

## **Copeland, Oliver Perry** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Copeland, Oliver Perry**

by Thomas C. Parramore, 1979

**23 Nov. 1816—?**

Oliver Perry Copeland, portrait artist, was born in Suffolk, Va., the son of Benjamin and Sophia Jones Copeland. He was still living at Suffolk in 1840, when he delivered a Fourth of July oration there, but soon afterward he moved to Northampton County <sup>[2]</sup>, N.C., where he had married Sarah Hill in April 1839. For the next twelve years he supported himself as a portrait artist in Northampton and neighboring counties in Virginia and North Carolina. In 1850 he exhibited at Richmond, Va., a canvas entitled "The Death-Bed of Wesley"; in 1853 he toured various North Carolina towns with the same painting and three others, "Faith," "Hope," and "Charity." After showing these pictures in Hillsborough, Greensboro <sup>[3]</sup>, and elsewhere, he took his works to the first North Carolina State Fair <sup>[4]</sup> (1853) and won first prize for the Wesley scene.

After the fair closed, Copeland opened a studio in Raleigh and offered lessons in drawing and painting. In 1857 he moved to Oxford to take a position as drawing instructor at Oxford Female Academy <sup>[5]</sup>. His wife died in Oxford on 16 Feb. 1858, and he soon afterward resigned his position. He found similar work at Louisburg Female Academy <sup>[6]</sup> in the same year and also appears to have worked for a time at Warrenton. In February 1861 he married Henrietta C. Gambol of Warwick County, Va.; thereafter, he appears to have lived and worked at Norfolk, where he is known to have had a studio in 1871.

Copeland's North Carolina subjects included Samuel Wait <sup>[7]</sup>, first president of Wake Forest College <sup>[8]</sup>, and Mrs. Wait; the Reverend Charles Force Deems <sup>[9]</sup> of Greensboro; Dr. W. R. Scott of Raleigh; and members of the Gray family of Northampton, the Gatling family of Hertford County <sup>[10]</sup>, and the Ridley and Shands families of North Carolina and Virginia. A large canvas by Copeland, entitled "Old Rip Van Winkle Wide Awake," depicted North Carolina's progress in agriculture, industry, commerce, and so on and attracted a good deal of attention at the North Carolina State Fair in 1854.

Copeland was a lifelong supporter of the temperance <sup>[11]</sup> movement and sometimes gave public readings of a long poem of his own composition entitled "Poetic Essay on Dram Drinking." He was also a professional daguerreotypist. The date of his death is not known. Of the ten children borne by his first wife, three survived their mother; the census of 1850 lists a son named Raphial and a daughter named Eumuke.

#### **References:**

L. MacMillan, *North Carolina Portrait Index* (1963).

Oxford *Leisure Hour*, 25 Feb. 1858.

G. W. Paschal, *History of Wake Forest College*, vol. 1 (1834).

Raleigh *Spirit of the Age*, 18 Jan. 1854, 1 Mar. 1854, 25 Oct. 1854.

Suffolk (Va.) *Christian Sun*, 1 Sept. 1871.

#### **Additional Resources:**

Copeland, Oliver Perry, b. 1816. Frick Art Reference Library: <http://arcade.nyarc.org/record=b1057788~S7> <sup>[12]</sup>

L. MacMillan, *North Carolina Portrait Index* (1963): <https://www.worldcat.org/title/north-carolina-portrait-index-1700-1860/oclc/832326> <sup>[13]</sup>

#### **Subjects:**

Artists <sup>[14]</sup>

Biographies <sup>[15]</sup>

#### **Authors:**

Parramore, Thomas C. <sup>[16]</sup>

#### **Origin - location:**

Northampton County <sup>[17]</sup>

#### **From:**

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press. <sup>[18]</sup>

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