogatory nickname used by conservative southern whites to describe other southern whites who were active members of the Republican Party during [Reconstruction](#) <sup>[3]</sup>. In North Carolina, the latter group was quite large and contained a significant number of outstanding leaders. The native-born white Republicans were primarily concentrated in two parts of the state: the "Quaker belt" in the [Piedmont](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, including [Randolph](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, [Moore](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, and [Guilford](#) <sup>[7]</sup> Counties; and the [Mountain](#) <sup>[8]</sup> areas of the west, especially [Mitchell](#) <sup>[9]</sup> and [Wilkes](#) <sup>[10]</sup> Counties.

Most native white Republicans had come to oppose the Confederacy at some point during the [Civil War](#) <sup>[11]</sup>. *Raleigh Standard* editor [William W. Holden](#) <sup>[12]</sup> became their leader during the last stages of the conflict and the early part of [Reconstruction](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, when [President Andrew Johnson](#) <sup>[13]</sup> appointed him provisional governor of the state. After he was defeated for a full term by Conservative Party candidate [Jonathan Worth](#) <sup>[14]</sup> in 1865, Holden and many other white Republicans endorsed the congressional Republicans and African American male suffrage. In 1868 the native white Republicans dominated a constitutional convention that created the most democratic state charter in North Carolina's history. Under the new document, Holden was elected governor and [Tod R. Caldwell](#) <sup>[15]</sup>, of [Burke County](#) <sup>[16]</sup>, lieutenant governor. Other white Republicans, including Alexander H. Jones of [Henderson County](#) <sup>[17]</sup>, were sent to Congress.

When white supporters of the Conservative Party resorted to violence during the 1870 legislative campaign, Holden created and used a state militia composed of partisans from western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. This so-called [Kirk-Holden War](#) <sup>[18]</sup> dominated the 1870 elections, which the Conservatives won decisively. When the General Assembly impeached and turned Holden out of office, Caldwell became governor. Caldwell was elected to a full term in 1872; he died in 1874 and was succeeded in office by [Curtis Brogden](#) <sup>[19]</sup>.

The revived and renamed Conservatives-now calling themselves Democrats-nominated [Zebulon B. Vance](#) <sup>[20]</sup> for governor in 1876 and defeated the Republicans despite a strong run by [Thomas Settle](#) <sup>[21]</sup> Jr. of [Rockingham](#) <sup>[22]</sup> County. Settle, a former [North Carolina Supreme Court](#) <sup>[23]</sup> justice and U.S. ambassador to Peru, was widely respected by opponents and allies alike. His aggressive campaign provided the impetus for a strong white presence in the North Carolina Republican Party throughout the post-Reconstruction period, when whites deserted the party in many other states of the former Confederacy.

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