

## **Ervin, John Witherspoon** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Sam J. Ervin, Jr., 1986

**27 Mar. 1823–15 Apr. 1902**

John Witherspoon Ervin, teacher and writer, who was called Witherspoon Ervin, was born at Cheraw, S.C. His parents were Colonel James Robert Ervin, of Cheraw, a lawyer and legislator, who was a leader of the opposition to John C. Calhoun's <sup>[2]</sup> Doctrine of Nullification in the Convention of 1832, and his first wife, Elizabeth Powe. His paternal grandparents were Colonel John Ervin, of Pee Dee, S.C., who commanded the Britton's Neck Regiment of General Francis Marion <sup>[3]</sup>'s brigade during the American Revolution <sup>[4]</sup>, and his first wife, Jane Witherspoon; his maternal grandparents were General Erasmus Powe, of Cheraw, who commanded the Ninth Brigade of South Carolina militia during the War of 1812 <sup>[5]</sup>, and his wife, Esther Ellerbe. After attending South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina <sup>[6]</sup>) as a sophomore and junior (1841–42), Ervin began teaching in the Brewington community on Black River in Clarendon County, S.C. On 21 Nov. 1844 he married Laura Catherine Nelson, daughter of Captain Jared John Nelson, of the Brewington community, who served in the War of 1812, and his wife, Susan McGill Conyers. They were the parents of nine children: Lawrence Nelson, a farmer of Indiantown, S.C.; Erasmus Ellerbe, a Presbyterian minister; John Conyers, a farmer of Fountain City, Tenn.; Donald McQueen, a merchant of Indiantown, S.C.; Susan Elizabeth, wife of James Ervin Kennedy of Manning, S.C.; Samuel James, a lawyer of Morganton, N.C.; Louise Nelson, wife of William Cowan Ervin of Darlington, S.C.; Annie Davis, wife of James Leslie Michie of Darlington; and Henry Flinn, who died in infancy.

In 1849 Ervin moved his family to Sumter, S.C., where he served as principal of the academy and for a time edited the Black River Watchman <sup>[7]</sup>, a regional newspaper. In 1857, the family moved to the new village of Manning, S.C., where Ervin conducted the Clarendon Grammar School and edited Clarendon County's first newspaper, the Clarendon Banner. While at Manning, he joined the Masonic <sup>[8]</sup> order, served as a ruling elder in the Presbyterian <sup>[9]</sup> church, and was a member of the Democratic <sup>[10]</sup> party.

During the Civil War <sup>[11]</sup> Ervin served as collector of the Confederate <sup>[12]</sup> War tax and member of the home guards in Clarendon County. His sons, Lawrence Nelson, Erasmus Ellerbe, and John Conyers, saw active service with the army. His brother, James Robert Ervin, a soldier of the Confederacy, was killed on 28 July 1864 in a skirmish on the Darbytown Road near Richmond, Va. Three of his wife's brothers also served in the Confederate Army. As a member of the home guards, Ervin participated in the engagement against General Edward W. Potter's vandalizing Federal raiders at Dingle's Mill on 18 Apr. 1865. It was one of the last encounters of the Civil War.

In 1874 all of the Ervin family, except Lawrence Nelson and Erasmus Ellerbe, moved to Morganton, N.C., where Witherspoon Ervin taught school for a time. Except for a brief period about 1884, when he resided in Wilkesboro and was principal of schools at Wilkesboro and Trap Hill, he made his home in Morganton for the remainder of his life.

While teaching in Sumter, Witherspoon Ervin was inspired by his wife to enter a contest for a \$100 prize for the best original story by a South Carolinian. He won the contest over sixty competitors with a story entitled "A Shot in Time." During ensuing years he supplemented his income by writing verse and fiction, which was published in the Baltimore Home Journal, Columbia Banner <sup>[13]</sup>, Darlington Family Friend, Sumter Watchman <sup>[14]</sup>, Yorkville Enquirer <sup>[15]</sup>, and other newspapers and periodicals. He wrote a number of short or medium-length stories, most written while he was living in South Carolina. Some, however, such as "The Fiddler of Linville Cove, A Legend of Western North Carolina," published in Fetter's Southern Magazine <sup>[16]</sup> in 1892, were written in Morganton.

Laura Catherine Ervin predeceased her husband, dying at Morganton on 29 July 1887.

#### **References:**

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Virginia K. G. Orvin, *History of Clarendon County, 1700 to 1961* (1961).

Edward W. Phifer, Jr., *Burke: The History of a North Carolina County* (1977).

Emily B. Reynolds and Joan R. Faunt, *Biographical Directory of the Senate of the State of South Carolina, 1776–1964* (1964).

#### **Additional Resources:**

Ervin Family Papers, 1847-1987 (collection no. 04498). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Ervin\\_Family.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Ervin_Family.html) [17] (accessed June 3, 2013).

John Witherspoon Ervin in WorldCat:<https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n2008-161603> [18]

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