

Outlaw, David ^[1]

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by Rebecca B. Littleton, 1991

14 Sept. 1806–22 Oct. 1868

David Outlaw, lawyer, legislator, and congressman, was born near Windsor, [Bertie County](#) ^[2], the son of Ralph and Elizabeth Cherry Outlaw. His maternal grandfather was Solomon Cherry, a captain in the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[3] and a member of the [General Assembly](#) ^[4]. Two of his uncles were [William Walton Cherry](#) ^[5] (1806–45), a legislator, and [Joseph Blount Cherry](#) ^[6] (1816–82), a planter, lawyer, and public official—both of Bertie County. A cousin, [George Outlaw](#) ^[7] (1771–1825), was a legislator and congressman from Bertie County.

David Outlaw attended private schools and academies of the county before entering [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[8] in 1820 at age fourteen. After he was graduated in 1824 with an A.B. degree, he began to read law under Judge William Gaston of New Bern. He was admitted to the bar in 1827 and established a practice in Windsor.

In 1831 Outlaw was elected to the General Assembly, serving until 1834. In 1835 he was chosen as a [Whig](#) ^[9] delegate to the state constitutional convention in Raleigh. For a time, Outlaw lived in Raleigh and edited the *Raleigh Star*, a newspaper used to communicate Whig ideas. When his father died in 1836, Outlaw, as the oldest son, moved back to Windsor to help with family matters. From 1836 to 1844 he was solicitor of the [Edenton](#) ^[10] Circuit. In 1844 Outlaw was a delegate to the Whig National Convention in Baltimore. During this time he was colonel of the Bertie County regiment of the [state militia](#) ^[11]. In 1845 he was an unsuccessful candidate for Congress from the Edenton District; the victor, Judge [Asa Biggs](#) ^[12] of Williamston, won by 145 votes. Two years later, in the 1847 election, Outlaw defeated Biggs by 724 votes and became a member of the House of Representatives. He was reelected in 1849, defeating General Thomas J. Person of [Northampton County](#) ^[13] by 511 votes, and again in 1851, when his opponent was Colonel William F. Martin of Elizabeth City. In the election of 1853, Dr. [Henry M. Shaw](#) ^[14] of [Currituck County](#) ^[15] defeated Outlaw by a mere 87 votes.

In Congress, Outlaw was a quiet listener but very persuasive when he did speak. Using simple language, Outlaw impressed his colleagues with his forceful voice. During the period 1847–53, he strongly opposed the bill establishing territorial governments in Oregon, New Mexico, and California on the grounds that the bill was not a compromise between the North and the South. Rather, he believed, the measure was unfair to the South. Similarly, Outlaw was against the acquisition of any Mexican territory by conquest for fear the action would create sectional difficulties and jeopardize the Union. As a congressman, he strived to maintain peace between the North and the South.

After his defeat in 1853, Outlaw returned to Windsor and was again elected to the General Assembly in 1854, 1856, and 1858. In 1860 and 1866 he won a seat in the state senate.

Outlaw was a tall man, measuring six feet two and one-half inches. He was very slender, with red hair, fair skin, and hazel eyes. Being very nearsighted, he wore glasses.

On 7 June 1837 Outlaw married Emily Turner Ryan, of Tennessee, the widow of Joseph Ryan of Bertie County. He had two stepdaughters (Harriet and Emily Ryan) and four children of his own (Elizabeth, Annie Peyton, David, and George). Outlaw always felt loyal to the local [Episcopal church](#) ^[16], since his wife and children were members of the congregation. He was buried in the Episcopal church cemetery in Windsor.

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John Nichols, *Directory of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina for the Session Commencing November 19, 1860* (1860).

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John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 to 1851* (1851).^[21]

Additional Resources:

"Outlaw, David, (1806 - 1868)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=O000138>^[22] (accessed May 14, 2014).

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Origin - location:

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Windsor^[28]

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[29]

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