

Winston, Robert Watson ^[1]

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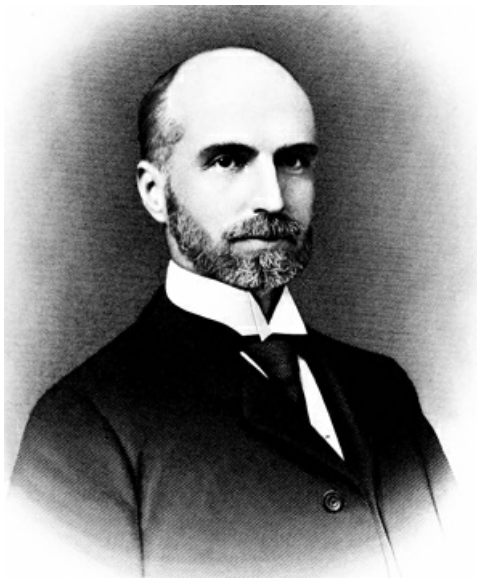


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Winston, Robert Watson

by William S. Powell, 1996

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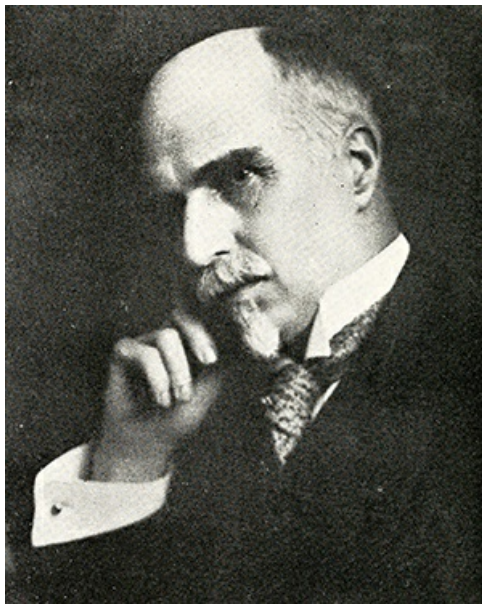


Engraving of Robert Watson Winston, circa 1905. Image from [Archive.org](#).

^[2]Robert Watson Winston, lawyer, judge, and author, was born in Windsor, the son of [Patrick Henry](#) ^[3] and Martha Elizabeth Bird Winston. After attending the [Horner School](#) ^[4] in Oxford, he entered [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[5] where he was on the baseball team; he was graduated in 1879 and received an LL.B. degree in 1881. Admitted to the bar in 1881, he opened an office in Oxford, where he was treasurer first and then city attorney. In 1895 he moved to Durham and formed a partnership with other lawyers, ultimately with Victor S. Bryant during the period 1903–9. Moving to Raleigh in 1909, he was an associate of [Charles B. Aycock](#) ^[6] until 1912 and thereafter with [J. Crawford Biggs](#) ^[7].

Politics attracted Winston, and for many years after 1895 he was a member of the state Democratic committee. He served in the North Carolina Senate during the years 1885–87 and as a superior court circuit judge from 1889 to 1895. As an attorney he represented a number of important business and financial firms, including the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and the state of North Carolina in railroad cases. He successfully defended Raleigh newspaper editor [Josephus Daniels](#) ^[8] in a contempt of court charge brought by a federal judge.

Judge Winston, as he was widely known, retired from his law practice in 1924 and for a brief time lived at the Cosmos



Photograph of Robert Watson Winston circa 1919. Image from the North Carolina Digital

Club in Washington, Collections. ^[9]D.C. At age sixty-three he reentered The University of North Carolina as a freshman, taking the complete four-year course, he said, to reorient himself. He devoted the remainder of his life to study and writing, living most of the time at the Carolina Inn on the campus. In 1928 he published *Andrew Johnson: Plebian and Patriot*^[10], a 549-page biography of the Raleigh native who succeeded Abraham Lincoln as president in 1865. In 1930 his biography of Confederate president Jefferson Davis, *High Stakes and Hair Trigger*^[11], appeared. *Robert E. Lee—A Biography*^[12] and *Gadfly of Chapel Hill: A Biography of Horace Williams, Socrates of Chapel Hill*^[13], were brought out in 1934 and 1942, respectively. His auto-biography, *It's A Far Cry*^[14], in 1937 was a look at southern traditions that survived beyond their time. Also published were many of Winston's lectures and public addresses dealing with the law, the lives of prominent citizens, and the history of the state.

On 13 Dec. 1882 Robert Winston and Sophonria Horner^[15] were married in Oxford. She was the daughter of James Hunter Horner^[16], whose school Winston had attended in his youth. Their children were James Horner^[17], Annabel Conyers (m. Watts Carr), Gertrude (m. Frank Blount Webb), and Robert Watson. Winston received honorary degrees from Wake Forest College^[18], The University of North Carolina, and Duke University^[19]. He also became an honorary member of Phi Beta Kappa. He was an Episcopalian^[20] and a Democrat^[21].

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