AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. EDWARD CLEMENTS WADE

By:

Jay E. Armstrong

This hypothetical interview with Mr. E.C. Wade is simply an attempt to present the facts about his life in a very readable form. I have supported his responses with facts that are documented, but in an attempt to make Mr. Wade more human, I have taken it upon myself to make other judgments about his character that I could be quite wrong about. They should in no way be taken as a factual account of how things were, but should be looked at as a tool to help the paper flow smoothly.
ABSTRACT

Edward C. Wade was born on August 25, 1830 and died April 5, 1911. He was the adopted son of Rev. Peyton L. and Elizabeth Wade, a very respected family in Screven County. Mr. Wade married Ms. Sarah Elizabeth Erwin on November 8, 1853 and had nine children by the time of her death in 1879. He left home at the age of 13 and four years later he owned a commission business. He went on to become an Alderman in Savannah, a United States Commissioner, a collector for the Internal Revenue, and finally a United States Marshall. He was known as the Wade who did not cease and helped rid the south of the Ku Klux Klan.
Q: Mr. Wade, you might say that you have become quite a controversial figure over the years with your open attack on the Ku Klux Klan and your feelings about the rights of the recently freed colored. Has this concern for other's rights always been there or is it just a way to gain notoriety for yourself?

A: No, it is not for recognition, but more for my own personal satisfaction. I believe it also has to do with my upbringing as a child. My parents, no my adoptive parents, Rev. Peyton L. and Elizabeth Wade,\(^1\) taught us, my brothers S.I.\(^2\) and Robert M.,\(^3\) and myself that we should love our neighbor and try to help people the best way we can in life.

Q: You mentioned that you were adopted?

A: Yes, my real parents, Jesse and Bethania Wade sent me when I was quite young to be raised by my aunt and uncle.\(^4\)

Q: Did you resent this?

A: No, not at all. They believed it was in my best interest to live on the plantation, or the "Lebanon Forest" as it was called.\(^5\) They thought that I would be able to learn more under the care and guidance of my uncle. He was a very capable and respected man in Screven County.\(^6\)

Q: Tell me a little about the Wade family. I understand they came from England?

(1)
A: That is correct. The family also lived in Wales. My ancestors of English origin settled in New England, while the ones of Welsh origin settled in Spotsylvania County, Virginia.

Q: I also have heard that there were some others in your family that have lead some very impressive lives.

A: No, not that I know of, but my brother Robert’s wife’s family was quite prominent. They were of the Washburn family. John Washburn was one of the early secretaries of the colonies. He was also a puritan emigrant whose progeny furnished men of prominence in every walk of life. Col. Seth Washburn, whose great-great-grandson was Judge Wade, commanded a regiment during the Revolutionary War. He was also the incumbent of various positions of an official character.

Q: Do you feel that you could be included in this prestigious group of men because of your independent nature and the accomplishments you have achieved in your life?

A: That’s quite a question. I would be honored to be remembered as being equal to men of this caliber. I hope people will remember that I tried to help rebuild our society after this terrible war the best way I could. I wanted to see the suffering in the south stop, whether it was a white or black suffering. Many people disagreed with my actions and I hope one day people will understand why I did what I did, no matter how different and controversial my actions were.
Q: You know you have been called a Scallywag. Do you feel that you fit this definition?

A: I have been called many names in my life, some are correct and some are not. This one is incorrect, I never turned on the south. The south was my home.

Q: Let's go back to your childhood. Tell me about your life on the plantation. I understand it was quite large and had over 500 slaves on it before the war.

A: I see you have done your research. The plantation was quite large. When I left there were not that many slaves, but I'm sure they bought more. We all had to work around the plantation to keep it running.

Q: You say you left? When was this and what were the circumstances of your leaving?

