

Carr, James Ozborn ^[1]

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by Eugenie W. Carr, 1979

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James Ozborn Carr, leader in law, politics, and education, was born on his father's farm south of Kenansville in Duplin County ^[2], the son of Joseph Hendley and Mary Susan Dickson Carr. He was descended from Joseph Carr, who is believed to have come to North Carolina in 1749 with a number of other Presbyterians from Ireland.

Carr worked on the family farm in the summers, attended the Samuel W. Clement School in Wallace and in 1895 was graduated from The University of North Carolina ^[3] *cum laude*, with a membership in Phi Beta Kappa and a Ph.B. degree with honors in Latin. He was a speaker at the 1894 commencement and, in his senior year, was class orator and intersociety debater for the Philanthropic Society. After graduation he studied law at the university, though he never got a law degree. After teaching school in Mt. Olive, he passed the bar in 1896. He was always a supporter of the university, and his papers were given to its library after his death.

Active in Democratic politics from his university days, Carr ran for the General Assembly in 1896 but was defeated in the Populist ^[4] and Fusion ^[5] landslides. In 1898, as chairman of the county Democratic executive committee, he was nominated again for the house and won. During the 1899 term he met Representative George Rountree ^[6], a Democrat from New Hanover County ^[7], and the two men formed a law partnership in Wilmington; there Carr spent the rest of his life.

Carr's private law practice, with a number of different partners, continued to be his life's work; although he was repeatedly called to public service, he maintained a family tradition of personal independence. He was a lawyer's lawyer. Thoroughly knowledgeable in state and federal law, he made the bulk of his practice corporation law and enjoyed the intellectual give-and-take of courtroom work.

Although he could be forceful when he wished, Carr usually displayed an even temper, and his low-keyed sense of humor stood him in good stead with clients and judges alike. An avid bird and duck hunter ^[8], he did not participate in any other organized sport or recreation; but he read widely in North Carolina and American history and took in a bit of Mark Twain or Dickens on occasion.

Carr's law practice and devotion to the Democratic Party ^[9] made him well known throughout the state and beyond. In 1916, Woodrow Wilson appointed him U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina, a post he retained until the end of World War I. Then he was named to the Mixed Claims Commission and spent several years prosecuting war claims against the German government, work that took him several times to England, France, and Germany. In 1923 he was appointed by the federal government to represent the receivers in the liquidation of several North and South Carolina national banks, work he continued to do for five years. He became U.S. attorney a second time from 1933 to 1945, but again resigned to devote full time to his private practice.

Carr also served state government, at the behest of several governors. Angus W. McLean ^[10] appointed him in 1925 to both the North Carolina Judicial Conference, for four years, and the North Carolina Education Commission, which he chaired for the two years it took to make the first comprehensive study of the state's public school system. The 650-page report recommended, among other things, a minimum eight-month school term and financial help for poorer counties to maintain at least a six-month term. In 1930–31 he was on the state equalization board and in 1933–34 on the state school commission.

Carr served two terms as chairman of the New Hanover County Board of Education, from 1909 to 1916 and from 1927 to 1931. In those years, eight hundred thousand dollars were spent in a school building program for the county. For the new New Hanover High School, Carr donated the maple trees that still stand around the big building; the young trees came from a large maple in his own front yard at 1901 Market Street.

Carr's involvement with education went outside the state as well: in 1920 the U.S. secretary of the interior appointed him to a national advisory committee in connection with a survey of secondary education in the United States.

In 1931 and 1932, Governor O. Max Gardner ^[11] appointed Carr to a commission to revise the state's constitution. That group's report called for broader legislative powers for the General Assembly combined with a strong executive (that is, a gubernatorial veto power), to make for greater centralization of government.

Carr was president of the Wilmington Star Company, ^[12] newspaper publishers, from 1919 to 1927, and a founder and director of both the People's Savings Bank and Trust Company and the Carolina Savings and Loan Association. He was a member of the American, North Carolina, and New Hanover County bar associations, the American Society of International Law, the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, the Cape Fear Club, and the Cape Fear Country

Club. For fifty years he was a deacon of St. Andrews Covenant Presbyterian Church. He was the author of *The Dickson Letters* ^[13] (Raleigh, 1901) and *The Carr Family of Duplin County* ^[14] (Wilmington, 1939).

Carr was married on 18 June 1907 to Susan LeRoy Parsley. They had three children: Katherine, now Mrs. Frederick Bolles Graham of Wilmington; Susan LeRoy, now Mrs. Horace Mann Emerson of Jacksonville, Fla.; and James Dickson Carr of Wilmington.

Carr died in Wilmington and was buried in Oakdale Cemetery there. There is a photograph but no other portrait.

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Additional Resources:

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