Lea, Solomon [1]

Share it now!

Lea, Solomon

by Lindley S. Butler, 1991

21 Nov. 1807–30 Apr. 1897

Photograph of Solomon Lea. From Samuel Bryant Turrentine's *A Romance of Education,* published 1946 by The Piedmont Press, Greensboro, North Carolina. Presented by HathiTrust. [2]Solomon Lea, Methodist [3] minister and educator, was born in Leasburg, the son of William, a merchant and a county sheriff, and Sarah McNeil Lea. He was a descendant of James Lea, of King and Queen County, Va., a pioneer settler of Caswell County [4] and a founder of Leasburg. Solomon's brothers, Lorenzo Dow and Addison, were also Methodist ministers. Lea was reared in Leasburg and attended The University of North Carolina [5], where he received an A.B. degree in 1833. He was awarded an A.M. degree in 1838.

Beginning in 1834, Lea taught for a year in theWarrenton Academy [6]. There he met Sophia Ainger (1810–66), a native of England and a music teacher in the school, whom he married in 1837. Leaving Warrenton, he accepted a teaching position in the preparatory department of Randolph Macon College [7] in Boydton, Va., where he remained until 1841, when he became president of Farmville Female School, also in Virginia.

On 1 Feb. 1846 Lea became the first president ofGreensboro Female College [8] in Greensboro, N.C. This new Methodist institution was the first chartered women's college in North Carolina and the second in the South. In addition to serving as president, he was professor of mathematics and ancient languages. Sophia Lea taught modern languages and was

principal of the music department. Lea resigned from his position in December 1847 because of difficulties with a faculty member and lack of support from the trustees.

From Greensboro the Leas returned to Leasburg; here they resided for the rest of their lives except for two years when Solomon taught in Shelby, Tenn. In 1848 Lea opened the Somerville Female Institute, a preparatory school that gained a wide reputation for quality secondary education. His interest in astronomy led to naming the school for Miss Mary Somerville, a noted Scottish mathematician and astronomer. At its height, the institute employed four teachers and enrolled between fifty and seventy-five students from several states; Sophia Lea taught music until her death in 1866. Solomon operated the school for forty-four years, until declining health forced him to close it in 1892. In 1848 he had been licensed by the Methodist church to preach. Although he held no regular pastorates, he assisted on the Leasburg circuit for over fifty years and was in demand as a guest minister.

Solomon and Sophia Lea had six daughters and two sons, one of whom died in infancy. The surviving children were Annis Sophia, Lilyanne, Wilhelmina, Adeline, Eugenia, Henrietta, and Edward W. Wilhelmina studied music and taught for many years in the Somerville Female Institute and at Louisburg College [9].

References:

Daniel L. Grant, *Alumni History of the University of North Carolina, 1795–1924*(1924). [10]

R. Irby, *History of Randolph-Macon College, Virginia* (1898). [11]

Lea Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).[12]

N. C. Newbold, "Rev. Solomon Lea," *Trinity Archives* (February 1898).

F. P. Otken, comp., "The Lea Family," Charles Lee Raper Scrapbook, and Frank L. Reid Papers (Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham).

William S. Powell, *When the Past Refused to Die: A History of Caswell County*(1977 [portrait]).

Raleigh *Star*, 10 Jan. 1834.

S. B. Turrentine, *A Romance of Education* (1946). [13]

Image Credits:

["Rev. Solomon Lea, (First President)," Photograph].Turrentine, Samuel Bryant. *A Romance of Education: a Narrative Including Recollections And Other Facts Connected With Greensboro College*. Greensboro, N. C: The Piedmont press. 1946. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3107190?urlappend=%3Bseq=42 [2] (accessed May 31, 2014).

Subjects:
Biography [14]
Clergy [15]
Educators [16]
UNC Press [17]
Authors:
Butler, Lindley S. [18]
Origin - location:
Caswell County [19]
Leasburg [20]
Guilford County [21]
Greensboro [22]
Greensboro College [23]
Warren County [24]
Warrenton [25]
From:
Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.[26]

1 January 1991 | Butler, Lindley S.

---

[8] https://www.ncpedia.org/greensboro-college
[9] https://www.ncpedia.org/louisburg-college
[10] https://docsouth.unc.edu/true/grant/menu.html
[11] https://archive.org/details/historyofrandolp00irbyiala
[12] http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/l/Lea_Family.html
[13] http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3107190
[14] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term
[15] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/clergy
[16] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/educators
[17] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/unc-press
[18] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/butler-lindley-s
[19] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/c
[20] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/leasburg
[21] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-4
[22] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmon-21
[23] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/greensboro
[24] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-2
[25] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/warrenton
[26] https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no