A: When I was about 13, I realized that I was tired of plowing the fields. There had to be more in life than walking behind a plow. I wanted to experience life in the city. I believed I would be happier there than on the plantation. I was told many times that I had a way with people and that’s where the people were. So I told my parents that I did not like to plow and I was going to leave and support myself. It was quite a scene, but I think my father in a way admired the way I stood up for what I wanted to do, that’s why I think he gave me a horse to take with me.
Q: So you showed your need to be independent at a young age. Did you feel you were rebellious in your youth?

A: No, we were raised to respect our elders. I just felt a need to do something on my own. In fact I took the horse and sold it. Then I used the money to go to school for a year. I thought that I needed to have a better education if I was going to be successful in the city.

Q: When did you move to Savannah? Were you married then?

A: I moved to Savannah in 1853. And yes I was married at this time. Sarah Elizabeth Erwin and I were married on November 6, 1853.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

A: I met her at the plantation and we became childhood sweethearts. Sarah was the niece of my uncle Peyton's second wife and the great niece of my uncle's first wife. She was born in the Barnwell District, S.C. on April 28, 1832. We had our first child on January 8, 1855. That was Edward C. Jr.

Q: How many children did you have?

We had nine children altogether. Edward was the first, William E. was the second. He was born 2 years later, but we lost him as a boy. He is buried next to his mother in Laurel Grove Cemetery. We also lost
our third child, Caroline, who was born in 1859.\textsuperscript{21} The twins, Marner Lawton and Erwin Middlebrooks were born on February 11, 1863. Eva was born in 1866,\textsuperscript{22} but she too died in infancy. Annie Elizabeth was born September 17, 1864.\textsuperscript{23} Our eighth child was Beauregard F. who was born on February 19, 1861.\textsuperscript{24} And finally our last was Charles who was born September 17, 1867.\textsuperscript{23}

Q: The deaths of your children must have been hard on you. Did it affect you directly in any way?

A: It was hard on my wife and I, but we overcame the grief in time. It made us a little stronger and made us realize we are only human. You have to be a survivor and continue on with life.

Q: Was your wife a strong support for you?

A: Always, she would back me any way she could. She would help me through the rough times. She was independent in her own way which made her able to give me quite good advice in times of indecision. She was a strong woman. Even when her father, Dr. William A. Erwin, died around September 20, 1858.\textsuperscript{26} It was Elizabeth that kept the family together. She believed in me from the start and until her death on May 17, 1879.\textsuperscript{27} God Rest Her Soul. She was a good woman.

Q: Let's talk about your commission business. When and how did your career begin in Savannah?
A: I began by working for Sol Solomon who owned a commission sales business. After about four years of learning the business I bought the company. It was small at first, but we grew in time. I took in a partner, Mr. Cruger and the company changed its name to Cruger and Wade. We were located at 84 Bay Street.

Q: What type of commission sales did you accept at this time?

A: We handled mostly cotton sales. What we would try to do was set the price on a bale of cotton by being the first to purchase it from upriver or S.C. We even had some president setting cases that were handed down by the Supreme Court. We handled real estate, leather goods, and any quality goods that I could obtain.

Q: I understand that Mr. Cruger retired in 1856. Did this place a financial burden on you to continue the business?

A: That was July 1. I remember it like it was yesterday. To answer your question, it did not place a financial burden on me, but more a spiritual one. I lost a good friend that I enjoyed working with. So I was not sorry to see him go. At least I didn't have to worry about loosing bank drafts anymore. (laughs)

Q: Did I miss something?

A: An inside joke. You see Nicholas lost a bank draft once in an
embarrassing incident and I never let him live it down.

Q: Can you tell us more?

A: No, some things are better left unsaid. I'm sure you have something that you don't wish to be known publicly. He was much too good a man. When he left I knew what it was going to take to succeed.

Q: I understand. But just what are you referring to when you say that you knew what it would take for you to succeed?

A: Hard work. I knew then that it would be like working in the fields only it would be a different form of labor, and if there was one thing my father taught me, it was to work hard. So I knew that it would just take time and patience.

Q: But some people say you did not succeed as well as you could have. That your success came not from your business, but from your jobs with the federal government. How would you respond to this statement?

