

Wood, Reuben ^[1]

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by Sam J. Ervin, Jr., 1996

1750–July 1812

Reuben Wood, trial lawyer, member of the state constitutional convention, legislator, and councillor of state, the son of John Wood, a native of Massachusetts, and Sibbel Wilborne Wood, resided in Randolph County ^[2]. Reuben Wood was well qualified for the law, which he chose as his vocation. Unlike most of his contemporaries at the early North Carolina bar, he devoted his chief efforts to the law rather than to politics. As a consequence, he became noted as a wise counselor and skillful advocate.

With horse and saddlebags, Wood attended virtually all of the courts that sat in the vast territory between his home in Randolph County ^[2] and North Carolina's westernmost court town, Jonesboro, which now lies within the boundaries of Tennessee. He was among the lawyers considered by the North Carolina General Assembly ^[3] in 1788 for appointment as attorney for the Washington District, embracing practically all of the territory that subsequently became the state of Tennessee.

Wood served as solicitor or prosecuting attorney in the Burke County ^[4] Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions ^[5] in 1788 and 1789 and in the Buncombe County ^[6] Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions from the organization of Buncombe County in April 1792 until April 1795, when he resigned his office.

Like his older brother Zebedee, Reuben merited and received the undying confidence of his contemporaries. Both men were chosen delegates from Randolph County to the constitutional convention ^[7] that met at Fayetteville in November 1789 and with their approving votes ratified the U.S. Constitution ^[8] on behalf of North Carolina. Moreover, they were both elected in 1791 to represent Randolph County in the North Carolina House of Commons. Subsequently Reuben was designated a councillor of state ^[9] by the General Assembly for seven terms between 1800 and 1806. The councillor's role was to advise the governor on affairs of state.

Wood married Charity Hayne of South Carolina, and they had four sons and four daughters: John L., Joseph, Alfred, Edwin, Sally (m. Augustine Willis of Randolph County in 1802), Laura (m. Joseph Wilson ^[10], "the Great Solicitor" of Charlotte and a brother of Jethro Starbuck Wilson), and Evalina (m. Augustine Willis in 1822 after the death of her sister, Sally, his first wife).

Reuben Wood died intestate in Randolph County, and the November 1812 term of the Randolph County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions settled his estate. At that term his son Joseph returned to the court "An Inventory and Account of the Sales of the Estate of Reuben Wood, dec'd, both in One," which shows that Reuben possessed an unusually large and diversified library for his day and supports Maud Potter's assertion that he "was a lawyer of distinction and a man of education and culture."

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Subjects:

Early Statehood (1789-1820) ^[11]

Public officials ^[12]

Authors:

Ervin, Sam J., Jr. ^[13]

Origin - location:

Randolph County ^[14]

From:

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[15]

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