

**ADDRESS**  
By **L. R. VARSER**  
ON  
**PRESENTATION OF A PORTRAIT**  
OF THE LATE  
**WILLIAM JACKSON ADAMS**  
TO THE  
**SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA**  
MAY 20, 1941

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I have been asked by Mrs. Adams and her son, W. J. Adams, to present to the Court this excellent portrait of their husband and father, the Honorable William Jackson Adams, a former Associate Justice of this high tribunal.

It is fitting and in accord with the precedents that at this time there should be an attempt to characterize and appraise the man and his life.

William Jackson Adams was born in Rockingham, Richmond County, North Carolina, 27 January, 1860, the son of Shockley D. Adams, a Methodist Minister, native of Marlborough County, South Carolina, and Mary Jackson Adams, of Moore County, North Carolina. He was a descendant on his father's side from the Adams and Gibson families of South Carolina. Mary Jackson Adams, his mother, was of gifted ancestry—the Clarke and Jackson families of Moore County. The parents of Judge Adams gave him the best in character, intellect and ancestry. It is a rich heritage to be brought up under the tutelage of a minister father and a good mother.

Judge Adams was prepared for college in the schools in Carthage, Warrenton and Greensboro.

In the fall of 1877 he entered the Freshman Class of Trinity College—then located in Randolph County—an institution consistently distinguished for its sincerity and high standards. He remained at Trinity until the close of the fall term of 1878 and in January, 1879, he transferred to the University of North Carolina and entered the Sophomore Class. In 1881 he graduated from the University of North Carolina in the largest class since its reopening after Reconstruction. In 1924 the

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University of North Carolina conferred upon him the honorary degree of LL.D. This degree was well earned—a fitting recognition of ripe scholarship and outstanding statesmanship.

To those who knew him intimately it was no surprise that he should turn to the Law for his life work. He entered the School of Law at the University immediately after his graduation and pursued his law course under Dr. John Manning. The impress of this great teacher on young Adams was lasting. His conception of the law was high—this had been taught him by this great teacher. License was issued to him by this Court at the October Term, 1883, and he began immediately to practice in Carthage, North Carolina.

He pursued the law zealously and was a wise counsellor, as well as a successful advocate.

In 1890, Judge Adams formed a law partnership with J. C. Black, under the firm name of Black & Adams. This partnership continued until Mr. Black's death in 1902. Thereafter Judge Adams practiced alone until December 12, 1908, when he was appointed Judge of the Superior Court, to succeed Honorable Walter H. Neal, resigned.

The law practice of Judge Adams from 1883 until 1908 covered, not only a wide territory, including the appellate courts, but such a variety of litigation that gave him a rich and full experience in the practice, as well as in the habits of the people of the State. His course as a lawyer was eminently successful, characterized at all times by a sincerity of purpose and honesty of conviction. The confidence that the people had in him, while great, was well placed and honestly deserved.

In politics Judge Adams was not without experience. His first political employment was as Attorney for the County of Moore—a position then full of work, but remarkably free from substantial remuneration. He was called to public station in times that “tried men's souls.” He was well fitted for great office, great events. He was loyal to his political party. He voted for its nominees, State and National. He did not substitute his judgment for that of his party in the selection of nominees. He believed in government through political parties. Judge Adams served as Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee of Moore County. The strength of his influence was a big element in Democratic influence in Moore County.

In 1892, Judge Adams was elected to represent Moore County in the House of Representatives. In 1894, he was elected to the Senate from his Senatorial District, then composed of the counties of Moore and Randolph. When this Senate was organized in January, 1895, it was found that, excepting R. A. Doughton, Lieutenant Governor and President of the Senate, there were only six Democrats in that body: Abell, Adams, Dowd, Green, Mercer, and Mitchell. This lonely six withstood

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the surge of the times and kept the Democratic rudder straight. Their record is a proud history for North Carolina.

Judge Adams served as a member of the Board of Internal Improvements from 1899 to 1901. On 8 April, 1915, Governor Craig appointed Judge Adams a member of the Commission to revise the system of Court procedure.

Judge Adams came to the Superior Court bench upon the resignation of Judge Walter H. Neal, and was elected for a full term in 1910 and another full term in 1918. On 19 September, 1921, Governor Morrison appointed Judge Adams Associate Justice of this Court to fill the unexpired term of Justice W. R. Allen, deceased. In 1922, he was elected to the same office for the unexpired term and in 1926 for a full term of eight years. Judge Adams died 20 May, 1934. On 19 December, 1906, he married Miss Florence Wall, of Rockingham, Richmond County, North Carolina. This marriage united two families, long distinguished in North Carolina. These two lives so blended that each ministered to each in all high inspirations of mind and character. To this union one son was born, W. J. Adams, Jr., a member of the bar of this Court, who is now a member of the Attorney-General's staff.

