

## **Thornton, Francis Alexander** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Thornton, Francis Alexander**

by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1996

**1 Apr. 1797–29 June 1869**

Francis Alexander Thornton, planter and legislator, was born in [Warren County](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, the son of Francis and Drucilla Jones Ransom Thornton. His mother, a maternal aunt of [Nathaniel Macon](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, married Plummer Willis after the death of her first husband and moved to Tennessee. Francis Thornton attended Warren Academy and in 1813 entered [The University of North Carolina](#) <sup>[4]</sup>. Early in 1814 he was involved in a student uprising opposing university president [Robert H. Chapman](#) <sup>[5]</sup>'s peace views during the [War of 1812](#) <sup>[6]</sup>. Among other things, the students cut off the hair of Chapman's horse's tail and took his gate off its hinges. For these and other misdeeds Thornton appears to have been among a group of students who were dismissed.

Entering politics, he represented his county in the [House of Commons](#) <sup>[7]</sup> for the sessions of 1821, 1822, 1848–49, and 1850–51. He was a delegate in 1850 to the [Democratic](#) <sup>[8]</sup> National Convention, which nominated [Franklin Pierce](#) <sup>[9]</sup> for the presidency. He also represented Warren County in the [secession convention](#) <sup>[10]</sup> of 1861–62 and in the Constitutional Convention of the same time. As his last public service he represented Warren County in the state senate in 1866–67. Kemp P. Battle, who met Thornton at the secession convention, described him as "a neighbor of Nat. Macon, a mild-mannered, gentlemanly, venerable man . . . tho' he was a fire-eating Secessionist."

Thornton in 1822 married Ann Swepson Boyd, the daughter of Richard and Panthea Burwell Boyd of Mecklenburg County, Va. After her death he married her first cousin, Lucy Nelson Boyd, the daughter of Robert Boyd. By his first wife, he was the father of two sons, George and Plummer, who both died in young manhood. Only one child of the second marriage, Robert Boyd, grew to maturity. Thornton was buried in a family cemetery on his Roanoke River plantation in the Oakville section of Warren County.

#### **References:**

[Kemp P. Battle, \*History of the University of North Carolina\* vol. 1 \(1907\).](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

John L. Cheney, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Government, 1585–1974* (1975).

[Daniel L. Grant, \*Alumni History of the University of North Carolina\* \(1924\).](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

John G. McCormick, "Personnel of the Convention of 1861," *James Sprunt Historical Monographs*, No. 1 (1900). <sup>[13]</sup>

Wills, Deeds, and Estate Records, Warren County (courthouse, Warrenton).

#### **Subjects:**

[Biographies](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

[Planters](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

[Public officials](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

#### **Authors:**

[Smith, Claiborne T., Jr.](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

#### **Origin - location:**

[Warren County](#) <sup>[18]</sup>

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