

## **Whitener, Basil Lee** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Whitener, Basil Lee**

by William S. Powell, 1996

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Portrait of Basil Lee Whitener, from the Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives. In Biographical Directory of the United States Congress online.

<sup>[2]</sup>Basil Lee Whitener, legislator and congressman, was born in York County, S.C., the son of Levi, foreman in a Cannon textile mill, and Laura Barrett Whitener. His father died at the age of thirty-six when Basil was eight, and his mother and her three children moved to Ranlo community near Gastonia, N.C. Young Whitener finished high school in Lowell at age sixteen and then completed the two-year course at Rutherford College <sup>[3]</sup> in 1933. He was graduated from the University of South Carolina in 1935 and received a law degree from Duke University <sup>[4]</sup> in 1937. As a boy he helped to support the family by delivering newspapers; to pay his college expenses he worked in a cotton mill in the summer and held student jobs during the term.

Admitted to the bar in 1937, he began to practice in Gastonia, and between 1938 and 1940 he also was an instructor of business law at Belmont Abbey College <sup>[5]</sup>. He held a seat in the state house of representatives <sup>[6]</sup> in 1941 and was renominated in 1942 but resigned to enter the U.S. Navy as an ensign. After serving as a gunnery officer, he was separated from the navy in November 1945 with the rank of lieutenant. Subsequently he became a major in the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

Governor R. Gregg Cherry <sup>[7]</sup>, a fellow townsman from Gastonia, appointed Whitener superior court solicitor of the Fourteenth District on 26 Jan. 1946 to complete an unfulfilled term. He was elected to a full term the following November and reelected in 1950 and 1954. In 1946 he was named a member of the General Statutes Commission, and in 1947–49 he served on the Commission to Study Improvement of Administration of Justice in the state. In 1948 and 1960 he was a delegate to the Democratic <sup>[8]</sup> National Convention. Elected to the Eighty-fifth and the five succeeding Congresses, he served from 3 Jan. 1957 to 3 Jan. 1969 but was an unsuccessful candidate in 1968 and 1970.

Whitener was a member of the Masonic order <sup>[9]</sup> and other fraternal, civic, and professional groups. He was awarded honorary degrees by Belmont Abbey College and Pfeiffer College <sup>[10]</sup>. A member of the Methodist church <sup>[11]</sup>, he married Harriet Priscilla Morgan on 26 Sept. 1942, and they had three sons and a daughter: John Morgan, Laura Lee, Basil Lee, Jr., and Barrett Simpson.

#### **References:**

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David L. Corbitt, ed., *Public Addresses and Papers of Robert Gregg Cherry, Governor of North Carolina, 1945–1949* (1951).

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*Raleigh News and Observer*, 30 Sept. 1951, 21 Mar. 1989.

Cameron P. West, *A Democrat and Proud of It* (1959).

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#### **Additional Resources:**

"Whitener, Basil Lee, (1915 - 1989)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000410> <sup>[2]</sup> (accessed March 18, 2014).

Guide to the Basil Lee Whitener Papers, 1889-1968. Rubenstein Library, Duke University Libraries. <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/whitener/> <sup>[12]</sup> (accessed March 18, 2014).

"Tag Archive for 'Basil Lee Whitener'." Publishing the Long Civil Rights Movement. Library Blog, UNC Libraries. <https://lcrm.lib.unc.edu/blog/index.php/tag/basil-lee-whitener/> <sup>[13]</sup> (accessed March 18, 2014).

Whitener, Basil Lee. 1963. *Three Hundredth Anniversary of the State of North Carolina* Washington: [G.P.O.]. <sup>[14]</sup>

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#### **Subjects:**

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Lawyers <sup>[16]</sup>

Public officials <sup>[17]</sup>

#### **Authors:**

Powell, William S. <sup>[18]</sup>

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

Gaston County <sup>[19]</sup>

Gastonia <sup>[20]</sup>

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography. University of North Carolina Press. <sup>[21]</sup>

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