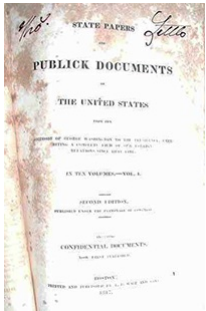


Settle, Thomas ^[1]

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by Lindley S. Butler, 1994; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, January 2023

9 Mar. 1789–5 Aug. 1857



An 1817 book inscribed by Thomas Settle. Image from the North Carolina Museum of History.

^[2]Thomas Settle, congressman and superior court judge, was the son of David and Rhoda Mullins Settle of [Rockingham County](#) ^[3] and a member of one of the most important political dynasties in North Carolina history. He was the father of [Thomas Settle, Jr.](#) ^[4], legislator, supreme court justice, and a founder of the North Carolina [Republican party](#) ^[5]; the uncle and father-in-law of [David S. Reid](#) ^[6], senator and governor; and the uncle by marriage of Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois, the prominent senator and presidential candidate in 1860.

Settle was educated by tutors, read law, and was admitted to the bar in 1816. In the same year he was elected to the North Carolina House of Commons, where he served on the committees of propositions and grievances and privileges and elections. The next year he defeated [Bartlett Yancey](#) ^[7] for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and won another term, serving in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth congresses (1817–21). Declining to run again, probably because he had recently married, he returned to his law practice. Settle ran for the House of Commons again in 1826 and in the two succeeding sessions. He was an active member of the [General Assembly](#) ^[8] in both committee work and floor debate. For two sessions he served on a conference committee, the committee of propositions and grievances, and a select committee on the wool tariff. When Speaker of the House [James Iredell](#) ^[9] won the governorship, Settle was elected speaker on 6 Dec. 1827 to succeed him.

He served as speaker of the house throughout the 1828 legislative session. In this assembly [Robert Potter](#) ^[10] sponsored resolutions to investigate mismanagement of banks in the state and to prosecute the banks in order to cancel their charters. Some banks were indeed poorly managed, but Potter's resolutions threatened the whole banking structure of North Carolina. The House of Commons vote was a tie, and Speaker Settle cast the deciding vote against the resolution to prosecute the banks. After this session he did not seek reelection.

On 24 Dec. 1832 the legislature voted to send Settle to the state superior court. After serving ably on the bench for twenty-two years, he resigned on 1 Aug. 1854 because of declining health. In his day he was one of the most highly respected superior court judges in the state. A contemporary and early biographer, [John H. Wheeler](#) ^[11], wrote that Settle was "distinguished for his ability as a statesman and as a judge, and esteemed for his virtues, learning, and deportment." After the founding of the [Whig party](#) ^[12] in the 1830s, Settle was considered one of its leading members. In 1836 he was nominated for a seat in the U.S. Senate but was defeated in the legislature by one vote. Settle became a trustee of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[13] in 1826 and remained on the board until his death in 1857. An active Baptist, he was a member of the [Hogan's Creek Church](#) ^[14] and was moderator of the Beulah Association for a number of years. He served as a trustee of [Wake Forest College](#) ^[15]. In his lifetime he accumulated several thousand acres of land, incorporating several large plantations. In 1850 he enslaved thirty people.

On 21 Sept. 1820 Settle married Henrietta Williams Graves (1799–1886), of [Caswell County](#) ^[16], the daughter of Azariah and Elizabeth Williams Graves and the sister of Calvin Graves, a state legislator. Thomas and Henrietta Settle had four daughters and two sons: Henrietta Williams and Caroline L., twins born on 7 Oct. 1824 (Henrietta married Governor [David S. Reid](#) ^[6]), and Caroline married the governor's brother, Hugh K. Reid); [Thomas, Jr.](#) ^[4], born 23 Jan. 1831; Fannie K., born 10 Nov. 1833 (married first J. W. Covington and then, after his death [Oliver H. Dockery](#) ^[17]); David A., born 7 Nov. 1839 (remained unmarried); and Elizabeth, born in 1842 and died young. Thomas and Henrietta Settle died in Rockingham County and were buried in the family cemetery near Reidsville. Photographs of the Settles are in possession of the family.

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