

Captain John Randolph Erwin.

The subject of this sketch was born on the 1st day of August, 1838, in Bethesda township, York county, S. C. He was a son of William L. and Annie Williamson Erwin, who belonged to the old Scotch-Irish families who emigrated to this country before the Revolution.

Capt. Erwin was raised on a farm, and was educated in the old field schools, except two sessions spent at an academy in Ebenezer, S. C.

In 1851 William Erwin moved to Mecklenburg county, North Carolina, locating at Ranalesburg, Steele Creek Township, and from that time Mecklenburg was Capt. Erwin's home.

In the fall of 1856 he entered the general merchandise store of Fisher, Burroughs & Co., of Charlotte, and remained with that firm until the winter of 1859. Then he decided to improve his fortunes by going West, so he went to Texas with a party trading on the Rio Grande. He remained there until South Carolina passed the ordinance of secession, when he sacrificed his business and returned to his home. He volunteered as a private in the Ranalesburg Rifles, but his popularity soon won for him the position of First Lieutenant of his company. Soon after organization this company was ordered to the camp of instruction at Raleigh, and was at the capital when North Carolina seceded on May 20, 1861. The company was then ordered to Garysburg, N. C., where he was made adjutant of the post by Col. W. D. Pender. Here it was that the Third, afterwards the Thirteenth Regiment of North Carolina Volunteers, was organized, and Capt. Erwin was selected as Major of the regiment. Owing to the absence of his captain, who had been wounded, and to the earnest entreaties of his men, he declined this honor and remained with the company.

The company was sent from Garysburg to Suffolk, Va.,

and from there to Todd's Point, on the James river, where they spent the summer. In the fall the company was sent on detached duty to Ragged Island, opposite Newport News, and was in camp there and witnessed the naval engagement of 1861 in which the warships Cumberland and Congress were destroyed. In the spring of 1862 the regiment was ordered to the peninsula near Yorktown, to hold in check the advance of Gen. McClellan.

In April of that year he was elected captain of a cavalry company, organized in Charlotte by Maj. M. N. Hart.

After equipping and drilling his company at the old fair grounds at Charlotte, Capt. Erwin was ordered to join Evan's Battalion at Kinston, N. C. In the winter of 1862 the battalion was ordered to Garysburg, where the Fifth Cavalry Regiment was formed; this regiment was sent to Virginia in 1863, and took part in the memorable campaign of Gettysburg. When the regiment went to Virginia Capt. Erwin was left at Garysburg with typhoid fever, and did not rejoin his men until they returned to Culpepper Court House, where the famous North Carolina brigade, composed of the First, Second, Third and Fifth Cavalry, was organized. This brigade was commanded by the gallant Gordon until his death in front of the breast works near Richmond in 1864, when Gen. Rufus Barringer took charge of the brigade. In this command Capt. Erwin served till the close of the war, taking part in all the battles in which his regiment was engaged. At the bloody battle of Chamberlain Run his colonel, McNeil, and Lieut.-Col. Shaw were both killed, and Maj. Galloway being sick, the command of the regiment devolved on him to the close of the war. He did not surrender his regiment, but marched it back to North Carolina, and in Charlotte he received from John C. Breckenridge, Secretary of War, an order to disband his company.

After the war Capt. Erwin again entered the mercantile field as a clerk for Taylor & Duncan, which position he held for two years. On the 5th of June, 1867, he was married to

Miss Jennie, a daughter of Maj. Z. A. Grier, of Steele Creek. In January, 1868, Capt. Erwin moved to Steele Creek and began the life of a farmer. In January, 1873, he returned to Charlotte and accepted a position with W. H. Houston, a wholesale grocery merchant. In May, 1873, Capt. Erwin was elected city marshal, or chief of police, which office he held until April, 1875, when he was appointed by D. Schenck, judge of this district, clerk of the Superior Court of Mecklenburg county, in which capacity he served for twelve years.

Upon his retirement the following tribute was paid him by Col. H. C. Jones, at the close of Capt. Erwin's last court:

"I desire to call your honor's attention to the fact that the term of office of our much esteemed clerk, Capt. Erwin, is about to close. It has been many years since he entered upon the duties of his office, and in all that time he has discharged them so efficiently, with so much fidelity to the important trust committed to him, with such patience and industry, with such kindness and courtesy to the members of the bar, that I know I speak their sentiments when I say we part from him with feelings of affectionate regret. He came to the position entirely without experience and without any acquaintance with the business that his office devolved upon him, but he devoted himself to the task with such patient industry that he soon became, what I now pronounce him, one of the best—if not the very best—clerks within the limits of this State."

In May, 1878, Capt. Erwin's wife died, and on the 11th of December, 1879, he was married to Miss Sallie, daughter of Col. William M. Grier, of Steele Creek, and a sister of Calvin E. Grier, a prominent lawyer of Charlotte, who died in 1889.

After leaving the clerk's office, he retired to his farm in Steele Creek, where he had made large investments in a milling plant.

In 1888 he was elected chairman of the Finance Committee of the county, which position he held until 1892, when

he was elected a member of the State Legislature. Although his first experience as a law-maker, he at once took a prominent position and was the chairman or a member of several committees.

In August, 1893, he accepted a position as private secretary to Congressman S. B. Alexander, and spent two years in the City of Washington. In 1895 he moved back to Charlotte and in the same year was made chairman of the Board of County Commissioners. During his administration and through his influence, the first iron bridges were erected for the county of Mecklenburg. He was also chairman of the committee which had in charge the building of the Mecklenburg county court house.

On the 19th of March, 1901, while seated in the court house in Charlotte, he died very suddenly, and was laid to rest in the old cemetery at Steele Creek.

During the war he had made an enviable record as a soldier, and to all who knew him his name was a synonym for honor and uprightness.—*Contributed by Miss F. Grier.*