

Keen, Thomas William ^[1]

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by Lindley S. Butler and George K. Schweitzer, 1988

8 Sept. 1823–16 Jan. 1886

Thomas William Keen, physician, tobacco dealer, and legislator, was born in Pittsylvania County, Va., the son of Ashford T. Keen (1796–1876) and his first wife, Elizabeth Edwards Keen. He was educated in a private school in Franklin County, Va., after which he attended the Medical University of Maryland, graduating in 1843. The following year he settled in Rockingham, N.C., and began a medical practice. After 26 Feb. 1846, he married Aramenta D. Adams (1827–1914). They had two daughters, one who died in infancy and Mary E. (1849–76), who married P. B. Kennedy of Salisbury.

Keen was active in the Democratic party ^[2] of Rockingham County ^[3], serving on the county committee and a term in the North Carolina House of Commons ^[4] (1848–49). In 1849 he ran for the U.S. House of Representatives, but was defeated. Later he declined appointment by President James Buchanan ^[5] as U.S. consul to Dundee, Scotland. In the presidential campaign of 1869, Keen served as an elector on the Douglas ticket. During the Civil War ^[6], he was appointed surgeon with the Eleventh North Carolina Volunteers (Twenty-first North Carolina Regiment) and, while his unit was stationed at Pageland, Va., participated in the Battle of the Potomac. In September 1861 he resigned, probably because of poor health, but in 1864 he was serving at Kinston as a member of the Sixth Regiment of North Carolina Home Guards and as a surgeon of the Third Military District.

After the war, Keen took up residence in Salisbury where he went into tobacco manufacturing ^[7] and sales in the firm of Keen and Kennedy, which he established with his son-in-law, P. B. Kennedy. He was elected mayor of Salisbury three times and served as president of the agricultural fair in 1873–75. In 1877 after some difficulties with his tobacco business, Keen moved to Reidsville and the next year to Danville, Va., where he engaged in medical practice, the tobacco business, and politics. In 1883 and 1885 he was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates. At the beginning of 1886, after a speech pleading for state-supplied books for school children, Keen collapsed on the floor of the legislative chambers and died of apoplexy. He was buried on 19 January in the Lutheran Cemetery, Salisbury, after funeral services at the First Presbyterian Church.

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From:

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1 January 1988 | Butler, Lindley S.; Schweitzer, George K.

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