

Tribute to  
Governor John Branch  
and  
Chief Justice R. Hunt Parker  
by the  
Frank M. Parker Chapter  
of the  
United Daughters of the Confederacy

## GOVERNOR JOHN BRANCH

Governor John Branch was born in Halifax County, N. C. on November 4, 1782. It was in the General Assembly of N. C. which convened at Raleigh on November 18, 1811, that he made his first appearance in public life as State Senator from his native county. He was destined to hold more high public offices than any other North Carolinian in all of history. He was to become the first North Carolinian to hold a cabinet post in the federal government; he was to become the first American to serve as Governor of two states, North Carolina and Florida; but most of all, he was to show that ability and dedication to service so necessary in an outstanding statesman.

While serving as Governor of North Carolina he saw the need for and recommended to the General Assembly the establishment of a Supreme Court for this state, and thereby became the father of our Supreme Court. It is interesting to note in this connection that no county in this state has produced more Supreme Court Justices than his native county of Halifax.

Governor Branch's career was amazingly varied. He served as a member of both Houses of the North Carolina General Assembly, as a member of both Houses of the Congress of the United States, as a member of the Constitutional Convention, as a Federal Judge, and as Secretary of the Navy of the United States. He was one of the earliest advocates of public education, and constantly fought against oppressive and unjust laws. His wisdom and foresight were strikingly displayed in a message to the General Assembly on November 22, 1820 when he referred to imposters in the medical profession and urges a system of regulation for the government of physicians. He thus became the founder of our modern medical board of examiners. His service as Secretary of the Navy was both outstanding and colorful. The story of Peggy Eaton and the havoc her marriage caused in President Andrew Jackson's cabinet is generally known.

Governor Branch died in Enfield on the 4th day of January, 1863. An editorial in a Florida newspaper stated:

"Born at the end of the American Revolution, this aged patriot lived to witness the dissolution of the Union then formed, and to pass away amid the convulsions which now shake the continent."

### Chief Justice R. Hunt Parker

Chief Justice R. Hunt Parker was born in Enfield, N. C. on February 15, 1892. He attended the Enfield Graded School, University of North Carolina, University of Virginia, Wake Forest Law School, and the University of Virginia Law School. He was admitted to the N. C. Bar during the summer of 1914, approximately a year before receiving his LLB degree from the University of Virginia Law School.

During World War I, he served as a Field Artillery officer in France for nearly seventeen months. After the war he returned to Enfield to practice law, and in 1923 was elected Representative from Halifax County in the General Assembly. This was the beginning of a long and outstanding career as Solicitor, Superior Court Judge, Supreme Court Associate Justice, Supreme Court Senior Justice, and finally Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. It is interesting to note that he was the third native son of Halifax County to serve as Chief Justice during this century.

Chief Justice Parker was known far and wide as an outstanding jurist and scholar of the law. He served as Chairman of the Judicial Council from March, 1962 to February 7, 1966. He also served as a member of the Commission to study improvements in the Administration of Justice in North Carolina, and as Chief Justice set up the new courts created under the Court Reform Amendments to the North Carolina Constitution.

He was an outstanding orator and never failed to use this talent in his continuous fight for good government, high morality, and the constitutional principles that have made this country great. No fight was too difficult or too unpopular for him to wage when he felt that our heritage was threatened. He will undoubtedly go down in history as North Carolina's fighting Chief Justice.

He died on November 10, 1969 and is survived by his widow, Rie Williams Parker.

---

In his spare time, Chief Justice Parker was an avid student of history and English literature. He read continuously and frequently quoted from the classics. He was dignified, austere in his manner, impeccably dressed, yet sociable and friendly to all. He never forgot a face or a name, and his friends stretched across the State of North Carolina from Manteo to Murphy. Above all, he was a dedicated statesman and a true gentleman.