Battle, Kemp Plummer

by W. Conard Gass, 1979

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Kemp P. Battle. From History of the University of North Carolina, vol. 2.

Kemp Plummer Battle, lawyer, railroad president, university president, educator, and historian, was born at Louisburg. He was the fourth child and third son of William Horn Battle, a distinguished North Carolina jurist, and Lucy Martin Plummer Battle. He was a great-grandson of Elisha Battle, a native of Nansemond County, Va., who in 1748 moved to the Tar River country of North Carolina and became a prominent member of the Baptist denomination and a civic and political leader. Two of Kemp Battle's brothers, Julian (b. 1826) and Thomas Devereaux (b. 1837), died in infancy. His remaining five brothers, like Kemp himself, were graduates of The University of North Carolina. His two youngest brothers, Wesley Lewis (1843–63) and Junius Cullen (1841–62), both died of battle wounds during the Civil War. His older brother, Joel (b. 1828), studied medicine for one year with a maternal uncle and then attended the University of Pennsylvania, from which he received the M.D. degree. He entered practice with a fair prospect of success but was forced by ill health to abandon medicine for the less demanding occupation of country merchant. He died in 1858. A younger brother, William Horn, Jr. (1833–93), also became a physician. After receiving his M.D. from the Medical College of South Carolina, he practiced medicine for many years at Lilesville. A third brother, Richard Henry (1835–1912), practiced law in Raleigh after a brief period of practice in Wadesboro. Kemp's older sister, Susan Catharine (1830–67), died unmarried 22 years after a fall from a runaway horse had left her an invalid for life. His younger sister, Mary Johnston (b. 1840), who married William Van Wyck II of New York, died unexpectedly in 1865, leaving a one-day-old daughter.

Battle received his early training in private schools in Louisburg, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill. He entered The University of North Carolina as a freshman in 1845 and was graduated with first honors as valedictorian of his class in 1849. During 1849–50 he served as tutor of Latin in the university, and for the following four years he was tutor of mathematics, meanwhile studying law with his father. He was admitted to the bar in 1854 and entered the practice of law in Raleigh. The following year he was married to his distant cousin, Martha Ann ("Pattie") Battle, daughter of James S. Battle of Edgecombe County, planter and cotton manufacturer. In 1857 he was named a director of the newly rechartered Bank of North Carolina. In 1861 he was chosen a delegate from Wake County to the Secession Convention and signed the Ordinance of Secession, though he had been a strong Union man prior to Lincoln's call for troops to coerce the seceding states. During the Civil War he served as president of the Chatham Railroad, which was organized to haul coal from the coal fields of Chatham County to the Confederate armament factories.
in two volumes, still in 1965 considered a "significant study." This work excepted, Battle's personal contributions to historical literature, like those of most of his generation of history professors, were based on scanty sources and consequently were narrow in conception and shallow in interpretation.

Kemp Plummer Battle was the father of three daughters and four sons. His first child, Cornelia Viola (1857–86), married James Sprunt (1859–1922), became a physician and medical school professor. His second child and first son, Kemp Plummer, Jr. (1859–1922), became a physician and medical school professor. His second son, Thomas Hall (1860–1936), practiced law in Tarboro and Rocky Mount and served for several years as president of the Bank of Rocky Mount and treasurer and general manager of the Rocky Mount Mills.
The third son, Herbert Bemerton [98] (1862–1929), received the Ph.D. degree in chemistry from The University of North Carolina and served for several years as director of the North Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station [30]. Battle’s youngest child was William James (1870–1955); after taking the A.B. (1888) and the A.M. (1889) degrees at the University of North Carolina, he undertook graduate work at Harvard [31], where he was awarded the Ph.D. in 1893. He taught the classical languages at the universities of Chicago, Cincinnati, and Texas and served for many years as dean of the latter school and for a time as its acting president.

In politics, Battle was an antebellum Whig [32] and a postbellum Democrat [33]. In religion he was an Episcopalian [34]. Numerous photographs survive, several of which have been reproduced in his published memoirs, Memories of an Old-Time Tar Heel [35], and in his History of the University of North Carolina, vol. 2 [2].

References:

Battle Family Papers and Cornelia (Phillips) Spencer Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

Kemp P. Battle, History of the University of North Carolina 2 vols. (1907–12), and Memories of an Old-Time Tar Heel (1945).


Additional Resources:


Memories of an old-time tar heel, by Kemp P Battle; William James Battle:https://www.worldcat.org/title/memories-of-an-old-time-tar-heel/oclc/666055 [38]

Search results for "Battle, Kemp P. (Kemp Plummer), 1831-1919" in the Internet Archive:https://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Battle%22%2C%3A%22Kemp%22%2C%3A%22Plummer%22%2C%3A1831-1919%22 [38]

Search results for "Battle, Kemp P. (Kemp Plummer), 1831-1919." in WorldCat:https://www.worldcat.org/search?q=su%3ABattle%22%2C%3A%22Kemp%22%2C%3A%22Plummer%22%2C%3A1831-1919%22&qt=hot_subject [38]

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