

Wade Hampton: Southern Gentleman - First in a Series

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by Bob Dill - Publisher of The Times Examiner

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Wade Hampton Memorial Statue in Columbia, SC.

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A high school and a major highway in Greenville County, South Carolina carries the name of Wade Hampton. A statue of the man, larger than life mounted on a horse, stands proudly on the grounds of the South Carolina State Capitol. Members of the Hampton-Lee Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) honor his memory in the Upstate to this day. Yet few South Carolinians and virtually no newcomers to the state and region know very much about this historical figure, his contributions and sacrifices and ultimately, the impact his life has had on the history of the Palmetto State.

Factual history from original sources make a strong case that he is one of the greatest men in South Carolina history, yet, because of political bias and regional jealousy, he is barely noticed in history text books used in our schools today in other than a negative fashion. Without knowledge of factual history, citizens and their elected representatives will likely repeat past mistakes unnecessarily. In many respects, the life of Wade Hampton III could serve as a role model for today's youth.

The purpose of this series is to provide a profile of a great American who made his mark on South Carolina. It is hoped that the series will provoke readers to pick up one or more factual books on Wade Hampton III and learn something about a critical turning point in South Carolina history. It is a story that has been largely swept aside by those who would revise history and replace truth with fiction to serve their own selfish motives.

This series is the product of an attempt to portray events as they happened and not as those on one side or another of a given issue would like for them to have happened.

Wade Hampton III was a man of principle such as our nation and state require during times of crisis. His own words describe his life more precisely than descriptions by others: "I will sacrifice everything but principle and honor."

He was known by many as the wealthiest man in the prewar South, owning a half-dozen plantations in southern states and thousands of slaves whom he "treated with a degree of civility unusual in one of his station and time."

Wade Hampton III was the son and grandson of upcountry South Carolinians known for their economic, political and military accomplishments on the frontier and in the War of Independence. According to one author, Wade "refused to succumb to the life of the idle rich."

At the outbreak of the War Between the States and South Carolina became the first state to declare its independence, despite his doubts that the Confederacy would be victorious, Wade Hampton III bankrolled the creation of the Hampton Legion and in 1862, became second in command to Gen. J.E.B. Stuart.

A model citizen who condemned violence and abhorred dueling, Wade Hampton III was proficient with firearms and with the sword. He personally dispatched more opponents in battle than any

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Other general officers with the possible exception of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest.

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When General Wade Hampton III left the Army of Northern Virginia to defend his native South Carolina and her women and children against the vindictive army led by William T. Sherman, General Robert E. Lee said Hamptons' departure made the Confederate surrender at Appomattox inevitable.

After the war, Hampton returned to his plantation in South Carolina that had been burned and ravaged by Sherman's troops and spent the next decade trying in vain to restore his wealth. As a former officer in the Army of the Confederacy, he was not allowed to vote, and the state government under Carpetbag and former slave rule was the most corrupt in history of the nation.

Carpetbaggers from the North who came to exploit the poverty stricken citizens and freed slaves formed the large majority of those allowed to vote as well as office holders. Federal troops propped up the corrupt state government with bayonets. When federal troops were withdrawn, their weapons were turned over to former slaves who formed militia units and terrorized the defenseless white population as well as their fellow former slaves who chose to cooperate with their former owners.

It was a desperate time. Leaders with credibility and character were desperately needed. Wade Hampton III was a reluctant volunteer.

Newspaper editor Alfred B. Williams, a witness to the events, described conditions in South Carolina in 1876, a decade after the end of the war. "The people of all South Carolina were in daily excitement and fear, beginning to see the faint dawn of hope where no hope had been.

"They were intent on staking everything on one desperate struggle for deliverance from conditions intolerable and dangerous beyond the conception of people of the present. Those days and weeks were the most eventful and important of the history of this state.

"The powers that ruled South Carolina from 1868 until they were overthrown caused more destruction than the four years of the Civil War. Judging by the record they made, written indelibly in the official archives, continuance of their rule would have meant inevitable and irretrievable annihilation of the fruits of two centuries of labor, thought, courage and aspiration."

Writing several years after the "Revolution of 1876," Williams concludes: "Considering the facts with the cleared light of the elapsed time, all of us may understand more distinctly than did the people of 1876 that the battle they were fighting these summer and autumn months literally was with new and brighter existence or tortured extinction, life or death, the issues."

Author Edward G. Longacre writes that Wade Hampton's life was one of dramatic contradictions. "He was the quintessential slave owner, but he questioned the ethical underpinnings of the "Peculiar Institution." He was a prewar spokesperson for national unity, but he became an avid

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secessionist. He "redeemed" South Carolina from Reconstruction, but he then extended more political benefits to African-Americans than any other Democratic governor in the postwar South. By Bob Dill - Publisher of The Times Examiner
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For more than forty years he gave unselfishly of himself to his state and his community, not only when wealthy but also when teetering on the abyss of poverty."

Next week: Part II, *Wade Hampton: Tyger River Roots*

Recommended reading: *Gentleman and Soldier: The Extraordinary Life of General Wade Hampton*, by Edward G. Longacre and *Hampton and His Redshirts*, by Alfred B. Williams.