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Sawyer, Samuel Tredwell [1]

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by Daniel M. McFarland, 1994

1800–29 Nov. 1865

See also: Harriet Jacobs [2]

Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, lawyer, congressman, editor, collector of customs, and Confederate officer, was born in Edenton [3], Chowan County [4], the oldest son of Dr. Mathias and Margaret Hosmer Blair Sawyer. He attended Edenton Academy and The University of North Carolina [5], and after reading law he began to practice in his hometown.

From 1829 to 1832 Sawyer represented the borough of Edenton in the General Assembly [6], where he was identified with the antitariff group. In both 1831 and 1832 he was an unsuccessful candidate for speaker. He was a delegate to the Philadelphia antitariff convention in 1831, a friend of John C. Calhoun, a supporter of the Barbour movement in 1832, and a staunch advocate of South Carolina during the Nullification crisis. In 1834 he represented Chowan County in the state senate and worked for a revision of the state constitution and for state support of public works. In 1835 he represented Chowan at the state constitutional convention.

An anti–Van Buren coalition including Whigs [7] elected Sawyer to the Twenty-fifth Congress (1837–39). In Washington he quickly reacted against the positions taken by Henry Clay's followers and was soon working with the Southern Democrats [8]. In 1838 he was defeated for reelection when the Whigs supported Kenneth Rayner of Winton. During his one term in the House, Sawyer was chairman of the Committee on Expenditures on Public Buildings.

After leaving Congress he moved to Norfolk, Va., and resumed the practice of law. During the Polk administration he founded a newspaper to support the president. The first number of the *Southern Argus and Virginian and North Carolina Advertiser*, with the motto "Southern Views and Southern Rights" on the masthead, appeared on 8 Jan. 1848. Sawyer was editor and proprietor until 1853, when he was named collector of customs for Norfolk, a position he held for five years. In 1858 he tried unsuccessfully to organize a Stephen A. Douglas paper in Norfolk. Soon afterwards he moved to Washington.

When the Civil War [9] began, Sawyer returned to the South and in September 1861 was appointed a commissary major in the Confederate army. He was assigned to Elizabeth City [10] with responsibility for helping to get supplies to forces defending Roanoke Island and the coastal area. This front quickly collapsed, as Roanoke Island [11], Elizabeth City, and Edenton all fell to Union forces in February 1862. Six months later Sawyer retired from military service.

Sawyer married Lavinia Peyton, the daughter of Francis Peyton of Alexandria, Va. They had three daughters: Fannie Lenox, Sarah Peyton, and Laura. The former congressman died in Bloomfield, N.J.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

Samuel Treadwell Sawyer is generally believed to be the father of children born to Harriet Jacobs who was at the time enslaved. He was most likely the "Mr. Sands" of her autobiographical narrative Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Please see the NCpedia article on Harriet Jacobs for more information, http://www.ncpedia.org/biography/jacobs-harriet [12].

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