

Cherry, Joseph Blount ^[1]

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by Francis Speight, 1979

ca. 1816–18 Oct. 1882

Joseph Blount Cherry, planter, lawyer, and public official, was born in [Bertie County](#) ^[2], the son of Solomon Cherry and brother of [William Walton Cherry](#) ^[3]. Cherry was a student at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[4] in 1836–37 but did not graduate. He served in the North Carolina House of Commons in 1848, 1850, and 1852 and in the state senate from 1856 until 1860. As chairman of the Committee on Education in 1852, he introduced a bill, passed that year, to create the office of superintendent of public schools. [Calvin H. Wiley](#) ^[5] was the first person to hold the position; he and Cherry, who became chairman of the school committee in Bertie County, became lifelong friends and frequent correspondents. As a member of the legislature, Cherry also introduced a bill to provide for the education of public school teachers by establishing scholarships for that purpose in private colleges.

In about 1860, the unfortunate purchases in the [cotton](#) ^[6] market of a relative whom he had set up in business brought Cherry to financial ruin. The Oaks, the plantation home he had purchased from the widow of his brother, W. W., in 1850, was put up for sale by the sheriff. In a letter written at that time, Cherry remarked, "I find myself reduced to penury and misery." It appeared to him that his friends had deserted him; those "who in former days have clung to me to gratify their ambition when I could carry them along, now that I am fallen 'know me not.' In my difficulty my thoughts are turned to God and His mercy."

As issues leading to the [Civil War](#) ^[7] came to a head, Cherry stood firm for the preservation of the Union. He petitioned the governor to let the voters have a say in whether North Carolina should uphold the Union. His was an unpopular attitude in that part of the state and served to increase his feeling of isolation. When the war began he wrote to Wiley: "To my other misfortunes and miseries in this troubled world, war, dreadful cruel war is calling to the gory battlefield all my kindred. Brothers, nephews and children are, some gone and others preparing to go to the field, I fear, of carnage and death to fight in a fratricidal war . . . that we have done all we could to avert"; he added that "in a certain contingency," he was preparing to leave for the battlefield himself. He had supported the Union, but when the war began, loyalty to North Carolina led him to cast his lot with the [Confederacy](#) ^[8].

Cherry must have regained his property not long after it was advertised for sale, for by mid-1861 his address was once again the Oaks. After the war he resumed his law practice in Windsor, about three miles from his home, continuing it until his death. He was an active leader in the [Democratic](#) ^[9] party and in 1879 was appointed by Governor [Thomas J. Jarvis](#) ^[10] to represent North Carolina at board meetings and vote its stock in the organization that operated the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. Cherry was also interested in promoting the construction of additional canals in the East, since those already in operation had served the state well in the years following the Civil War.

Cherry married Sarah Outlaw, and they had several children. One of his sons, George Outlaw, a Confederate veteran, was secretary to Governor [Zebulon B. Vance](#) ^[11]. A portrait of Cherry is owned by his great-grandson of the same name in Windsor.

References:

Daniel L. Grant, *Alumni History of the University of North Carolina* ^[12] (1924).

M. C. S. Noble, *History of the Public Schools of North Carolina* ^[13] (1930).

[Calvin H. Wiley Papers](#) ^[14] (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

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