

Bryan, John Herritage (Heritage) ^[1]

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by Daniel M. McFarland, 1979

4 Nov. 1798–19 May 1870

See also: [James West Bryan](#) ^[2], brother; [William Shepard Bryan](#) ^[3] and [Henry Ravenscroft Bryan](#) ^[4], sons



Photograph of a portrait of John Herritage Bryan by William Garl Brown.

^[5]John Herritage (Heritage) Bryan, lawyer and congressman, was born in New Bern, the son of James (1776–1806) and Rachel Heritage Bryan. He attended [New Bern Academy](#) ^[6], received the bachelor's and master's degrees from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[7] (1815 and 1820), studied law, and was admitted to the bar in 1819. On 20 Dec. 1821 he married Mary Williams Shepard, daughter of a New Bern merchant. He served as a member of the state senate in 1823 and 1824. In the latter year he worked for the ticket of Jackson and Calhoun, against that of W. H. Crawford.

In 1825 he defeated Old Republican [Richard Dobbs Spaight](#) ^[8] in the election to represent the New Bern District in Congress. He was reelected without opposition in 1827. While in Washington, he was a steady supporter of the policies of President John Quincy Adams. He served in the House on the committees on Elections, the District of Columbia, and Roads and Canals. After the election of [Jackson](#) ^[9] in 1828, Bryan declined to run for Congress again. When he returned home, he was active in opposition to Jackson and in the organization of the [Whig party](#) ^[10] in his area.

After a decade of strenuous professional practice in the tidewater section, Bryan's health began to fail, and during the winter of 1828 he moved to [Raleigh](#) ^[11]. Here he gradually abandoned his law practice but continued a busy life. He played a role in the affairs of the Whig party before the [Civil War](#) ^[12] and was opposed to [secession](#) ^[13] in 1860. He was an active [Episcopal](#) ^[14] layman and during the fifties was secretary of the state [Agricultural Society](#) ^[15]. In 1847 he was a member of the committee that welcomed [President Polk](#) ^[16] to Raleigh. He was interested in [internal improvements](#) ^[17]. For forty-five years he was trustee of The University of North Carolina, and for many of these years he served on the executive committee.

Bryan and his wife had a family of fourteen children. Seven of the sons graduated at Chapel Hill. One son, George, a captain in the Confederate service, died defending Richmond in 1864.

The war did great harm to the family business interests, and Bryan's health declined rapidly after 1868. He died in Raleigh and was interred in Oakwood Cemetery.

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"John Herritage Bryan of New Bern and Raleigh, a lawyer, married Ann Blount Shepard Pettigrew's sister Mary Williams Shepard. Photograph of a portrait from the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill." *The Pettigrew papers* volume 2. Raleigh [N.C.] : State Dept. of Archives and History. 1988. 370. <https://archive.org/stream/peittigrewpapers1988lemm#page/370/mode/2up> [5] (accessed June 7, 2013).

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