A: The first time I saw my father I was worth $150,000 dollars. I think that is pretty successful, don't you?

Q: I would think so. When was this reunion with your father?

A: Before 1899. We became partners after our reunion. He saw that I was quite capable of supporting myself and I believe he was proud of me. He
accepted me on his level and wanted to become a partner in the business. I was glad to have him as a partner and honored that he had faith in me. We almost lost him that year. He fell from the balcony of his home in Screven County. The railing broke away and he received a nasty head wound that was quite serious for a while, but being the fighter he was, he pulled through.45

Q: You also had business dealings other than those of your commission business. What connection did you have with the Merchant Savings Bank and the Home Insurance Company?

A: I was a member of the board of directors for each corporation at one time. On the first of the year in 1859 I took the place of W.B. Giles when he resigned as director of the Merchants Savings Bank.46 I held that position for four years.47 I worked with the Home Insurance Company in the years 1864,48 and 1866.49 Both of these jobs enabled me to show what I was capable of doing. I am glad I had the opportunity to work within these two corporations.

Q: You seemed to have been quite a busy man. How was your life at home? Were you able to spend the time with your family that you would like to? You must have done something right. I understand that your two sons both graduated from college50 and your daughters married very respected men in their community.51 Is this contributed to their upbringing or something in the Wade blood?

A: I hope it is a little of both. Elizabeth and I would like to believe that it was the way we brought them up, but to be truthful they are, and have always been independent. What we tried to do was let them develop as they wanted.
We always tried to be there for advice and guidance if they needed it.

I am very proud of my children. It was in 1883 when the twins graduated from Athens. I sent them to New York for a little vacation on the steamship Chattahoochee. Edward Jr. went on to become a lawyer. He moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and became partners with Col. William L. Hyrson. Annie married Judge Thomas F. Miller of Washington D.C. He was a fine man to have as a son-in-law. Now what was your other question?

Q: How much time were you able to spend at home? As much as you would like to have?

A: That's right. To answer your question, it would be no. I wish I could have been home more, but I had obligations. A lot of people counted on me and this took up a lot of my time. The children understood and I would always make sure I had my Sundays free for the family.

Q: What other obligations did you have besides your business affairs?

A: I was involved in charity work in Savannah. What I would do would be to solicit contributions for groups like the Kansas Committee. They were organized in 1856 for the purpose of helping Georgia settlers in the new state of Kansas. After that I became involved with the Fort Bartow Medical Hospital. I acted as treasurer and I must admit, it was a constant struggle to keep the place going, there never seemed to be enough money.

Q: This was during the Civil War wasn't it?

A: That's right. We opened the hospital on November 15, 1861. Dr. Kemming who
was the resident surgeon did all he could during the war. By the time we closed it down we had treated 146 soldiers and only four of them died.

Q: Let's talk about the war. People have referred to you as the Wade who never seceded. This is a pretty strong statement about someone living in the south. Also your view on the treatment of blacks was not very popular. What are your feelings about the south and its involvement in the war and do you see this time as a turning point in your life?

A: Yes I have been called the Wade that did not secede and I am quite proud of that fact. I had mixed feelings concerning the war. I felt that the south could not be as independent as everyone thought. We had been letting ourselves be exploited by Northern industry for too long. It would be very hard to change and I was not sure we had the capabilities. We lacked water power and a good means of transportation which were vital for industry to function. We were only able to produce the raw product and we could only profit from that because of our slave labor. We were quite limited at the time. I believe the Union should have remained in tact.

Q: What did you think about John Calhoun's nullification doctrine? Do you think the federal government has the right to enforce tariffs on different states or should the states prevail and simply not comply with the request?

A: I believe that the Federal government should have in their power the right to raise revenue so they can function properly. States rights are important, but they should realize that they have certain obligations that they
have to fulfill. When you believe in state rights you are mainly concerned with your state. This makes the Union weak as a whole, which in my opinion is unhealthy for everyone.

