

## **Williams, Lewis** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Daniel M. Mcfarland, 1996

**1 Feb. 1786–20 Feb. 1842**

See also: [Williams, Robert](#) <sup>[2]</sup>; [Williams, Marmaduke](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

Lewis Williams, congressman, was a native of [Surry County](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, the son of Joseph (1748–1827) and Rebecca (or Rebekah) Lanier Williams. His father, a native of Virginia who moved to [Surry](#) <sup>[4]</sup> shortly before the [Revolution](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, was a member of the [Provincial Congress](#) <sup>[6]</sup> at Hillsborough in 1775 and at Halifax in 1776, then served as a colonel in the war for independence. His mother was the daughter of General Thomas Lanier of [Granville County](#) <sup>[7]</sup>. The Williams family achieved great distinction. Lewis's oldest brother, [Robert](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, was a congressman and governor of Mississippi. Another brother, John, served in the U.S. Senate from Tennessee, and Lewis's twin brother, Thomas Lanier, was a prominent politician and judge in eastern Tennessee. Congressmen [Marmaduke Williams](#) <sup>[3]</sup> and [Hugh Lawson White](#) <sup>[8]</sup> were both close relatives.

In 1808 Lewis was graduated from [The University of North Carolina](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, where he became a tutor (1810–12) and was granted a master's degree (1812). In 1813 he was appointed a trustee of his alma mater, a post he held for the rest of his life. Surry County sent him to the [General Assembly](#) <sup>[10]</sup> in 1813 and again in 1814. In 1813 he was an unsuccessful candidate for Congress, running against [Edmund Jones](#) <sup>[11]</sup> and the incumbent, [Meshack Franklin](#) <sup>[12]</sup>. Two years later Williams defeated Franklin and thereafter was returned to Congress every two years until his death. His service in Washington for fourteen terms (March 1815–February 1842) gained him the title "Father of the House."

During the [Era of Good Feelings](#) <sup>[13]</sup> Williams, distrusting [Monroe](#) <sup>[14]</sup>, Calhoun, and Jackson, supported William H. Crawford. His early efforts were devoted to a reduction of taxes and the size of the army. In February 1817 he offered a resolution to abolish all internal taxes. The following year he questioned the legality of Jackson's campaign against the Seminoles. Williams was generally opposed to Secretary of War Calhoun's program for [internal improvements](#) <sup>[15]</sup>, but he supported the Missouri Compromise in 1820.

The Williams family feud with [Jackson](#) <sup>[16]</sup> began with the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1813, when Colonel John Williams and General Jackson clashed. In 1823 Jackson forced John from the U.S. Senate. In the presidential campaign of 1842 Lewis was a leading supporter of William H. Crawford, and in February 1825, when the House of Representatives had to decide the election results, Lewis voted for Crawford. During the four years [John Q. Adams](#) <sup>[17]</sup> was president, Williams was sympathetic to the administration, and by 1827 he had become a National Republican. Adams men in the state General Assembly tried in vain to reward Williams for his support by sending him to the U.S. Senate.

During the [Jackson](#) <sup>[18]</sup> and [Van Buren](#) <sup>[19]</sup> administrations Williams was in the opposition. Democrat Samuel King tried to capitalize on the fact that Williams opposed Jackson and Van Buren by running against him in 1829 and 1833, but Williams kept his seat. Williams was a bitter opponent of the Democratic presidents on the issue of the U.S. Bank, but he did support Jackson in the Nullification crises and on the Force Bill. In 1833 he was the Whig choice for Speaker of the House, but the Democratic candidate, Andrew Stevenson, was selected by the majority.

In the House of Representatives Williams served for several sessions as chairman of the Claims Committee. He was at different times a member of the Public Lands Committee, the Committee on Territories, the Committee on Indian Affairs, and the Committee on Rules. With the Whig victory in 1840 he emerged as one of the more important members of Congress. His death just over a year later came as a great shock to members of his party. Former president Adams on 23 Feb. 1842 recorded in his diary: "Lewis Williams was one of the best men in the House, or in the world." The "Father of the House" never married. After his death in Washington, D.C., his body was returned to Surry County for burial in Panther Creek Cemetery.

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

NCpedia staff note that there may be some inconsistency in the record of Lewis Williams's genealogy regarding his connection to Robert Williams. This entry by Daniel M. Mcfarland reports that Lewis and Robert Williams were brothers and Marmaduke Williams their cousin. The NCpedia article from the Dictionary of North Carolina Biography for Robert Williams indicates Robert and Lewis were cousins and Marmaduke the brother of Robert. The Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress entry for Robert reports that Robert, Lewis, and Marmaduke were brothers. The entry from the same source for Lewis reports that Robert and Lewis were brothers, but Marmaduke was a cousin.

### **References:**

Charles F. Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vols. 5–7 (1970).

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J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed., *The Papers of William Alexander Graham*, vol. 2 (1959).

North Carolina Sons of the American Revolution, *Lineage Book* (1951).

Herbert D. Pegg, *The Whig Party in North Carolina, 1834–1861*(1968).

N. K. Risjord, *The Old Republicans* (1965).

#### **Additional Resources:**

"Williams, Lewis, (1782 - 1842)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000527><sup>[21]</sup> (accessed March 10, 2014).

#### **Subjects:**

Biographies<sup>[22]</sup>

Public officials<sup>[23]</sup>

#### **Authors:**

Mcfarland, Daniel M.<sup>[24]</sup>

#### **Origin - location:**

Surry County<sup>[25]</sup>

#### **From:**

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.<sup>[26]</sup>

1 January 1996 | Mcfarland, Daniel M.

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