

Evans, Charles Napoleon Bonaparte ^[1]

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by Durward T. Stokes, 1986

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Image of masthead from the *Carolina Patriot*, May 4, 1838, published by Clancy and Evans. From UNC-Greensboro Digital Collections.

Charles Napoleon Bonaparte Evans, editor and civic leader, was born in Norfolk County, Va., the son of James E. and Jane Shirley Evans. He left home at an early age after his father's death, and learned the printing business by working in Virginia and South Carolina as a journeyman and then as a printer's assistant to two North Carolina publishers, [Philo White](#) ^[2] of Raleigh and [Dennis Heartt](#) ^[3] of Hillsborough.

Because of a kinship with the widow of [William Swaim](#) ^[4], Evans became editor of the *Greensborough Patriot* in 1835 and the following year purchased the newspaper. He published the *Patriot* until 1839 in partnership with, first, Alfred E. Hanner; second, E. S. Zeverly; and third, John D. Clancy. The latter was Evans's father-in-law, as the publisher married Elizabeth Clancy in 1836. Though apparently successful in this endeavor, Evans disposed of the Greensboro paper and moved to Milton, N. C., in 1840. He purchased a printing plant from a former publisher, Nathaniel J. Palmer, and in the year of his arrival in the [Caswell County](#) ^[5] town launched the *Milton Chronicle* ^[6], which he published until his death.

Evans was gifted with a literary style and fluency superior to the average North Carolina editor of his day, and his paper was soon widely read. Under the motto, "Willing to Praise—Not Afraid to Blame," the editor staunchly defended his preference for the Whigs in politics, but nevertheless promised, "*Our press shall be a free and independent press—a channel admissible of political communications from opponents as well as from friends.*" Adherence to this policy was one of the reasons for the success of the *Chronicle*, as the editor promoted the interests of the town and county while championing a strict interpretation of the Constitution, limiting the power of the federal government, and opposing the growing sectionalism in the United States. With the demise of the [Whigs](#) ^[7], Evans became a loyal [Democrat](#) ^[8], unhesitatingly both praising the policies of his party and criticizing its errors. Throughout the antebellum period, the editor discouraged the trend toward secession; once the Confederacy was formed, however, he became one of its most loyal supporters. During [Reconstruction](#) ^[9], he caustically assailed both the carpetbaggers and the [Ku Klux Klan](#) ^[10], narrowly escaping physical injury because of his condemnation of the latter movement. When political affairs became normal again, he devoted his editorial talents to promoting [internal improvement](#) ^[11] and commercial development of the resources of Milton and Caswell County.

Thomas Clancy Evans became a partner with his father in the publication of the *Chronicle* in 1861, but shortly afterward left the paper to serve in the Confederate Army for several years as a captain of the "Milton Blues." With his enrollment in military service, young Evans continued the tradition of his family, which had furnished a captain in the [War of 1812](#) ^[12] and a soldier in the [American Revolution](#) ^[13]. After the war, he returned to his post in the *Chronicle* office.

The greatest literary asset of the elder Evans was his ability to intersperse humor cleverly among his compositions for the paper. The most outstanding achievement in this respect was his creation of a fictitious character named "[Jesse Holmes, the Fool Killer](#)." ^[14] This reformer supposedly wrote letters periodically to the editor who published them in the paper. Through this means Evans was able to express his views subtly but pungently on many current events of local or statewide interest. The popularity of the mythical Holmes grew to such an extent that he has become a significant unit in North Carolina [folklore](#) ^[15]. A cousin of Evans, [William Sydney Porter](#) ^[16], entitled one of his short stories "The Fool Killer," and many other authors have used the fictitious character in their literary creations. Unfortunately only five of these letters exist in the sixty-five known surviving issues of the *Milton Chronicle*.

Beginning in 1866, Evans edited a newspaper in Danville, Va., for two years, after which he and his son purchased the *Hillsborough Recorder*, in Hillsborough, N. C. The Evans family eventually sold this paper and published only the *Chronicle*.

In 1882, Evans was elected to the [North Carolina Senate](#) ^[17] to represent the Twentieth District. While the legislature was in session he died of bronchial pneumonia. Eloquent eulogies were delivered in both houses of the Assembly, which also voted to pay the funeral expenses. As no account of the services has survived, the burial place is unknown, and no information has been found indicating whether Evans was a member of any religious denomination. No photograph of the editor has been identified, but he was described in his later years by a contemporary as a tall man with a shock of snow white hair, a kindly but resolute facial expression, and a quiet, dignified demeanor.

The *Chronicle* ceased publication shortly after the death of its founder; Captain Evans, the only one of seven children to survive his father, engaged in another line of business and left numerous descendants who became prominent in the civic and commercial life of North Carolina and Virginia.

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Durward T. Stokes, "Charles Napoleon Bonaparte Evans and the *Milton Chronicle*," *North Carolina Historical Review* 46 (1969). ^[20] and "Five Letters from Jesse Holmes, the Fool Killer, to the Editor of the Milton Chronicle,"*North Carolina Historical Review* 50 (1973) ^[21].

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