

Holmes, Gabriel ^[1]

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by Daniel M. McFarland, 1988

1769–26 Sept. 1829

Gabriel Holmes, lawyer, governor, and congressman, was a native of Duplin (now [Sampson](#) ^[2]) County. He attended [Zion Parnassus Academy](#) ^[3] in [Rowan County](#) ^[4] and for a time was a student at Harvard. Afterwards he studied law with [John Louis Taylor](#) ^[5] in Raleigh, was admitted to the bar in 1790, and began to practice in Clinton. Holmes represented [Sampson County](#) ^[2] in the House of Commons in 1793, 1794, and 1795, and served in the North Carolina Senate in 1797, 1801, 1812, and 1813. He was a trustee of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6] from 1801 to 1804 and again from 1817 until his death. The General Assembly honored him eight times between 1810 and 1820 by appointments as a councilor of state.

In the General Assembly of 1820, Holmes was nominated as a candidate for governor but was defeated by [Esse Franklin](#) ^[7]. The following year, however, Franklin declined a second term and Holmes was elected over [Hutchins G. Burton](#) ^[8] of Halifax, [James Mebane](#) ^[9] of Orange, and [Joseph H. Bryan](#) ^[10] of Bertie counties. He served as governor of North Carolina from 7 Dec. 1821 to 7 Dec. 1824. As chief executive, Holmes was committed to expanding the functions of state government and tried to persuade the Assembly to spend more on [transportation facilities](#) ^[11] and education. He advocated the teaching of agricultural courses at the university, and during his administration the Board of Agriculture was established and money was appropriated for the promotion of agriculture and industry.

In the political caldron of the 1820–24 period, Holmes wavered between support of John Quincy Adams or John C. Calhoun. After Congressman [Charles Hooks](#) ^[12] of the Wilmington District voted for [William H. Crawford](#) ^[13] in the House vote of February 1825, Holmes successfully contested his seat and was sent to Washington. On Capitol Hill he was a messmate of U.S. Senator [John Branch](#) ^[14] at Mrs. Dunn's establishment. Both of the former North Carolina governors were identified as friends of Vice-President Calhoun. While in Congress, Holmes served on the Select Committee on the Militia and for a time was chairman of the Committee on the Post Office. He was easily reelected in 1827 and narrowly defeated [Edward B. Dudley](#) ^[15] in 1829. A few weeks after the 1829 election he died suddenly at his home near Clinton, and in a special election future governor Dudley was selected to replace him in Congress.

Holmes married Mary Hunter, the daughter of [Theophilus Hunter](#) ^[16], Revolutionary hero of [Wake County](#) ^[17]. One of their sons, [Theophilus Hunter Holmes](#) ^[18], was a classmate of Robert E. Lee and a year behind Jefferson Davis at West Point; he became a lieutenant general in the Confederate Army. A state [historical highway marker](#) ^[19] four miles north of Clinton indicates the former home of Governor Holmes.

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