

Holden, Joseph William ^[1]

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by Horace W. Raper, 1988

30 Sept. 1844–21 Jan. 1875

Joseph William Holden, poet, newspaperman, and state political leader, was born in [Raleigh](#) ^[2], the son of [William Woods](#) ^[3] and Ann Augusta Young Holden. He attended the Lovejoy School in Raleigh and later the military academy in [Charlotte](#) ^[4] conducted by Daniel H. Hill. With the outbreak of the [Civil War](#) ^[5], he enlisted as a private in the state troops before his seventeenth birthday and was stationed on [Roanoke Island](#) ^[6]. Holden distinguished himself for gallantry in service but was captured by the Union forces and confined as a prisoner of war for a year. After his parole, he returned to his home in Raleigh.

In 1862–63 Holden attended [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[7], but a strong desire to return to military service caused him to give up his formal education; however, he was persuaded by his father to work for the *North Carolina Standard*, having previously gained newspaper experience working during summer vacations. He continued in this capacity, as well as participating in his father's political campaigns, until 1868.

In 1868 Holden won a seat in the [General Assembly](#) ^[8] as a [Republican](#) ^[9] from [Wake County](#) ^[10], and, through the influence of his father, who was then governor, was elected speaker of the house. He presided over the chamber with grace and, given his youth, displayed a surprising knowledge of parliamentary law. In March 1870 he resigned the speakership to assume editorial control of the *Standard*, then under the financial control of N. Page & Co., after an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Congress.

After Governor Holden's impeachment and removal from office in 1871, Joseph left the state and attempted to make a new career for himself, first in Washington, D.C., and then in Leavenworth, Kans., where he worked for the *Times*, a newspaper edited by the brother of Susan B. Anthony. He was immediately promoted to the post of managing editor, but ill health forced him to leave the paper after a tenure of only eighteen months.

Returning to Raleigh, Holden was elected mayor in 1874. Through his temperate and judicious actions in office, he reestablished and maintained the affection of his fellow citizens—having had the reputation of a warm, friendly, but hot-tempered personality. He died before completing his term. In the last months of his life, he wrote occasional newspaper stories and even began a novel.

It was through his pen, and especially his poetry, that Holden is most remembered. He began writing verse as a young boy, often publishing it in the *North Carolina Standard*. Among his best poems are "Love's Melancholy," "Hymn," "A Home Above," and "[Hatteras](#)" ^[11]. The latter (original manuscript now owned by [Salem College](#) ^[12]) was written when he first saw the whitecaps of Cape Hatteras while on board ship as a prisoner of war. Described by [Walter Hines Page](#) ^[13] as the "best in sentiment and tone written in the South," "Hatteras" was included in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's collection of writings published under the title *Poems of Places*. Had his life and times been different, the young poet might have achieved national recognition. Certainly he was greatly respected and admired by another of North Carolina's famous writers, John H. Bonner.

Holden, who never married, died in his father's house and was buried in [Oakwood Cemetery](#) ^[14], Raleigh. He was known for his lovable spirit, discriminating mind, fertile and poetic imagination, cultivated taste, and courteous and generous manners.

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