

Watauga Club ^[1]

Watauga Club

by William D. Snider, 2006

See also: "[Mummy Letters](#)" ^[2].

Organized on 26 May 1884 in Raleigh, the Watauga Club sprang out of the desire of a group of young, professional North Carolinians to look toward the future rather than remain transfixed by the losses of the past. The club, while avoiding partisan politics, attracted a youthful membership intensely interested in the economic and social betterment of North Carolina. Under the guidance of a young attorney, [William Joseph Peele](#) ^[3], and aided by several young men destined to rise to positions of leadership-among them [Walter Hines Page](#) ^[4] and [Josephus Daniels](#) ^[5]-the club pushed for the establishment of an industrial school in North Carolina. Col. [Leonidas L. Polk](#) ^[6], editor of the *Progressive Farmer* ^[7], took up the club's campaign, and in 1887 the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (now [North Carolina State University](#) ^[8]) was chartered.

Because of member criticism of what Page called "the [mummies](#)" ^[2], the established leadership of the state, many looked with skepticism on the [progressive](#) ^[9] ideas of the Watauga Club. At its largely unpublicized dinner meetings, the club's membership called for improved [roads](#) ^[10] and schools, modern agricultural methods, and farmers' institutes. In the words of one early member, the Watauga Club was always on the look out for any chance to extend "the opportunities of the common man."

After an energetic start, the club drifted into inactivity in the 1890s, but it became active again toward the end of the century in promoting a [textile](#) ^[11] department for the new college. As its membership gradually aged, the Watauga Club lost some of its youthful energies and was quiescent until it was reenergized during the 1920s under the leadership of Clarence Poe, who had succeeded Polk as editor and publisher of the *Progressive Farmer*. Poe remained the club's president from 1925 through 1955, during which time the group regularly invited incoming governors and other important state leaders into its membership.

During modern times, the Watauga Club has maintained a regular membership of some two dozen professional, academic, and business leaders from Raleigh and surrounding cities. North Carolina State University has memorialized the club by establishing the [Watauga Medal](#) ^[12] for leadership and also by naming several campus buildings for the club and several of its members, including Page, Daniels, Peele, and Poe.

References:

Jeri Gray, *A Century of the Watauga Club and Its Role in State History* (1984).

Richard Walser, *The Watauga Club* (1980).

Additional Resources:

"MC 00229 Guide to the Watauga Club Records, 1884 - 2011." Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University. <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/findingaids/mc00229/> ^[13] (accessed August 16, 2012).

"Watauga Club Gateway." North Carolina State University. https://www.ncsu.edu/facilities/buildings/wat_club_gate.htm ^[14] (accessed August 16, 2012).

"The Young Men Of The South: Letter Of The Hon. Carl Schurz To The Watauga Club Of Raleigh." *The New York Times*. November 15, 1885. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9503E2DC1E3EEF33A25756C1A9679D94649FD7CF> ^[15] (accessed August 16, 2012).

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History of NC State and the Watauga Medal YouTube video. 3:25. Posted by NCState, April 13, 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz3tpLXIDAY> ^[16] (accessed August 16, 2012).

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Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. [21]

1 January 2006 | Snider, William D.

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