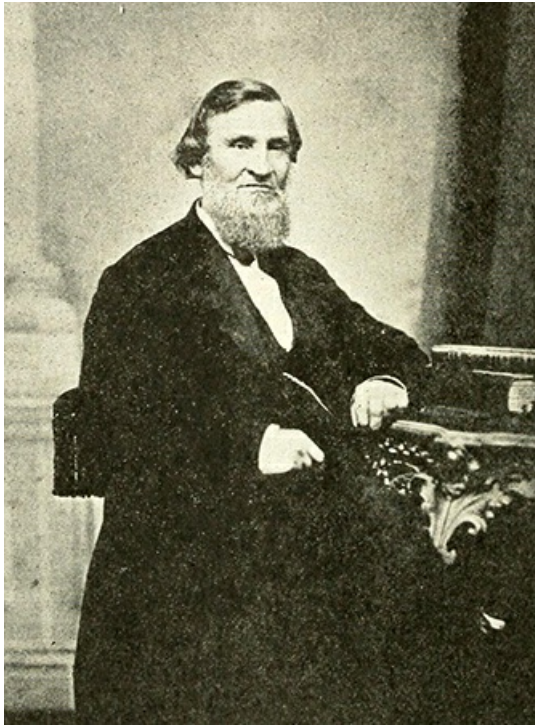


Cooke, William Dewey ^[1]

Cooke, William Dewey

by George Stevenson, 1979; Revised by Andrea Smythe, SLNC Government and Heritage Library, October 2023

May 27, 1811–May 20, 1885



A photograph of William Dewey Cooke (1811-1885) published in 1919. Image from the Internet Archive.

^[2]

William Dewey Cooke, educator of deaf students, editor, publisher, and cartographer, was born in Williston, Vermont, to Milo and Harriet Bulkley Cooke. He was educated at Middlebury College, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1832. He moved to Virginia in 1833 to teach.

Cooke married Lucy Ann Waddell on October 2, 1834. William and Lucy had nine children: Maria Elizabeth, Lyttleton Waddell, Mary St. Clair, William Latimer, Fanny Skinner, Harriet Latimer, Louisa Gordon, Charles Lyttleton, and James Addison.

After his marriage in 1834, he served jointly with his father-in-law, Lyttleton Waddell, as principal of Staunton Academy. Afterward, he taught in Waynesboro, Virginia.

Cooke returned to Staunton in 1840. Staunton had established a school for deaf students in 1839 and Cooke returned to serve as their teacher. In October 1843, he wrote to North Carolina Governor [John Motley Morehead](#) ^[3] on the subject of a private school for deaf learners in North Carolina. Morehead was receptive to the proposal and offered Cooke the use of a tavern building he owned in Leakesville. Cooke considered Raleigh the proper location for such a school and a visit to North Carolina confirmed his opinion.

On December 28, 1844, Cooke and his pupil Daniel M. Albright of Greensboro demonstrated to the General Assembly of North Carolina the method of teaching deaf learners. The demonstration created a sensation. Eleven days later an act to establish the North Carolina Institution for the Deaf (now the [Governor Morehead School](#) ^[4]) was ratified by the General Assembly. A few days after passage of the act, the literary board met and appointed Cooke principal, with instructions to open the school as soon as possible. The institution accepted its first students and opened on May 1, 1845. For the next fifteen years, Cooke served as head of the school.

As part of the curriculum of the North Carolina Institution for the Deaf, Cooke established a printer and a press at the school. His publication of the periodical, the *Deaf Mute* (1849–51), was the beginning of his work in editing and publishing. Cooke also established a literary newspaper, the *Southern Weekly Post*. It was printed from December 6, 1851 until November 24, 1855. [Calvin Henderson Wiley](#) ^[5] originally co-edited the newspaper but resigned to allow more time

for his duties as superintendent of common schools. Cooke published and edited other periodicals in addition to the newspaper. His interest in agricultural developments led him to become a member and secretary of the executive committee of the Agricultural Society of North Carolina [6]. He published John F. Tompkins [7]'s Farmer's Journal between 1853 and 1854. Cooke also edited and published the Carolina Cultivator [8] (March 1855–October 1857) with the assistance of Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick [9]. Cooke was a member of the University of North Carolina's Historical Society of North Carolina. He sought to encourage public interest in the history of the state. From January 1852 through March 1857, Cooke published the University of North Carolina Magazine for the society. In 1853, he compiled and published essays by Francis Lister Hawks [10], David Lowry Swain [11], and William Alexander Graham [12] under the title *Revolutionary History of North Carolina*.

Cooke's brief association with Calvin H. Wiley [5] led him into other fields. As early as 1852, Wiley and Cooke were joined by Samuel Pearce [13] of Hillsborough in a joint effort to compile a gazetteer, natural history, and authoritative map of the state. The most recent maps, executed by Robert H. B. Brazier [14], were two decades old. Cooke produced the *Outline Map of North Carolina* (1852), and the three men gathered the necessary data for a more substantial project. The General Assembly supported their proposal for a new map. Wiley chose to remove himself in 1854 to devote more time to his work as superintendent of common schools. Cooke and Pearce worked to compile a larger map after Wiley's departure. They were successful, and in 1857 the map was published under the title *Cooke's New Map of North Carolina* [15]. Pearce's name was included in small letters in the lower right corner of the map, but with no statement of credit or explanation. In July 1858, Joseph Hutchins Colton of New York republished the map. He published the map under the date of 1857 and used an engraved plate which did not include Pearce's name. As an authority, this map was replaced within a decade by Pearce's *New Map of the State of North Carolina*. In 1858, Cooke also created the *Map of the Routes to the Virginia Springs, Giving All Routes and Distances*, which was lithographed in Richmond by Ritchie and Dunnivant.

In the fall of 1860, he resigned from the North Carolina Institute for the Deaf in order to accept the principalship of the Georgia Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, located at Cave Springs. After the Georgia school was closed during the Civil War, Cooke moved to Maryland, where he became principal of that state's school for the deaf. In 1871 he returned to Staunton to become principal teacher in Virginia's Institution for the Education of the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind. He lived in Staunton for the remainder of his life.

Cooke was also a stockholder and served as director of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company [16]. Cooke resigned his position as a member of its executive committee before leaving for Georgia. He maintained his membership and interest in the Presbyterian church and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows [17] until his death.

Cooke died of bronchitis in Staunton, Virginia on May 20, 1885. His funeral was held at the First Presbyterian Church in Staunton and he was buried in Thornrose Cemetery.

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[Writers, journalists, and editors](#) [37]

Authors:

[Stevenson, George, Jr.](#) [38]

Origin - location:

[Raleigh](#) [39]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#). [40]

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