In early life Judge Adams joined the Methodist Church, and remained a consistent and devoted member to the time of his death. Judge Adams attended no show of religion. He did not believe in the kind that "vaunteth itself." His religion was a vital part of his personality. It was at all times a dependable guide and comfort.

Judge Adams' great service was in his judicial labors. His long and wide experience as Superior Court Judge, holding court in every county in the State, constituted a rich field for the application of the law to the people he loved. While a great student, with unceasing desire to learn, not only what the law is, but its sources, his labors and ministrations on the Superior Court bench were thoroughly practical. The office of Superior Court Judge has been characterized by many of our greatest men as the most important office in the State. The reason assigned is that it is the great trial Court administered by the people in which the law is directly applied to the conduct of the individual citizen. It is a rare gift when a Judge is able to know what the law is and to temper its strong hand, not only with accuracy, but with mercy. There has been no waste of judicial machinery on account of his errors as a trial judge. He enjoyed from the beginning of his judicial career the respect of the bar and the officers and jurors of his courts. While the thief felt the halter draw, he found no excuse for a lack of respect of the law.

When Judge Adams came to the Supreme Court of this State he brought a rich experience at the bar, and in the trial court to its service. True scholarship is a necessity for great judicial attainments, but equally

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necessary is a practical experience gained at first hand, either at the bar or on the trial bench, or in both of these spheres. Judge Adams was wealthy in his experience in both.

Judge Adams' mind was not only trained in the acquisition of knowledge, but it was full of the power of analysis. From his admission to the bar to the end of his career Judge Adams was a most diligent student of the science of the law and the application of its sublime principles to the transactions of men and their relations to each other. He was a lawyer of ability and distinction—a great mind, with judicial poise, all of which commanded the respect of his brethren of the bar. These qualities brought to him a clientele worthy of the best legal minds of the State. He was equally successful in his judicial roles. His long and useful service is known in every county in the State. To his other qualities he added sound judgment, with a rare knowledge of an insight into human nature. He was quick to perceive both from the muddled facts in the trial court, as well as from an obscure record in the appellate Court, what justice and equity directed. His nature was warm and sympathetic. He was always merciful, but just. He had too much regard for the "light of jurisprudence" and its proper administration to pretend to be better and wiser than the law. His opinions contained in Volumes 182 to 206, inclusive, of the North Carolina Reports, will always serve as monuments to him and guide-posts to his brethren who come after him.

Judge Adams was not only learned in the law, but his scholarship had a wide culture. He was deeply read in the science of government. He loved history and especially the record of his own State. He was familiar with the great authors of the world and of all times. He indulged for long hours in association with good books. He loved the loveliness of natural things—flowers and trees, the colors of autumn and the birth of spring. He was a lover of nature, of books, of friends. He found in these the happiness that riches cannot buy. He was generous in heart, cultured in mind, courtly and chivalrous among men and women. He was courageous and yet gentle. He never faltered when once he had found the truth.

"And is he dead whose glorious mind  
Lifts thine on high?  
To live with those we leave behind  
Is not to 'die.'"

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ACCEPTANCE OF ADAMS PORTRAIT.

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REMARKS OF CHIEF JUSTICE STACY, UPON ACCEPTING PORTRAIT  
OF THE LATE ASSOCIATE JUSTICE WILLIAM J. ADAMS, IN THE  
SUPREME COURT ROOM, 20 MAY, 1941.

The Court is pleased to accept this splendid portrait of the late Associate Justice William J. Adams, and it has heard with sympathetic understanding and gratification the just and faithful tribute of his friend and ours, who has spoken today. We heartily agree with the speaker that he will take his place among the ablest and most learned judges of the commonwealth. He was a lawyer of the first rank.

In twenty-five volumes of our Reports, beginning with the 182nd and ending with the 206th, his opinions reveal a marked accuracy of learning and constant devotion to duty. In his first case here he was assigned the task of dealing with the *Rule in Shelley's Case*. *Reid v. Neal*, 182 N. C., 192. In his last prepared opinion, which was adopted by the Court after his death, the question was the discontinuance of a neighborhood road. *In re Petition of Edwards*, 206 N. C., 549. His investigations covered a wide variety of subjects. He delighted in the pursuit of the ideal. Always courteous, he was a most agreeable as well as a most valuable member of the Court. While a profound student of the law, he never assumed that his knowledge was all-embracing, or that his conclusions were sacrosanct, albeit his mind ranged upon the mountain heights. He freely accorded to others the right to their views and the privilege of expressing them. This made him most helpful in conference, and his familiarity with the decisions, their meaning and significance, gave him an unique place among his associates and in the esteem and affection of the members of the bar. We welcome the opportunity of receiving his portrait.

The Marshal will see that it is assigned to its proper place, and these proceedings will be published in the forthcoming volume of the Reports.