

## William Henry Bernard

William Henry Bernard (1837-1916) was both Mr. Editor and Mr. Democrat of Wilmington for 40 years after he became editor-owner of the Wilmington Star.

Bernard was a Virginia native who came to North Carolina by way of Texas. He was first a staunch Whig who opposed secession, and then a 24-year-old soldier in the first regiment of Confederate troops from North Carolina who saw battle in the Civil War.

Bernard had once edited a newspaper in Texas named The Star-Spangled Banner. When his brief war career was over (he was discharged for physical disability), he worked on newspapers in Fayetteville, where he had settled with his wife, a native of the town on the upper Cape Fear. Late in the war, using a press from a defunct prewar newspaper, he actually published a daily newspaper, the Daily Telegraph.

When the war ended with Fayetteville battered by the visit of

General William Tecumseh Sherman's army, Bernard moved to Wilmington with Col. John D. Barry and founded the Wilmington Dispatch. In 1867, he left the association and began the Wilmington Star.

The newspaper became a powerful voice of a resurgent Democratic Party, fighting against the post-Civil War Republican Party that, thanks to large numbers of newly-franchised black voters, was often in the majority. Bernard, working as both party chairman and editorial propagandist, at times foiled the majority.

His newspaper's editorial platform was stridently in favor of states rights and white supremacy. It also plugged for economic development and railroads for the port city. He lived to see Wilmington's rise from bitter racial strife in the 1890s to a growing rail center and shipbuilding port during World War I.

The Wilmington Star-News continues as one of the state's longest-established daily newspapers. In contrast to its white supremacy tone of 100 years ago, a modern-day editor Alfred G. Dickson, won a national award for his editorials condemning links between the Ku Klux Klan and law enforcement officers.

By Roy Parker Jr.  
January 1998