

Ervin, William Carson ^[1]

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by Karen S. Hood, 1986

16 Dec. 1859–16 July 1943

William Carson Ervin, lawyer, newspaper editor, and financier, was born in Marion. Nicknamed "Buddie" by his family and called "Will" in later years, Ervin was the son of James S. Ervin, a [Methodist](#) ^[2] minister, and Anna Matilda Carson Ervin. His paternal great-grandmother was Martha Marion, daughter of [Francis Marion](#) ^[3]. Ervin attended Finley High School in Lenoir before reading law for two years with Judge Clinton A. Cilly of Lenoir. In 1879 he entered [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[4] law school where he studied with [Professor Kemp P. Battle](#) ^[5] and received his degree in 1880. During the June 1880 term of the state supreme court, at the age of twenty, he was admitted to the North Carolina bar. However, his interests soon changed when he became involved in the newspaper business the following year. He edited the [Lenoir Topic](#) ^[6] from 1881 to 1884, the [Morganton Mountaineer](#) from 1884 to 1886, and, later, the [Morganton Herald](#) ^[7] from 1889 to 1895 when he ended his newspaper career.

In 1889 Ervin and Isaac T. Avery formed one of the earliest law partnerships in [Burke County](#) ^[8]. Their successful Morganton firm specialized in corporation law until 1926 when it was dissolved by mutual consent. Afterwards Ervin practiced alone until 1929, when he and J. E. Butler formed a partnership that lasted until Ervin's death.

Displaying a dislike for trial work, Ervin concentrated on business law, especially the drafting of legal documents. He provided much of the legal guidance for the industrial development of [Burke County](#) ^[8]. A noted financier, he served as president of Morganton Building and Loan for thirty-seven years. He was on the board of directors of many Burke County banks, utilities, and mining companies. In 1899 he was an incorporator of the Burke County Telephone Company, and in 1916 he was an officer of the Morganton Chamber of Commerce. Ervin was also instrumental in establishing the [Waldensian](#) ^[9] settlement in [Valdese](#) ^[10].

An active [Democrat](#) ^[11], Ervin served as mayor of Lenoir from 1887 to 1889 and as mayor of Morganton from 1911 to 1913. Even though he refused other offices, he remained active in state and local politics. He was chairman of the Burke County Democratic Executive Committee for six years as well as a member of the state Democratic Executive Committee. As a delegate to the Democratic National conventions at Baltimore in 1912 and St. Louis in 1916, Ervin helped nominate [Woodrow Wilson](#) ^[12] as the Democratic presidential candidate.

Ervin's main outside interest was local western North Carolina history. He was a member of the North Carolina History Club, the Hobby Club, and the [Masons](#) ^[13]. He also enjoyed singing with his wife. Ervin was a longtime member of the First Presbyterian Church in Morganton where he taught a men's Bible class for many years.

On 9 Mar. 1887 Ervin married Kate Lee Sheetz, the daughter of a [Presbyterian](#) ^[14] minister. They raised two children to maturity: Morton Sheetz, who married Lillian Cowart of St. Petersburg, Fla., and Julia Reid Ervin Coburn. Ervin was buried in Morganton.

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