

HISTORY MAKER

CALVIN HENDERSON WILEY

Born: Feb. 3, 1819, Guilford County

Died: Jan. 11, 1887, Winston

Known for: North Carolina's first superintendent of Public Schools, chairman of Winston's first board of education, a member of the General Assembly, author and a life-long advocate for public education.

Calvin Wiley came of age as the public school movement of the mid-1800s was building steam. Publicly funded universal education was a divisive topic in America's formative years, but champions such as Thomas Jefferson and Noah Webster campaigned for communities to provide for the education of all children, regardless of financial means.

Wiley graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill and was admitted to the bar in 1840, the same year North Carolina's Common School legislation was passed.

Ten years later, however, when he was elected to the General Assembly, the system of schools was a patchwork of disparate instruction with no supervision or common standards.

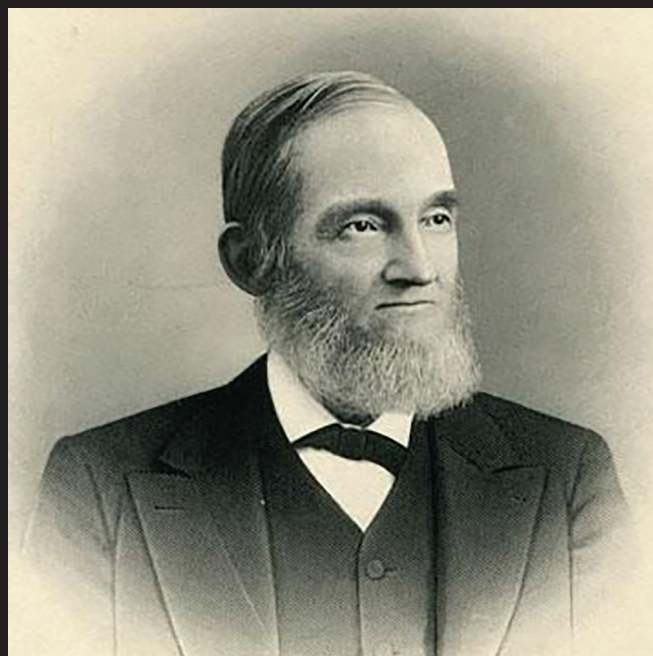
An eloquent and persuasive writer, he supported sweeping legislation to bring a quality level of education to as many of the state's children as possible. When it passed, he left the Assembly to accept appointment as the first Superintendent of Common Schools in 1853.

Born the second of David L. and Anne (Woodburn) Wiley's seven children on the family's Guilford County farm, he attended the Presbyterian-operated Caldwell Institute before studying literature and law at UNC. Through an active and varied career in politics, public service and ministry, he authored the first North Carolina-centric school textbook, many articles and published six novels.

As head of the state's education system, he traveled to many communities to convince them tax money would be well spent and the hours their children spent away from farms and family businesses in school would benefit everyone.

"We cannot educate ... people against their will," he said in 1853. "Every consideration of prudence, of justice and of patriotism calls on us to be patient, to be tolerant of honest mistakes, to be diligent and to be faithful to our great cause."

He set standards for textbooks and curriculum, codified standards of education for teachers and set up clinics across the state to certify them at much lower expense than college degrees and pushed for higher teacher pay. In a time when women had few professional opportunities, he advocated for



women to be allowed to teach.

His 12-year tenure spanned the Civil War, when N.C. school money remained untouched and schools continued to operate unlike many other Southern school systems.

After the war, he moved to Tennessee to work with the American Bible Society for several years. That position brought him to Winston in 1874, where he resumed his advocacy for public education. He was elected the first chairman of the city's first board of education in 1883.

His impact on education across the state can be measured in student attendance rising from 95,000 in 1853 to 118,852 by 1860. Teacher pay rose from \$15 a month to \$28 in that time. At the end of his tenure, North Carolina ranked third in the nation for education, behind Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Education, he said, "is the most all-pervading secular influence in the State." What was taught in the schools would "radically affect the character of the whole state."