

Toon, Thomas Fentress ^[1]

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Toon, Thomas Fentress

by Maud Thomas Smith, 1996

10 June 1840–19 Feb. 1902

Thomas Fentress Toon, farmer, teacher, soldier, and superintendent of public instruction, was born in [Columbus County](#) ^[2], the son of Anthony and Mary McMillan Fentress Toon. He attended county schools and [Wake Forest College](#) ^[3]. When the Civil War began during his senior year, he enlisted immediately but completed the term and was graduated with high honors.

On receiving his diploma, Toon joined the Columbus Guards No. 2, which later became a part of the Twentieth North Carolina. He was elected first lieutenant in his company, and a month later his men chose him captain. Toon's command served in various campaigns of Robert D. Jackson, Jubal Early, and John B. Gordon, during which his distinguished performance led to his elevation to colonel in 1863. At Spottsylvania General R. D. Johnston was injured, and Toon was temporarily promoted to brigadier general; he returned to the rank of colonel when Johnston was well enough to resume command. Wounded several times during the war, Toon was permanently removed from the fighting ranks during the attack on Fort Stedman in March 1865.

After the war he returned to Columbus County, where he had a many-sided career in teaching, farming, and working for the [Atlantic Coast Line](#) ^[4] Railway system. He also served as county school examiner, mayor of Fair Bluff, and member of the state legislature (lower house, 1881–82; senate, 1883–84).

In January 1866 Toon married Carrie E. Smith, the daughter of Alva Smith of Fair Bluff. They had two sons and three daughters. After his wife's death Toon married, in 1891, Rebecca Cobb Ward and moved to Lumberton in [Robeson County](#) ^[5]. Well known in her own right, the new Mrs. Toon was chosen first superintendent of Robeson Baptist Women's Missionary Union at the time of its creation in 1896 and served for five years. Her husband taught at the Robeson Institute.

In 1900 North Carolina elected as its governor [Charles B. Aycock](#) ^[6], who planned to revamp and drastically improve the state's education system. Aycock called T. F. Toon to Raleigh to become state superintendent of public instruction. These two men and [Charles D. McIver](#) ^[7] made plans to canvass the state in order to gain support for the "Declaration against Illiteracy." During the strenuous campaign Toon contracted an illness that ended his career in 1902. He was a Democrat and a Baptist. Of him his church people said: he was "a humble and faithful servant of His Master and Lord, an exemplary father and companion and a statesman of rare merit."

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