

Obituaries of Thomas Lanier Williams (1786-1856)

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Brownlow's Knoxville Whig, p. 2, December 13, 1856

DEATH OF JUDGE WILLIAMS

Hon. Thos. L. Williams, of this city, who has been absent all summer and fall among his children in the West¹, recently died in Nashville, on his return to that city. The *Banner* of the 5th thus notices his death.

We are pained to learn that the Hon. Thomas L. Williams suddenly died of an affection of the heart, at the residence of his Brother in law, Mr. John P. Erwin. He was a gentleman, eminent no less for his ability as a lawyer and his learning and impartiality as a Judge, than for his traits of moral and religious character, which renders his death a public loss to the State in which he has so long lived and faithfully served. We suppose some friend will furnish an extended biography of his long and laborious life. He had reached the patriarchal age of seventy years, and died full of years and usefulness.

Knoxville Register, p. 3, December 11, 1856

DEATH OF THE HON. THOMAS L. WILLIAMS

We learn that the Hon. Thomas L. Williams died of paralysis, at the residence of his brother-in-law John P. Erwin, in Nashville on Wednesday last. This melancholy intelligence will be a source of sincere regret to the numerous friends of the deceased. An affectionate father, a devoted friend, an eminent jurist, an active and influential member of society, loved by all who enjoyed his friendship, and merited his confidence, honored and respected by all who knew him, Judge Williams' death leaves a void in our community which will be long and seasily² felt. He has long been regarded as one of the brightest ornaments of the Tennessee Bar, and the ablest Chancellor that ever adorned the bench of our State.

Although Judge Williams had well nigh lived out his three score years and ten, yet blest with a vigorous constitution, which a moral and upright life had preserved unimpaired, he gave promise of living many years. But death the insatiate archer has summoned the earthly Judge to

¹ Melinda Williams Napton (1820-1862), his favorite daughter, whom he called "Juno", and Margaret W. Miller (1817-1899) both lived in Missouri. Frances W. Percy (1823-1894), lived in Mississippi.

² A word long out-of-use which appears to mean feasibly, sensibly, or understandably. Not in modern dictionaries, but found in context in many Internet references to 19th Century writings.

appear before that higher tribunal before which we must all one day be arraigned. Peace to his ashes.

Brownlow's Knoxville Whig, p. 3, January 10, 1857

MEETING OF THE BAR

On occasion of the Death of Hon. Thos. L. Williams

On Monday, the 29th of December, 1856, the Chancery Court being in session, Hon. Seth J. W. Lucky³ presiding, on motion of Horace Maynard, Esq.⁴, prefaced by an appropriate tribute to the worth, ability, and public service of the late distinguished Chancellor, the Court adjourned to give place to a meeting of the Bar.

On motion of James M. Welcker, Esq.⁵, Hon. John H. Crozier⁶ was called to the chair, and Jos. B. Heiskell⁷ appointed Secretary.

On motion of Thos. C. Lyon, Esq.⁸, it was resolved that the chair appoint a committee of three to present resolutions expressive of the sense of this meeting, on occasion of the death of the Hon. Thos. L. Williams. The Chairman appointed Thos. C. Lyon, Esq., S. R. Rogers, Esq.⁹, and H. H. Maynard, Esq. The meeting then adjourned until Wednesday, the 30th day of December.

J. B. Heiskell, Sec'y

The members of the Bar met pursuant to adjournment, when the committee reported the following:

Since the last sitting of this Court, the melancholy tidings of the death of the Hon. Thomas L. Williams has been received here. He died very suddenly, at Nashville, on the 2d of December, 1856.

³ Seth Lucky (1799-1869) was an East Tennessee judge for many years.

⁴ Horace Maynard (1814-1882) was first elected to Congress in 1857. He was a staunch Unionist and was later Ambassador to Turkey and the U.S. Postmaster General.

⁵ James M. Welcker (1817-1858) was a Chancellor of the East Tennessee Division.

⁶ John Hervey Crozier (1812-1889) had been a Tennessee State representative and two-term Congressman. He was a noted orator and was a strong Confederate sympathizer.

⁷ Joseph Heiskell (1823-1913) was a Tennessee State Senator, member of the First and Second Confederate Congresses, and Tennessee State Attorney General from 1870-1878.

⁸ Thomas C. Lyon (1810-1864) had been a major in the Second Seminole War and was a frequent Special Judge of the Tennessee Supreme Court.

⁹ Samuel R. Rogers was U.S. District Attorney for Eastern Tennessee 1850-53 and was a Union man during the Civil War.

Here was the home of the deceased, and in this Court he presided for eighteen years; and we who are thus called on to pay this tribute of respect to a departed public servant, grew up under his administration of the law and may not be inaptly termed his pupils. To his ability, impartiality and dignity in the administration of Chancery jurisprudence we are greatly indebted for this invaluable branch of our judicial system. He brought to the investigation of causes heard before him a sound and discriminating mind, vigor and promptitude of decision, and great capacity for labor; his honesty and impartiality were unimpeached, and his hatred of fraud, and his skill in detecting and exposing it – unerring almost as the operations of instinct – have become proverbial with the profession. In all the relations of private life, the deceased was most exemplary. But we mean to pronounce on him no labored eulogy. Less than this we could not say with truth, and more is not needed.

Judge Williams retired from the bench to private life in the full vigor of his mental and bodily powers, but he was permitted not long to enjoy its ease and comforts. Without warning the death summons came. But it found him, as we trust not, unprepared. He died as he had lived – in the faith of the Christian religion and in the hope of its glorious promises. Therefore,

Resolved, That we deeply deplore the death of Judge Williams, and offer our condolence to his afflicted family.

Resolved, That these proceedings be spread on the minutes of the Court, and that the Secretary furnish a copy to the family of the deceased.

On motion of Wm. B. Reese, Jr. Esq.¹⁰, the Secretary is requested to furnish copies of these proceedings to the newspapers of the town for publication.

On motion of Saml. R. Rogers, Esq., the Chairman is requested by the meeting to furnish the proceedings of this meeting to the Hon. Chancery Court on its meeting on tomorrow, and ask, in the name of the members of the Bar, that it be spread on the minutes of the Court.

On motion, the meeting adjourned.

Jno. H. Crozier, Chm.

Jos. B. Heiskell, Sec'y.
Wednesday, Dec, 31, 1856

¹⁰ William B. Reese, Jr. (1793-1859) was Chancellor of East Tennessee, a state Supreme Court judge, and President of East Tennessee University.