

## Wimberly, Dred <sup>[1]</sup>

### Wimberly, Dred

by John Macfie, 1996

**1848–16 June 1937**

Dred Wimberly, member of the [General Assembly](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, was born at Walnut Plantation near Tarboro, where he was raised and worked in the fields of [James S. Battle](#) <sup>[3]</sup> prior to the [Civil War](#) <sup>[4]</sup>. In 1865 [Kemp Plummer Battle](#) <sup>[5]</sup> informed all his help that they were free to leave or stay and work for wages. Dred Wimberly elected to remain. Though his choice may have been for largely practical reasons, it was also indicative of the close relationship between Battle and Wimberly.

Placed in charge of supplies, Wimberly bought farm implements and dry goods for the plantation. During and after the [Civil War](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, Battle lived in [Raleigh](#) <sup>[6]</sup> and following [Emancipation](#) <sup>[7]</sup> Wimberly was responsible for delivering poultry and other farm products from Flag Marsh and Walnut Creek farms to the Battle house in the city. The trip took two days by wagon with an overnight stop at Moccasin Creek.

It was probably soon after this that Wimberly moved to Rocky Mount, where he followed his trade as a carpenter. In 1879, or shortly before, he was approached by the [Republican](#) <sup>[8]</sup> party and asked to run for a seat in the General Assembly. He did not think he was qualified. Reminiscing years later, he said, "I got into it when I wasn't looking . . . I hesitated at first and asked them to look around a lot more. They nominated me anyhow and I was elected."

Elected again in 1887, Wimberly won a seat the senate in 1889. To what extent the turbulence of [Reconstruction](#) <sup>[9]</sup> influenced him is unknown. He does not appear as one given to charges and countercharges. And perhaps this was unnecessary because in 1887 black citizens outnumbered whites in [Edgecombe County](#) <sup>[10]</sup> 2,523 to 1,304. Moreover, Wimberly had a "family" loyalty to the Battles, especially Kemp P. Battle, who was trying to obtain a substantial appropriation for [The University of North Carolina](#) <sup>[11]</sup>, reopened only a half dozen years before.

Well after the turn of the century, when interviewed by the press, Wimberly firmly stated that *he* had cast the deciding vote for the appropriation. The vote had been called alphabetically, and just before it came to him the ayes and nays were tied, whereupon he cast an aye and thus earned the eternal gratitude of President Battle. This account has been disputed by later commentators, who point out that the appropriations of \$5,000 and \$15,000 were granted in 1881, when Wimberly was not in office. As there is no doubt of Wimberly's integrity, it is probable that, while in some education or finance committee meeting, he did cast a deciding vote to bring the matter to the floor, and this would not be on the record.

In any case, during the 1879 legislature he supported the improvement of roads and highways, and in 1887 he voted to establish the [North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts](#) <sup>[12]</sup>. As he once stated, "I voted for Dr. Battle's appropriation because Dr. Battle had said voting for the University would help everybody. It might somehow help the colored folks too." Fifty years later, [Josephus Daniels](#) <sup>[13]</sup>, in an editorial in the [Raleigh News and Observer](#) <sup>[14]</sup> on the contribution of Wimberly and other black legislators, said: "they upheld education when no one else did. They laid the foundation for the common schools where the schools had few or no friends."

After retiring from the legislature, Wimberly remained active in Republican party affairs. In 1900 he attended the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia and voted to renominate [William McKinley](#) <sup>[15]</sup> for president. He then went to Washington, D.C., and spent two years as a custodian in the House of Representatives, subsequently returning to Rocky Mount. Wimberly was twice married, the first time in 1869.

His first wife's name and that of their five children are unknown, and it is believed that most of these descendants moved to northern cities. His second wife was Ella Jenkins, whom he married on 11 Feb. 1891. Their children were Luther, Jim, Della, Lucy, Annie, John, and Allen. Wimberly spent the last years of his life at his house at 814 Raleigh Street, in Rocky Mount, in front of which a historical marker was erected in 1965. He was a member of the Primitive Baptist Church of [Edgecombe County](#) <sup>[10]</sup> and held the position of deacon. He was buried in Unity Cemetery.

#### References:

Herbert B. Battle, *The Battle Book* (1930 [portrait]).

Edgecombe County Marriage Records (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

*Raleigh News and Observer*, 17 Feb. 1935, 17, 19 June 1937.

*Rocky Mount Telegram*, 1 May 1965 (portrait).

"Uncle Dred Wimberly—Slave Senator," *Carolina Magazine* (1935).

Wimberly descendants, personal contact.

### Additional Resources:

"Dred Wimberly." N.C. Highway Historical Marker E-74, N.C. Office of Archives & History.  
<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=E-74> [16] (accessed July 16, 2013).

(Includes image of Dred Wimberly) Fleming, Monika S. *Echoes Of EdgeCombe County 1860-1940*. Arcadia Publishing, 1996. [http://books.google.com/books?id=4rcM\\_G1yKw0C&dq=dred+wimberly&source=gbp\\_navlinks\\_s&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=4rcM_G1yKw0C&dq=dred+wimberly&source=gbp_navlinks_s&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false) [17] (accessed July 16, 2013).

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