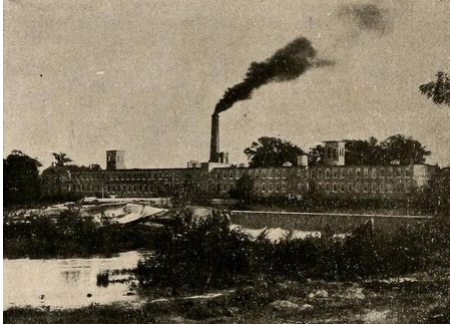


Battle, William Smith ^[1]

Battle, William Smith

by Elizabeth Dancy Battle, 1979; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, April 2023

4 Oct. 1823–10 Nov. 1915



The Gateway of Eastern North Carolina.

^[2]William Smith Battle planter and manufacturer, was born in [Edgecombe County](#) ^[3], the son of Sally Harriet Westray and [James Smith Battle](#) ^[4]. He began his education at Stony Hill and Louisburg academies and was graduated from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[5] in 1844. Battle soon was occupied in the management of a very large plantation devoted to the production of cotton. He also owned and operated the [Rocky Mount Cotton Mill](#) ^[6] and a grist mill and within a few years was probably the wealthiest man in the county. In 1858 he began the construction of a large brick home in Tarboro and in 1860 moved his family there.

He was a delegate to the convention of 1861 and voted for secession from the Union. His cotton mills thereafter produced cloth for uniforms and yarn for socks for the [Confederate Army](#) ^[7]. His plantations supplied meat and corn, and he invested heavily in Confederate bonds. His activity apparently attracted the attention of Federal officials: in the summer of 1863, a raiding party of Union troops was dispatched from New Bern to destroy his industrial enterprise. At great sacrifice, Battle rebuilt the cotton mill, the grist mill, and a cotton gin. The end of the war found him in extreme financial straits. The cotton mill burned again and was rebuilt with money borrowed at a staggering rate of interest. Land was sold to repay loans, but the [Panic of 1873](#) ^[8] brought utter ruin. In 1890, Battle turned over his remaining property to his creditors and retired to a farm in his wife's name in Edgecombe County, where he farmed for many years.

On 25 June 1845, Battle married Elizabeth Mary Dancy, daughter of Charlotte Sessums and Francis Little Dancy of Tarboro. They were the parents of nine sons and a daughter: James Smith II, who married John Anna Somerville; Frank Dancy, married to Emily Semple; William Smith II; John Dancy, who married Mary Fremont; Samuel Westray, married to Alice Belknap; Camillus Little; Elisha; Octavius, married to Margaret Maud Anthony; Marmaduke; and Elizabeth Dancy.

Although he belonged to no church, Battle was buried in the Calvary Episcopal churchyard in Tarboro.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

This person enslaved and owned other people. Many Black and African people, their descendants, and some others were enslaved in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865. It was common for wealthy landowners, entrepreneurs, politicians, institutions, and others to enslave people and use enslaved labor during this period. To read more about the enslavement and transportation of African people to North Carolina, visit <https://aaahc.nc.gov/programs/africa-carolina-0> ^[9]. To read more about slavery and its history in North Carolina, visit <https://www.ncpedia.org/slavery> ^[10]. - Government and Heritage Library, 2023

References:

H. B. Battle et al., *The Battle Book* (1930).

Kemp P. Battle, *Memories of an Old-Time Tar Heel* (1945).

Rocky Mount Mills (1943).

Additional Resources:

Battle, Kemp Plummer. *William Smith Battle: By One who Knew Him Well : 1823-1915* K.P. Battle - North Carolina - 4 pages. http://books.google.com/books/about/William_Smith_Battle.html?id=NyFRtqAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false ^[11] (accessed March 8, 2013).

Battle Family Papers, 1765-1955 (collection no. 03223). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/b/Battle_Family.html ^[12] (accessed March 8, 2013).

Capitol Broadcasting Company website: http://www.cbc-raleigh.com/capcom/news/2007/corporate_07/rm_mill_purchase/rm_mill_purchase.html ^[13]

Edgecombe County: Along the Tar River, by Monika S. Fleming, [Google e-book](#) ^[14].

Rocky Mount Mills, a case history of industrial development, 1818-1943, ECU Libraries <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/16842> ^[15]

"Rocky Mount Mills." N.C. Highway Historical Marker E-7, N.C. Office of Archives & History <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=E-7> ^[16] (accessed March 7, 2013).

Rocky Mount Record. *Rocky Mount: The Gateway of Eastern North Carolina*. Rocky Mount Record. 1911. <https://archive.org/details/rockymountgatewa00rock> ^[2] (accessed March 7, 2013).

Rocky Mount Mills Records, Southern Historical Collection, UNC Chapel Hill, online finding aid at: <http://webcat.lib.unc.edu/search?drocky+mount+mills/drocky+mount+mills/1%2C2%2C5%2CB/frameset&FF=drocky+mount+mills+rocky+mount+n+c&3%2C%2C3> ^[17]

The Battle book; a genealogy of the Battle family in America, with chapters illustrating certain phases of its history. By: H B Battle; Lois Yelverton; William James Battle, Montgomery, Ala., The Paragon Press, 1930: <https://www.worldcat.org/title/battle-book-a-genealogy-of-the-battle-family-in-america-with-chapters-illustrating-certain-phases-of-its-history/oclc/2579075> ^[18]

"William S Battle [Battle]." *Slave Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States*. 1860. Edgecombe, North Carolina. National Archives Microfilm Publication M653. Record Group 29. Accessed April 21, 2023 from Ancestry.com.

Image Credits:

Rocky Mount Record. *Rocky Mount: The Gateway of Eastern North Carolina*. Rocky Mount Record. 1911. <https://archive.org/details/rockymountgatewa00rock> ^[2] (accessed March 7, 2013).

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[19]

[Business leaders](#) ^[20]

[Civil War \(1861-1865\)](#) ^[21]

[Planters](#) ^[22]

Authors:

[Battle, Elizabeth D.](#) ^[23]

Origin - location:

[Edgecombe County](#) ^[24]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#) ^[25]

1 January 1979 | Battle, Elizabeth D.

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/battle-william-smith>

Links

^[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/battle-william-smith> ^[2] <https://archive.org/details/rockymountgatewa00rock> ^[3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/edgecombe> ^[4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/battle-james-smith> ^[5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/university-north-carolina-chapel-hi> ^[6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/rocky-mount-mills> ^[7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/confederate-party> ^[8] <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americalexperience/features/general-article/grant-panic/> ^[9]