Q: I have read that you did participate in the war. You helped to organize and outfit the Mitchell Guard in Savannah and went on to make the rank of Colonel with the seventh Regiment of Georgia Cavalry, CSA. How do you explain your involvement?

A: I never said I did not believe in the South. I was fighting for an institution. I believed very strongly in the southern way of life. It is very unique and I thought it should be preserved. I also fought for the land itself, my land and my families land. It would have been impossible for me to watch what was going on around me and not get involved. There was too much death and destruction to ignore.

Q: How did the war affect your business? Do you believe the war led to your involvement in politics?

A: The war affected my business a great deal once the north was able to successfully blockade the port. My last big shipment came around January in 1862.

The blockade changed a lot. Some good even came out of it. I remember receiving a letter from W.F. Roberts of Grahamville S.C. In it he stated, "I send you by today's train, 5 bales of hay of my own growth. The blessed blockade is the means of opening a new epoch in the history of southern farming. If I had started curing hay three months ago, I should from it alone..."
have received over thirty thousand dollars. The south finally realized
they could produce some of the goods that we used to depend upon the
north to provide, but the south still had its limitations. As far as politics
are concerned I do believe that the war made me more active in the government.
I believe it also had something to do with my pro-union stand and my
ability to get the job done. My first position was as Alderman. That was
in 1862. I held that position until 1865. In 1865 I took the position
again and stayed in it until 1868. This was a very important part of my
life. I learned how bureaucracy worked and how to get things done.

Q: When did you leave Savannah and move to Quitman, Georgia, and why did
you make such a move?

A: We moved to Quitman in 1867. I felt a need for a change of scenery.
I also liked the appointment as United States commissioner for the district
which the Grant Administration was offering me. Judge Wood made the
appointment when I accepted it.

Q: Did you know President Grant?

A: Yes we were friends.

Q: Did this help you out?

A: It sure didn't hurt.

Q: What had happened to your commission business by this time?
A: I had formed a copartnership with A.B. Weslow, my brother S.H., and J. Roseburn. The firm's name was Weslow, Wade and Company. This was in May of 1871. We moved to 132 Bay Street. By 1875 the partnership was dissolved and I was in business with W.G. Butler which did not last too long, I received a few judgments against me so I only concerned myself with my business in Quitman which I started by 1871. The judgments could be the reason why people believe I failed in business.

Q: When did you become Deputy Collector of the Internal Revenue?

A: That was in 1875. I took the place of General Lafayette McLaw.85

Q: What made you accept this position?

A: I looked at it as a new challenge. Also my blood brother Milton Carter Wade lived there. He was City Clerk for the town.87

Q: Did he live with your real parents or did they send him away too?

A: He lived with them. They were in a much better position to take care of him when he was born.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: They did what they thought was best and I'm happy things turned out the way they did. They only tried to give me a better life than they were able to offer me at the time.

(13)
Q: Did working for the Internal Revenue give you that "get up and go get them" attitude that made you famous in south Georgia?

A: You might say that. My training in the military made me physically able to bring people in and the job gave me the opportunity. You might say it also gave me the drive to take the job of Head Deputy for the United States Marshall of this district. This eventually lead to a nomination by President Grant for me to become a U.S. Marshall. This was on December 16, 1881. A month later I returned from Macon with the commission for an unexpired term. I had 79 counties under my jurisdiction.

Q: That's quite a large territory to cover and from what I've heard you were pretty good at it. I have also heard you say that you personally have wiped out the Ku Klux Klan in southeastern Georgia and northern Florida. Did Mrs. Wade's death in 1879 give you the freedom to attack the Ku Klux Klan as you did?

A: Freedom is a bad word to use. Her death relieved me of the responsibility I had to her to look after myself. You Might say say it allowed me to take a few risks that I might have thought twice about if she were still alive. She meant the world to me, and the job of Marshall gave me a sense of purpose in life again. I just put everything I have into whatever I am doing.

Q: Just what are you doing now?

