

Robinson, Benjamin ^[1]

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1843–3 Aug. 1888

Benjamin Robinson, newspaper publisher, editor, novelist, political activist, lawyer, and Confederate officer, was born in [Fayetteville](#) ^[2], the son of Dr. Benjamin (Young Ben) West (1811–85) and Joanna Huske Robinson. The family had been in Fayetteville since the arrival in 1805 of his grandfather, also Dr. Benjamin (Old Ben) West Robinson (1775–1857), a Vermont native and builder of the family home, Monticello. For a century, three generations of the family played leading roles in both medicine and public affairs in the town.

His educational record is unknown, but as he was listed as a sixteen-year-old "student" in the census of 1860, it is probable that he attended Donaldson Academy, then the major school in Fayetteville. At seventeen, Robinson (called "Benny" in a diary of a contemporary) enlisted in the Confederate army on 2 May 1861 and was named second lieutenant in Company A of the Fifth North Carolina Infantry Regiment. His military service spanned virtually all the campaigns of the Army of Northern Virginia through the Battle of Spotsylvania in May 1864.

Robinson was promoted captain of the company on 6 Mar. 1862, just prior to the Battle of Williamsburg, Va., in which he played a conspicuous role by carrying the regimental battle flag "until the staff was shot to pieces." As a result of the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863, he was among only four captains remaining unwounded of the regiment's field officers. The depleted regiment was badly mauled again on 1 July 1863, on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. Slightly wounded, he returned to duty the next day. His active service ended when he was severely wounded in the foot at Spotsylvania, Va., on 9 May 1864. He returned to Fayetteville and was assigned to the Invalid Corps. In March 1865, when General William T. Sherman's Union army approached the town, Robinson organized a "shovel corps" intending to dig ditches for Confederate troops.

He began a journalism career in June 1865, when he and his brother-in-law, James H. (Harry) Myrover, founded the *Fayetteville News*, which had both a weekly and a daily edition. In 1866 he was listed as copublisher with H. H. Smith. He then went to [Wilmington](#) ^[3] to become an editor of the *Wilmington Dispatch*, founded by [William Henry Bernard](#) ^[4], who had been a wartime editor in Fayetteville. He apparently also worked on the *Wilmington Star*, established by Bernard in 1867. It is probable that Robinson got his earliest training as a journalist on Bernard's wartime papers in Fayetteville.

While engaged in journalism in Fayetteville and Wilmington, he also found time to write a 180-page novel, entitled *Dolores: A Tale of Disappointment and Distress* ^[5], published in the autumn of 1868. The publisher was the newly opened New York house of E. J. Hale and Sons, an enterprise of the former publisher of the *Fayetteville Observer* ^[6], which had departed the South in 1866. The work, which Hall advertised as "a southern novel," mixed scenes of life in Fayetteville, Civil War action, and a love affair linking families in Vermont and North Carolina. Using the form of letters, journals, and "conversations with the Vernon family of Rushbrook in Carolina," the book is a colorful and authentic panorama of life of its period, intriguing for its timeliness, depicting as it does the very days when it was written. Its straightforward passages of Civil War army life and battle are among the earliest of such scenes penned by a combatant who experienced it as a frontline officer.

In 1873 Robinson was back in Fayetteville, both as a journalist and with a law license. On 5 Apr. 1873 he founded *The Statesman*, a weekly newspaper. In six articles that covered an entire page, he described his conversion to the [Republican party](#) ^[7] and announced his political and editorial philosophy. He called for national reconciliation and home rule. For the next five months, he carried out a vigorous editorial policy, promoting education, backing establishment of a fire company composed entirely of freed enslaved people, jousting with Democratic critics among his editorial peers and local politicians, and writing informative accounts of visits to [Raleigh](#) ^[8] and to local cotton factories. His newspaper also carried his card as a lawyer. In September 1868 he gave up the editorship, apparently intending to make a living as a lawyer. In addition, he advertised for a "literary partnership" in polishing material for another novel. The newspaper ceased publication in 1874, leaving a unique journalistic legacy of enlightened partisanship for the GOP at a time when the [Democratic party](#) ^[9] was regaining political control in North Carolina.

In 1874 he plunged into an active role in the Republican party, which fielded full tickets in local elections that year. Robinson was the party's candidate for mayor of Fayetteville. He was defeated by a single vote, 362 to 361.

After that election, Robinson virtually disappears from the public record and from the archives of his extended family. Despite the varied promise of the years of his young manhood, Robinson's life after 1874 went downhill, and details of his last years are sketchy. In censuses of 1870 and 1880, his wife and children were listed in households of first her father-in-law and then her brother. He is not listed. In 1880, with five children ranging in age from five to fourteen, she listed herself as a milliner. In 1885 the couple appears in court records disposing of his portion of his father's estate and borrowing

small sums from a local developer.

When he died, Robinson was living in Fernandina, Fla. The notice of his death in the *Fayetteville Observer* by editor George Haigh said of him: "He has had many trials, and tried many vocations, but fortune seem never to smile upon his labors. The writer knew him well, his faults and foibles, and can say with truth that he was a truly brave and honest man." The place of his burial is unknown.

Robinson married Celia U. Myrover (b. Jan. 1845) on 8 Feb. 1863, while home on furlough. She was the younger sister of his journalism associate, [Harry Myrover](#) ^[10]. Six children were living when the 1880 census was taken: Lewis (b. 1866), Bennie (b. 1867), Nettie (b. 1869), Huske (b. 1871), Celia (b. 1873), and Augustus (b. 1875).

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Additional Resources:

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[26]

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