

George, Marcus ^[1]

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by M. H. D. Kerr, 1986

ca. 1760/65?–7 Oct. 1810

Marcus George, educator and classical scholar, was born in Ireland. He obtained his U.S. citizenship in [Warren County](#) ^[2] August Court in 1802. His first known appearance in North Carolina was in 1788 at the time of the constitutional convention at Hillsborough, where he was in search of employment as a teacher. The Warrenton Academy had been created by legislative act in 1786, and five of the twenty trustees named in the act who were delegates to the Hillsborough convention engaged the young Irishman as principal to organize and conduct the school.

The male academy was well attended from the start and many students came from other communities as well as from Warren County. Many were sons of the leading citizens of eastern North Carolina and of the bordering counties of Virginia. [Thomas Ruffin](#) ^[3] (later chief justice of North Carolina), who was sent to the Warrenton Academy from his home in Essex County, Va., was so well instructed by George that he entered the junior class at Nassau Hall (now [Princeton University](#) ^[4]) in 1803. The scholastic achievements of George's students who furthered their education at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[5] so impressed President [Joseph Caldwell](#) ^[6] that an unsuccessful effort was made in 1805 to induce George to accept the chair of ancient languages at Chapel Hill.

Despite the numerous references to him as the Reverend Mr. George, no evidence of his church affiliation has been found. His reputed previous experience on the stage, however, contributed to the success of theatrical performances to raise money for buildings and equipment for the school during his twenty years as principal of the Warrenton Academy. As early as 1793 he instigated the performance of a comedy and farce, followed by a ball the next night. The institution flourished and a new building was authorized in 1800 to replace the unpretentious building that had been completed in 1792; George conducted the subscription and directed the activities to finance the undertaking. This "Red Academy," so called because of the dark red paint used on the exterior of the building, continued to be used as a school building, with some alterations and additions, for over a hundred years until a high school was built on the site in 1923.

Until 1805 students at Warrenton Academy lived in homes in the town, but that year a steward's house was built at the academy for the accommodation of the students with board and lodging under the immediate supervision of the principal. Various activities were offered to supplement the money raised by contributions. Among them was a theatrical performance by the gentlemen of the town on the evening of the first day of the Warrenton spring races in June 1805. [Jacob Mordecai](#) ^[7] was steward at the academy in 1807, the year of George's marriage to Mary F. Campbell. One of Mordecai's daughters later wrote that George's marriage, late in life, was an unhappy one and that his wife was an artful widow who induced him to move from Warrenton to Petersburg, Va. Apparently they had no children.

Not long before leaving Warrenton in 1809, George built a new dwelling house across Main Street from the Warrenton Academy on town lots totaling two acres that he had bought in 1802. After moving to Petersburg, he sold his house to Jacob Mordecai. In Petersburg he was principal of an academy when he died "after a short but severe indisposition."

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