

Barnes, David Alexander ^[1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1979

1819–24 June 1892

Excerpts from the Diary of David A. Barnes^[2], February 10 and 15, 1840¹

Barnes, David Alexander, 1819-1892

Page 1  

Monday Feb 10th 1840

The same state of weather still continues and all nature seems to partake of the gloom that surrounds them. The college buildings resemble old deserted mansions where we would rather expect to find the owl and raven than intelligent beings. No truant youth weary of his books is seen running over the campus and starting us with his savage yell. No separate groups are assembled around the doors to idle away a weary hour in mirth and pleasant conversation. But all have retired to their respective rooms. Some perhaps guilty few see the arms of Somnus others busily engaged over the [classic] page or adorning his brain in endeavoring to solve some abstruse problem in astronomy or calculus. This useless expenditure of time in acquiring a knowledge of circles lines and tangents is thought necessary to invigorate the mind To give it the requisite mou[?] for the reception and retention of ideas acquired in after [life] And thus we are compelled to plod our way through sines and cosines tangents and cotangents thrown together and forming an indigested mass without a single verdant and inviting spot upon which to repose. It is a mistaken notion in the system of education and one that deserves a radical change. The student who stores upon in his mind the useless familiar will find that he has been heaping up rubbish and forming a [jumble] house from which he can draw no valuable products and while he is only calculated to measure heights and distances find the base of a cone & his companion less distinguished in collegiate honours is far outstripping him in the race of honour and distinction. His knowledge will thus avail him nothing and can only turn away in mournful dejection and regret his folly. I have been reading an anonymous publication called *Battles* it is very interesting but contains nothing worthy of particular remarks.

(click for larger) Excerpt from Barnes' diary. Courtesy of UNC Libraries. ^[2]David Alexander Barnes, judge and legislator, was born in [Northampton County](#) ^[3], the son of Collin W. Barnes and Collin's second wife and cousin Louisa Barnes. Collin Barnes, a native of Nansemond County, Va., had settled in Northampton and become a successful [planter](#) ^[4]; he represented the county in the [North Carolina Senate](#) ^[5] in 1829 and 1830.

Following graduation from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6] in 1840, David Barnes entered politics and represented Northampton County in the House of Commons in 1844, 1846, and 1850. A member of the Secession Convention in 1861, he was during the war a member of the military council of [Governor Zebulon Vance](#) ^[7]. In 1866, Barnes was appointed provisional judge of the superior court of the First Judicial District by [Governor W. W. Holden](#) ^[8]; he served until 1868. The same governor appointed him trustee of The University of North Carolina in 1868. In 1872, Barnes moved to Murfreesboro; in 1873 he was a candidate for Congress but was defeated by [C. L. Cobb](#) ^[9]. In July 1873, at the instance of the state board of education, a state educational convention was held under the presidency of B. F. Moore. Barnes was one of the vice-presidents of the convention, which met to discuss the reopening of the university. While still living in Jackson, Barnes was one of the thirteen persons who organized the Church of the Saviour in 1851 and later served on the vestry. He was well-regarded by his fellow citizens for his general manners and acquirements.

In 1872, Barnes married Bettie Vaughan, the daughter of Colonel Uriah Vaughan, a well-to-do merchant in Murfreesboro. They had one son, David Collin, and three daughters.

References:

Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina* 2 vols. (1907–12).

D. L. Grant, *Alumni History of the University of North Carolina* (1924).

John H. Wheeler, *Reminiscences and Memoirs of North Carolina* (1883–84).

Benjamin B. Winborne, *The Colonial and State Political History of Hertford County* (1906).

Additional Resources:

David A. Barnes Papers, 1806-1892 (collection no. 03484). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/b/Barnes.David_A.html ^[10] (accessed March 1, 2013).

Barnes, David Alexander 1819-1892 in WorldCat: [https://www.worldcat.org/identities/np-barnes,%20david%20alexander\\$1819%201892](https://www.worldcat.org/identities/np-barnes,%20david%20alexander$1819%201892) ^[11]

Murfreesboro Historical Association Collection: Benjamin B. Winborne Papers, ECU Manuscript Collection:

<http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/0691-005/> [12]

Outhouse elevations, David A. Barnes House, Hertford County, North Carolina, NCSU Collections:
<http://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog/bh036802201> [13]

Biographic Information, UNC: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/global/getBio.html?type=bio&id=pn0000096&name=Barnes,%20David%20Alexander> [14]

Excerpts from the Diary of David A. Barnes , February 10 and 15, 1840 <https://docsouth.unc.edu/true/mss04-01/mss04-01.html> [2]

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1 January 1979 | Smith, Claiborne T., Jr.

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