

Webb, William Alexander ^[1]

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by Eva Burbank Murphy, 1996

30 July 1867–4 Nov. 1919

William Alexander Webb, educator and administrator, was born in that part of [Orange County](#) ^[2] that later became [Durham County](#) ^[3], the son of Richard Stanford (23 Feb. 1837–10 Nov. 1901) and Jennie Morrow Clegg Webb (d. June 1910). His father was an itinerant pastor in the Methodist Episcopal church, so the family moved frequently. William Alexander was the oldest of at least five children. His brothers were Albert Shipp (b. 1873) and Richard; his sisters were Cornelia Catharine (b. Oct. 1869) and Jenny (b. July 1879). William was graduated from the Webb School in 1885 and from [Vanderbilt University](#) ^[4] in 1891. At Vanderbilt he belonged to Phi Delta Theta fraternity and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Later he spent time at the [University of Leipzig](#) ^[5] (1895–97) and the [University of Berlin](#) ^[6] (1903–4). In June 1911 [Wofford College](#) ^[7] awarded him the honorary Litt.D. degree.

Webb began his career in the early 1890s as a teacher at the [Webb School](#) ^[8], in Bell Buckle, Tenn., where his uncles John Maurice Webb and William Robert Webb had established their reputations as educators. After his first sojourn in Germany, he was principal of Central Academy in Fayette, Mo. (1897–99), and then taught English at Central ([Methodist](#) ^[9]) College, also in Fayette, before serving as its president (1907–13). In 1913 he became president of [Randolph-Macon Woman's College](#) ^[10] in Lynchburg, Va., a post he held until his death. A building on the campus bears his name. During several summer sessions (1911–14) he taught English in Colorado. He contributed to a number of professional and literary journals, including the [South Atlantic Quarterly](#) ^[11], the *Educational Review*, *School and Society* ^[12], and *Religious Education*.

On 31 Jan. 1899 in Bedford County, Tenn., he married Mary Lee Clary (d. 17 Oct. 1919) of Bell Buckle. Their children were Stanford, Carolyn, Dorothy, and Mary Clary. A member of the Religious Education Association, he served in 1916–17 as vice-president of the Association of American Colleges and president of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States. He died in Nashville, Tenn., and was buried in Bell Buckle on 6 Nov. 1919.

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