

Person, Benjamin Thomas ^[1]

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Person, Benjamin Thomas

by Hugh Buckner Johnston, 1994

16 Sept. 1833–2 Jan. 1916

Benjamin Thomas Person, physician, legislator, and postmaster, was a son of Thomas and Sally Tarver Person of [Greene County](#) ^[2]. Details of his youth and education are unavailable. He enlisted on 17 Mar. 1862 in Company H, Ninth North Carolina (First Cavalry) Regiment, Confederate States of America, and was promoted to first lieutenant on 23 July 1863. He served until General Robert E. Lee's surrender but declined to apply for a parole. From 26 May to 25 June 1866 he represented [Wayne County](#) ^[3] in the North Carolina Constitutional Convention. After living and practicing medicine for many years in the Stantonsburg area, he was by 1896 in Wilson, which he served as postmaster from 24 Mar. 1903 to 1 June 1914. For a brief period he had also represented [Wilson County](#) ^[4] in the state house of representatives (6 Jan.–9 Mar. 1897).

"Dr. Tom" became something of a legend in Wilson and adjacent counties, particularly after leading several ex-Confederates into [Goldsboro](#) ^[5], then one seat of the Federal Army of Occupation, and shooting on a public street with his Colt revolver a certain Andrew Wilson, whose misbehavior among the local people had caused them to suspect him of being an informer. On the fatal day, about daylight, Wilson ambushed and almost killed a young hired hand on the Coley farm, having mistaken him for ex-cavalryman Frank Coley, who had been active in protecting his friends and neighbors from the foraging Yankees. Within an hour three or four Blue Rangers were in pursuit. They came upon Wilson in Goldsboro at the point of crossing of the two railroads. In a rapid exchange of fire their leader, Tom Person, left Wilson dying on the steps of a store as they galloped rapidly out of town with a band of Federal cavalry in hot pursuit.

For two or three years Dr. Tom was forced to keep on the move among friends and relatives between [Contentnea Creek](#) ^[6] and [Nahunta Swamp](#) ^[7], and he had several hairbreadth escapes during the repeated searches of military patrols. The Federal authorities finally abandoned their efforts, and he soon married (26 Apr. 1871) Elizabeth Kennedy Ruffin (13 Oct. 1833–28 Jan. 1906), daughter of William Lee and Sidney Delzell Crawford Kennedy of Greene County and widow of Etheldred Francis (Dred) Ruffin, who had given his life in the Confederate service. She and her two husbands were buried in Maplewood Cemetery, Wilson. There were children by both of her marriages, but the Persons were Thomas L., William Kennedy, and Sally, who married William Edwin Bardin of the Eureka area.

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