

Lowe, Thomas G. ^[1]

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by Ralph Hardee Rives, 1991

10 Aug. 1815–13 Feb. 1869

Thomas G. Lowe, Methodist ^[2] minister of Halifax ^[3], was known as "a forest born Demosthenes," "one of the best equipped preachers of the Methodist denomination," and the "Foremost Natural Orator of North Carolina." He was born between the towns of Halifax and Enfield near the historic Hayward's Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church.

Lowe received his early education in the old field schools ^[4] of his day and became a local minister in the Methodist Episcopal church before he was twenty-one. Although he never entered the Annual Conference of the church, he preached and held stated appointments in many areas of eastern North Carolina and Virginia. He was frequently called upon "to deliver funeral discourses and Masonic addresses, in both of which he very greatly excelled." According to tradition, his sermons always attracted large audiences. "Men of intelligence would ride twenty or thirty miles to listen to this sweet and fascinating orator." In a eulogy to Lowe, presented in 1882, Theodore B. Kingsbury ^[5] observed that Lowe's name "should be added to that roll of illustrious American preachers who were eminent for a rich, glowing, and inspiring eloquence."

Lowe never wrote out his sermons, made an outline, or even used notes, feeling that he lost all inspiration and fervor when he resorted to a pen. Instead, he mentally organized his sermons, which usually lasted thirty to forty minutes, while working or fishing and then memorized the language he wished to use. His "finest oratory," however, was generally extemporaneous with no previous preparation.

Lowe spoke with a clear, musical voice and always used pure, correct English. He had "a splendid imagination but under the control of reason and taste and allied to wisdom and discretion. He was a very sound piece of American timber." He "spoke fine poetry, although presented in the garb of prose." Once, after delivering a sermon at the St. John's Street Methodist Church ^[6] in New York City, he was invited to preach there for the then unheard-of salary of \$12,000 a year. But he chose not to leave his home and work in North Carolina.

Lowe married Maria J. Wade of New Bern in August 1842, and they had two daughters. He was apparently buried in an unmarked grave near his home in Halifax County ^[7].

References:

W. C. Allen, *History of Halifax County* (1918). ^[8]

Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (1974).

Theodore B. Kingsbury, *An Oration on the Life and Character of the Late Rev. Thomas G. Lowe, Delivered at Hayward's Church, Halifax County, on June 24th, 1882* (1882). ^[9]

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