

McMullan, Harry, Sr. ^[1]

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by C. Sylvester Green ^[2], 1991

23 July 1884–24 June 1955

Harry McMullan, Sr., attorney general ^[3] of North Carolina, was born in Edenton, the son of Dr. James Henry and Carolina Tucker McMullan. He attended Edenton Academy and at age seventeen entered The University of North Carolina ^[4], from which he was graduated in 1905. In Chapel Hill he was active in numerous campus organizations, especially a debating society, and was editor of the yearbook. Admitted to the bar in the year of his graduation, he began a practice in Plymouth but in 1907 joined the firm of Small and McLean in Washington, N.C. In 1913 he opened his own law office and practiced alone for the remainder of his life.

During World War I ^[5] McMullan was chairman of the Beaufort County Draft Board, and from 1926 to 1933 he was county attorney. In 1929 he was elected to the state senate, where he came to the attention of Governor O. Max Gardner ^[6]; in 1933, at the end of his term in the General Assembly, McMullan was tapped by the governor to become director of the Collections and Assessments Division of the state Department of Revenue. The following year he was chosen by Governor J. C. B. Ehringhaus ^[7] as chairman of the North Carolina Industrial Commission, and after two years in that post he was named assistant attorney general of the state. In 1938 Governor Clyde R. Hoey ^[8] elevated McMullan to the position of attorney general following the promotion of the incumbent to the state supreme court bench. Thereafter he was regularly elected to the post, serving a total of seventeen years. As attorney general McMullan was ex officio member of the State Board of Education ^[9], the Municipal Board of Control, the State Board of Assessment, the State Banking Commission, the Eugenics Board ^[10], and other agencies, to each of which he rendered useful service. As a member of the State Art Commission, he was especially active in the movement that resulted in the multimillion-dollar North Carolina Museum of Art ^[11].

He held office in many professional organizations serving tax administrators, attorneys general, and the legal profession. An ardent Democrat ^[12], he held posts in the party organization from the precinct level to national ranks, the latter especially during the administration of President Harry S. Truman ^[13]. McMullan is credited with one of the many stories told about the president, much to Truman's delight. Greeting the president on one of his visits to North Carolina, McMullan earned a good laugh when he told Truman: "One of us has been slandered. Several people have told me today that you and I look alike."

A provocative and popular speaker, McMullan shared his thoughts with state civic and professional groups and was an especially welcome speaker on college campuses. He often spoke on matters pertaining to business, government, and law. The University of North Carolina granted him an honorary doctor of laws degree. He was cited by the North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities for his support of historic preservation ^[14] in the state and by the Tryon Palace ^[15] Restoration Commission for his support of its work. The Ackland Art Center in Chapel Hill also expressed appreciation to McMullan for his role in securing significant bequests.

On 4 Oct. 1911 he married Pattie Mary Baugham of Washington, N.C., and they became the parents of four children: Pattie Mary (Mrs. W. T. Old, Jr.), Mildred Louise (Mrs. Henry Blount Rumley, Jr.), Harry, Jr., and James Baugham. McMullan was an active Episcopa ^[16] layman. He was buried in Washington, N.C.

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