

Dr. Kemp Plummer Battle led a long life of devoted and eminent service in Church and State. He was an outstanding business leader, public servant, and historian for Raleigh and the state of North Carolina. Dr. Battle was especially active in the restoration of Raleigh after the Civil War.

At age 17, Dr. Battle graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1849 as the valedictorian of his class. During the next five years he worked at the university, as tutor of Latin and then as tutor of mathematics, while studying law under the tutelage of his father. He was admitted to the Bar in 1854 and began a practice in Raleigh. Battle practiced in Raleigh until 1876, when he moved to Chapel Hill as President of the University where he was instrumental in re-opening the University, which had closed in 1870.

From 1854-76, Dr. Battle was an active member and vestry member at Christ Church, which was built in 1853. In 1857, he was named a director of the re-chartered Bank of North Carolina. About the same time, he was appointed a director of the State Asylum for the Insane and a member of the executive committee.

In 1861 he was chosen as a delegate from Wake County to the State Constitutional Convention and signed the Ordinance of Secession although he was a strong Union man prior to Lincoln's call for troops to coerce the seceding states. During the Civil War he served as president of the Chatham Railroad which was organized to build a road from Raleigh to the Chatham County coal fields to haul coal to Confederate munitions factories.

In 1862, Dr. Battle was elected by the legislature to serve as trustee of the University and held this position until 1868, when the entire board was thrown out by the Reconstruction General Assembly. Again elected trustee in 1874, he served successive re-elections until his death in 1919, a total of 51 years as trustee.

He was elected State Treasurer by the legislature in 1866 but removed from office in 1868 when the entire State Government was replaced by the United States military under Congressional Reconstruction. The range of his interest is further seen in the organization of the Citizens' National Bank and the North Carolina State Life Insurance Company, both at Raleigh. He remained President of the Insurance Company while he lived in Raleigh.

Also in this period, Dr. Battle was elected Commissioner of the City of Raleigh, where he found the finances of the city in disorder and the treasury empty. The books didn't show the amount of bonds which had been issued

or the indebtedness for current expenses. With Battle's organizational skills and the inflow of taxes, the city's treasury was soon in order. In addition, he persuaded his colleagues to run cross streets in many places to improve congested conditions. Battle only served one term, but continued as Commissioner of the Sinking Fund until he left Raleigh in 1876.

In 1867, at the request of Dr. Brinton Smith, Battle accepted the office of treasurer without salary for the newly formed Saint Augustine Normal School and Collegiate Institute, now known as St. Augustine's College. Battle with George W. Mordecai, Col. William E. Anderson and others formed Oakwood Cemetery. He served as president from 1871-76. Battle is buried in Oakwood Cemetery.

Because of his large farming interests, and his conspicuous advocacy of improved agriculture, he was active in reviving the State Agricultural Society and as its President, in 1867-70, engineered with success three State Fairs in Raleigh. For many years, he was also a member of the State Board of Agriculture. In 1877, largely due to the efforts of University President Kemp P. Battle, the North Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station became only the second agricultural experiment station in the nation - a full 10 years before the federal government supported such a plan. As President of the University, Battle supported the use of land grant funds to establish a separate College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in Raleigh, now known as NC State University.

As an historian, Battle spent a lot of his time giving lectures and writing. Some of his publications include *Memories of an Old-Time Tar Heel*, *History of the University of North Carolina*, *The Early History of Raleigh: The Capital City of North Carolina*, *History of the Supreme Court of North Carolina*, *Raleigh and the Old Town of Bloomsbury*, *North Carolina Booklet: Great Events in North Carolina*, many biographical papers on North Carolinians, and several papers on the Episcopal Church in North Carolina.

In 1874, Battle was reappointed a trustee to the University, a position he served for the rest of his life. He was named president of the University in 1876 and served ably until 1891, when he resigned to become Alumni Professor of History. He died February 4, 1919, after a long life of distinguished service to Raleigh and the State of North Carolina.

Sources

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