

Lanier, Edwin Sidney ^[1]

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by James D. Gillespie, 1991

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Edwin Sidney Lanier, educator and government administrator, was born near Metter, Ga., in a rural section of the state, the son of Richard and Hassie Banks Lanier, farmers. He attended local schools and was graduated from State Normal Teachers School in Athens in 1921. From 1921 to 1924, he studied at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[2] in the School of Commerce. There he was president of the Philanthropic Society and won the Mary D. Wright Memorial Prize in debate and the Algernon Sidney Sullivan Award for humanitarian service. He was a member of the Order of the Grail and of the Order of the Golden Fleece, both distinctive honorary organizations.

In 1924 Lanier began teaching and coaching at the Baptist Orphanage high school in Thomasville, an experience that he regarded highly for the remainder of his life. In 1930 he returned to Chapel Hill to become a special student in the law school with a part-time position in the student aid office of the university. In 1934 he gave up his law studies to become director of student aid and in 1945 he also became director of Records and Registration, positions he held until 1961, when he resigned to accept an appointive post in state government.

While living in Chapel Hill, Lanier became deeply involved in educational and civic affairs. From 1945 to 1949 he was a member of the board of trustees of the [Baptist Orphanage of North Carolina](#) ^[3]; he served on the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen from 1949 to 1955 and was mayor of the town for three terms. Between 1954 and 1956 he served on the Orange County Board of Commissioners, and in 1957 he was elected to the [state senate](#) ^[4], a post he filled for a second term beginning in 1959. On leave from the university, he worked for increased pay for teachers and for funds to expand physical facilities of public schools. It was noted that as a state senator he lived off the meager income of that position and that he took a room in the local [YMCA](#) ^[5] when the [General Assembly](#) ^[4] was in session.

While he was director of student aid at The University of North Carolina, one of the students he helped was Terry Sanford. In 1961, when Sanford was governor of the state, he appointed Lanier state personnel director. The next year the governor named him commissioner of insurance following the death of the incumbent; Lanier was elected to the position in the fall and reelected in both 1964 and 1968. In this post, he was known as a great consumer advocate by keeping insurance rates low. He declined to seek a third term in 1972.

Lanier married Nancy Thelma Herden, of Durham, the daughter of a Baptist minister, and they were the parents of two children, Nancy and Edwin S., Jr.

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