

Murchison, Claudius Temple ^[1]

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by C. Sylvester Green ^[2], 1991

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Claudius Temple Murchison, college teacher, economic adviser, and author, was born in Hickory, the son of Claudius Murat and Alice Penelope Temple Murchison. Preparatory education in the Hickory public schools qualified him to enter Wake Forest College ^[3] in September 1907; he was graduated with a bachelor of arts degrees *summa cum laude* in 1911. Wake Forest awarded him an honorary doctor of laws degree in 1936.

After graduation he spent five years in and around New York, primarily as a graduate student in economics at Columbia University. There he earned membership in Phi Beta Kappa and completed his residence requirements for a doctor of philosophy degree. During his last year at Columbia (1915–16), he was a lecturer in economics. In the fall of 1916 he became assistant professor of economics at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio ^[4]. Returning to New York City, Murchison taught for two years at Hunter College ^[5] (1918–20) and for one year at New York University ^[6] (1920–21). He received his doctorate from Columbia ^[7] in 1919, when his incisive and comprehensive study (an outgrowth of his doctoral thesis) was published under the title, *Resale Price Maintenance* ^[8]. Murchison's writings on economics and his addresses before various business gatherings attracted the attention of the administration of The University of North Carolina ^[9]. In 1921 he joined the faculty as associate professor of economics and the next year he became a full professor. He taught at Chapel Hill until June 1934. Murchison spent much of his time in North Carolina advising various manufacturing organizations, especially those concerned with textiles and related areas.

Regarded as a rational, farsighted, and even prophetic analyst of business factors, Murchison in 1934 was tapped for the post of director of the U.S. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce ^[10]. Concurrently, he served as a member of the executive committee of the Commercial Policy Commission of the United States, as well as a member of the board of directors of the Export-Import Bank of Washington.

After an extremely busy year, when his public appearances and governmental activities catapulted him into national prominence, he accepted the presidency of the Cotton Textile Institute of America and was its major economic adviser for fourteen years (1935–49). Murchison also served as a member of the Cotton Mill Advisory Commission to the War Production Board (1942–45) and to the Office of Price Administration (1943–46). In 1954 he was an adviser to the U.S. delegation to the International Cotton Conference.

Murchison held membership in Alpha Chi Rho fraternity, the American Economic Association ^[11], the American Statistical Association, and the Merchants Club of New York City. He was a lifetime affiliate of the Protestant Episcopal ^[12] church. Beginning in 1935, his principal residence was in the Georgetown section of Washington, D.C., and later in Arlington, Va. During his semiretirement after 1949, he lived in Wellfleet, Mass.

One of the early accomplishments of Murchison's work with the Cotton Textile Institute was the execution of a two-year quota agreement with Japanese spinners in January 1937, a feat *Time* magazine hailed as "a solution both surprising and superb." Murchison's ultimate success in Osaka was apparent in an article in the *New York Times* (August 1936), in which he pointed out that the multiplication of Japanese imports (from one million to seventy-five million yards in three years) was a long-feared menace to American manufacturing because of Japan's cheap cottons, especially bleached goods.

When Murchison accepted the latter appointment by President Franklin D. Roosevelt ^[13] in 1934, he had only recently published his searching study *King Cotton Is Sick* ^[14], written at Chapel Hill. His intimate knowledge of cotton growing in the Deep South, plus his avid study of its related economics, equipped him to sit in with State Department officials as they drafted reciprocal trade agreements with Cuba, Belgium, Brazil, Haiti, Sweden, and Colombia.

In the spring of 1936 Murchison began to develop his strategy for negotiating the treaty with Japan. He started with Assistant Secretary of State Frances Bowers Sayre, and together they elicited the interest of Ambassador Saito of the Japanese Embassy. On 24 December he left for Japan with a party of American manufacturers, and ten days after their arrival the treaty was signed, giving "stability where formerly there existed the threat of immeasurable and overwhelming competition." This was only one of many such national and international agreements he effected. What protection and prosperity today's textile industry enjoys owes much to the quiet, "long-headed" efforts of this dignified, courteous, friendly, pipe-smoking southern gentleman who always did his homework and who dreamed of and worked for a sound economy first—in his own textile trade and correlatively in all American business.

Murchison was a prolific writer. In addition to his many articles for publications of the textile industry, he published and was quoted frequently in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Business Week*, and *Nation's Business*. In his later years he added two books, *Japan and the World Cotton Goods Trade* (1952) and *World Trade and the United*

States (1953). He was coauthor of the volume, *Management Problems* (1931), while teaching at Chapel Hill.

By his first wife, Constance Waterman, whom he married on 24 June 1916, Murchison had three children: Nancy Croom, Cameron, and David Claudius. His second wife was Esther L. Devine, whom he married on 21 Aug. 1951. He died in Wellfleet at age seventy-nine, survived by his wife and the two sons by his first marriage.

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