

Bryan, James Augustus ^[1]

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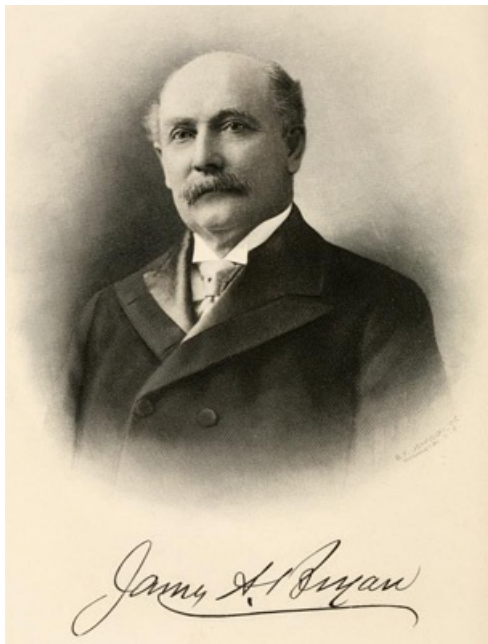


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Bryan, James Augustus

by Gertrude S. Carraway, 1979

13 Sept. 1839–30 Jan. 1923



Portrait of William Augustus Bryan, circa 1916. In Leonard Wilson's *Makers of America* *Volume II*, published 1916. From [Archive.org](#). ^[2]

James Augustus Bryan, soldier, planter, and banker, was born in New Bern to [James West Bryan](#) ^[3] and Ann Mary Washington. A grandson of James Bryan and Rachel Heritage and of John Washington and Elizabeth Heritage Cobb, he was also a nephew of [John Heritage Bryan](#) ^[4] and a brother of [Washington Bryan](#) ^[5].

During the [Civil War](#), ^[6] Bryan was a major in the Confederate Army. Returning to his native town after the war, he became an extensive landowner, especially in [James City](#) ^[7], a settlement across Trent River from New Bern (a native told a newcomer, "Everything there not always belonging to God is now owned by Jim Bryan"). For some time, Bryan was president of the state-controlled [Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad Company](#) ^[8]. From 1880 until his death he was president of the National Bank of New Bern.

In 1884 he bought the historic John Wright Stanley house, which he renovated and enlarged as his residence on its original site; after his death it was moved to make way for a new post office and federal building.

As a Democrat, Bryan was elected to the 1899 [state senate](#) ^[9] and was instrumental in helping relieve [Craven County](#) ^[10] from [Reconstruction](#) ^[11] policies. That assembly established the modern spelling of New Bern; the final "e," Bryan and his associates claimed, had been erroneously added by northern soldiers occupying the city in Civil War years.



Frances Benjamin Johnston. Photograph of the John Wright Stanly House, New Bern, 1936. Image from the Library of Congress Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the South.

^[12]Bryan's first wife was Mary Spaight Shepard (18 Mar. 1843–1 Jan. 1892), whom he married 2 Nov. 1864 at Raleigh ^[13]. She was a daughter of Congressman Charles Biddle Shepard ^[14] and Mary Spaight Donnell, a granddaughter of Judge John Robert Donnell ^[15] and Margaret Elizabeth Spaight, and a great-granddaughter of Governor Richard Dobbs Spaight ^[16] and Mary Leech. James A. and Mary S. Bryan were the parents of Charles Shepard ^[17]. All three were buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery, New Bern.

Bryan's second wife was Julia Rush Olmstead (30 Aug. 1843–22 May 1915), a descendant of Richard Stockton, New Jersey lawyer and signer of the Declaration of Independence. His third and surviving wife was Alice Hilliard Brown Biddle (9 April 1856–30 Dec. 1938), widow of Sheriff James Williams Biddle of New Bern.

References:

Bryan Family Records (in possession of Charles H. Ashford, Jr., New Bern).

Craven County Records (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Tombstones, Cedar Grove Cemetery (New Bern).

Additional Resources:

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Origin - location:

Craven County ^[31]

New Bern ^[32]

From:

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