A: Trying to remove the influence of the Ku Klux Klan on the people living in the south. I believe they have gone too far and must be stopped. I think blacks should have the right to live in peace and I see it as my job to
protect them the best way I can. Even if it means fighting violence
with violence.

Q: Did your unsuccessful attempt to become nominated in 1870 as a candidate for
the Democratic nomination for congress and your other try for a senatorial seat turn
you toward the Radical party? You went from a conservative to a radical very
quickly.
A: yes it did. I wanted the nomination as representation in 1872 and
the party turned to me for leadership, so I became a radical. I was
disappointed that I did not get the nomination in 1870. I believe I have served the
Federal Government to the best of my ability and I thought a seat in congress
would enable me to do more than I am able to do now.

Q: Mr. Wade let's stop now and let me look over my notes. I see that I
have kept you longer than I intended. How would you feel about continuing
this at a later date?
A: That would be just fine. I have enjoyed talking with you and I hope it has
helped you come up with a story for your readers. I need all the support I
can get and this interview should give people a better understanding of me.
Maybe they will not be so quick to condemn my actions the next time my name
is brought up in conversation.
4. Folks Huxford, p. 571; E.G. Wade was born August 25, 1830 at Oxford, Newton County. (Folks Huxford, p. 570.)
5. Folks Huxford, p. 572.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

9. It was stated that Mr. Wade was not as popular as he might have been if he had been loyal to the cause which was so dear to the hearts of true Southerners. (*Savannah Morning News*, April 17, 1911, p. 4, col. 3.)
10. Lucian Lamar Knight, p. 2025.
11. *Savannah Morning News*, April 7, 1911, p. 4, col. 3.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Folks Huxford, p. 571.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
28. Savannah Morning News, April 7, 1911, p.4, col.3.
29. Ibid.
31. Savannah Morning News, April 7, 1911, p.4, col.3.
   c. The Steamer, John G. Walton, arrived with 6 bales of upland cotton, the first received by the river. (Daily Morning News, August 12, 1858, p.1, col.1.)
   d. Sold on August 23, 1859, one bale of new cotton, the first received from S.C., at 14 cents.
33. In the Supreme Court of Georgia the following decision was made on June 18, 1860. In the case of E.C. Wade vs. James Hamilton and Lawson and Addison, claimants, it was held that when a factor agrees with his customer to advance money upon a shipment of cotton, the lien of factor attaches upon it at the time of its delivery to common carrier and that such lien will support a claim to the cotton as against an attachment. (Daily Morning News, June 19, 1860, p.1, col.1.)

(17)
38. Ibid.
39. In the years 1862 and 1864 he was showing a profit of $5000.00 per year. He also showed debits of $10,000.00 in 1862, $30,000 in 1863, and $10,000 in 1864. These figures were obtained from the Tax Digests of Savannah for the corresponding years.
41. Capt. John R. Dillon stated that Mr. Wads failed in business. (*April*, 1911, p. 4, col. 3.)
42. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
51. *Folks Hudson*, p. 751.
53. Ibid.
55. Polks Huxford, p.751.
57. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. *Savannah Morning News*, April 7, 1911, p.4, col.3.
65. Ibid.
66.
69. This information was obtained from an abstract of Mr. Wade's life that was compiled by Mr. Jordan Smith. It is located at the Chatham County Library on Bull Street.
70. Helped organize a Vigilance Committee for the better preservation of Southern Rights and institutions. This was in December of 1859. (*Daily Morning News*, December 22, 1859, p.2, col.1.)
The remains of Mrs. E.C. Wade, who died on Saturday last at Quitman, arrived in the city yesterday morning by the Atlantic and Gulf Rail Road, and were taken to the residence of Col. W.J. Thompson, 39 Habersham Street from where the funeral took place in the afternoon at 4:30, and was very largely attended by sorrowing relatives and friends. The services were conducted by Rev. R.J. Corley of Trinity Methodist Church. Born April 29, 1832, Christian Church.