Richmond Hill

Richmond Hill in Yadkin (formerly Surry) County was the home of former North Carolina Chief Justice Richmond Mumford Pearson. Judge Pearson conducted a private Law School here for approximately 30 years, 1848 until his death in 1878. Over 1000 students including 6 state Supreme Court justices, 3 U.S. representatives and 3 state governors attended school here. Classes were held in a modest building (no longer in existence) on the west side of the grounds or he simply under the trees on this property. Students lived on tiny log huts or boarded with local families.

This brick home, build in the mid-later 1800s was restored in the 1970s and the surrounding 30 acres have been turned into the Historic Richmond Hill Nature Park. Richmond Hill is a part of the North Carolina Civil War Trails. Judge Pearson who was opposed to secession even though he owned slaves, became known throughout state because of his rulings against the conscription of men into the Confederate Army.

Richmond Hill Nature Park is open from dawn to dusk.

This site, a part of the “Geocaching for History” program, was researched and placed by the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History in partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield North Carolina Foundation and the North Carolina Humanities Council. The goal of this program is to encourage physical activity and exploration of the history of our community.





Richmond Mumford Pearson

The Fifth Chief Justice


RICHMOND HILL
★ ★ ★
"Though the Heavens Fall"
CIVIL WAR TRAILS
Richmond Hill was the home of North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Richmond Mumford Pearson (1805–1878) and his family. Pearson conducted a law school from 1848 to 1878 in a small building located west of the house. Students lived in log cabins near Pearson's home, or boarded with area families, some across the Yadkin River at Rockford. Pearson reportedly taught a thousand students.
Pearson, who served as chief justice from 1858 to 1878, opposed secession. During the Civil War, he championed individual rights over the power of the Confederate government. When Confederate conscription laws were enacted and men were arrested for avoiding the draft or deserting the army, Pearson (who believed the laws were unconstitutional) issued writs of habeas corpus to release several men from the county jail. The writs required a prison official to bring the prisoner into court to determine whether he had been imprisoned unlawfully and, if the judge so ruled, to free him. The Confederate government denounced Pearson's stand on conscription, and North Carolina Gov. Zebulon B. Vance continued to use the Home Guard to pursue and arrest deserters. Pearson persisted, however, declaring "Let justice be done though the heavens fall."
During Reconstruction, Pearson presided at the impeachment trial of Gov. William W. Holden. Pearson was the only high-ranking state official to hold office during both the Civil War and Reconstruction and to die while still in office. He is buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Raleigh.
Richmond M. Pearson
N.C. Office of Archives and History
Zebulon B. Vance
Library of Congress
North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Richmond M. Pearson constructed this house about 1860. It combines elements of the Greek Revival and Tuscan architectural styles and has simple Greek Revival-style interior woodwork. The Historic Richmond Hill Law School Commission restored the house.


RICHMOND HILL
Estate and Law School of
Richmond M. Pearson
Chief Justice of the N.C. Supreme Court, Teacher,
Champion of Freedom and the Rule of Law
THE MAN
Richmond M. Pearson moved to Yadkin from Davie County, N.C., about 1848, just before his election by the legislature to the North Carolina Supreme Court. Pearson served on the Court for 29 years, 19 of them as Chief Justice. His tenure encompassed the years of the Civil War and Reconstruction and his decisions were both far-reaching and controversial.
Pearson was opposed to secession. During the Civil War he strictly interpreted the laws and staunchly defended individual rights. Supported by Governor Zebulon-Vance, he brought discomfort to the Confederate Government by his use of the writ of habeas corpus to free men he believed illegally conscripted into the army. During Reconstruction, Pearson wisely refused to invoke a posse comitatus, a group of armed citizens, when Republican Governor William W. Holden refused to enforce Pearson's writ to free imprisoned Conservatives. Nearly impeached because of his refusal, Pearson then presided over the impeachment trial of the Governor, resulting in the first removal of a state governor in America.
While serving on the Supreme Court, Pearson conducted a law school here at Richmond Hill. He is said to have taught over a thousand students and many of them became distinguished attorneys and jurists. He was renowned for his unstructured style of instruction and for holding class outdoors on the estate. On his way to Raleigh to open the 1878 term of the Supreme Court, Pearson was stricken and fell unconscious in his carriage. He was carried to the old Wilson Hotel in Winston, where he died.
THE ESTATE
The original log house stood southeast of the present brick house, which was built about 1861 for Pearson's second wife, Mary McDowell Bynum. A separate kitchen once stood to the west of the main building. Log cabins inhabited by the law students were scattered about the estate.
By the late 1960's the house had been uninhabited for many years and was badly deteriorated. At this time a program of restoration was initiated by the Yadkin County Historical Society and others. Funds came from Federal, State and local governments, as well as from foundations, businesses, and individuals. The house has now been fully restored and is furnished with period furniture, some donated by Pearson family descendants. Additional furnishings are still needed. The house and grounds are now the Historic Richmond Hill Nature Park managed by a commission appointed by the County of Yadkin.
The house in disrepair in the 1930's.
Interior and exterior views of the house in ruins in the late 1960's.
The red brick house is the Seal of Yadkin County in Richmond Hill.
YADKIN COUNTY
18
50
THE SEAL OF
HISTORIC RICHMOND HILL NATURE PARK
Nature Park Trail Guide