

## **William Henry Bernard**

William Henry Bernard (1837-1916) was both Mr. Editor and Mr. Democrat of Wilmington for 40 years after he became editor-owner of the Wilmington Star.

Bernard was a Virginia native who came to North Carolina by way of Texas. He had once edited The Star Spangled Banner, a newspaper in Texas.

Bernard was first a staunch Whig who opposed secession, and then a 24-year-old soldier in the first regiment of Confederate troops from North Carolina who saw battle in the Civil War.

When his brief war career was over (he was discharged for physical disability), he worked on newspapers in Fayetteville, where he had settled with his wife, a native of the town on the upper Cape Fear. Late in the war, using a press from a defunct pre-war newspaper, he actually published a daily newspaper, the Daily Telegraph.

When the war ended with Fayetteville battered by General William Tecumseh Sherman's army, Bernard moved to Wilmington with Col. John D. Barry and founded the Wilmington Dispatch. In 1867, he left the Dispatch and began the Wilmington Star.

Bernard served as the Democratic Party's chairman. His newspaper became a powerful voice for the resurgent party, fighting against the post-Civil War Republican Party that, thanks to large numbers of newly-franchised black voters, was often in the majority. Working as both party chairman and editorial propagandist, Bernard, at times, foiled the majority.

His newspaper's editorial platform was stridently in favor of state's rights and white supremacy. It also plugged for improving railroads and economic development for the port city. He lived to see Wilmington's rise from bitter racial strife in the 1890s to a growing rail center and shipbuilding port during World War I.

The Wilmington Star-News continues as one of the state's longest-established daily newspapers. In contrast to its white supremacy tone of 100 years ago, a more modern-day editor Alfred G. Dickson, won a national award for his editorials condemning links between the Ku Klux Klan and law enforcement officers.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
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