

THE NATIONAL CYCLOPAEDIA OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY

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BIOGRAPHY

BEING THE

HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE LIVES OF THE FOUNDERS, BUILDERS, AND DEFENDERS
OF THE REPUBLIC, AND OF THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE
DOING THE WORK AND MOULDING THE
THOUGHT OF THE
PRESENT TIME.

EDITED BY

DISTINGUISHED BIOGRAPHERS, SELECTED FROM EACH STATE
REVISED AND APPROVED BY THE MOST EMINENT HISTORIANS, SCHOLARS, AND
STATESMEN OF THE DAY

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OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY.

LEIGH, HEZEKIAH GILBERT

Clergyman, was born at Durant's Neck, Perquimans Co., N. C., Nov. 23, 1795, son of **RICHARD** and **CHARLOTTE (SPRUILL) LEIGH**, grandson of **GILBERT** and **ELIZABETH (FOSTER) LEIGH**, and cousin of **BENJAMIN WATKINS LEIGH**, U. S. Senator from Virginia. His family, of Scotch-Irish extraction, is descended from **JAMES LEIGH**, an early settler of the James river section of Virginia, where its members resided until 1785. In that year his grandfather, **GILBERT LEIGH**, removed to Edenton, N. C., an old colonial town on Albemarle sound, then the seat of government of North Carolina, and in about eight years amassed a comfortable fortune as a contractor on public buildings under the colonial Government. About 1774 he purchased lands in Perquimans county, where he resided until his death in 1790. **DR. LEIGH** attended schools at Murfreesboro and Edenton, and began active life as a school teacher. He enlisted at the outbreak of the war of 1812, and at its close studied surveying, but his principal work was teaching until his twenty-second year, when he was converted, and immediately offered his services to the Virginia Methodist conference. In February, 1818, he was received on trial, remaining a member until the creation of the North Carolina conference in 1836. His first circuit was Bedford County, Va., and his second, Wake county, N. C., including the city of Raleigh. He was in Norfolk, Va., in 1821; in Petersburg in 1822-23, and during this period inaugurate the movement which later developed into Randolph Macon College. During the first years of his efforts for the college, he was aided by **GABRIEL P. DISOSWAY**, a merchant of Petersburg, who thus shares with him the honor of founding the oldest Methodist College in the southern states. He held pastorates successively at Bedford, Raleigh, Gloucester, Norfolk, and Petersburg, and was presiding elder of the Meherrin, James River, Petersburg, Henderson, and Raleigh districts. Within six ears after his reception on trial he was elected a delegate to the general conference, and was re-elected to each succeeding conference until the end of his life. In 1845 he was a member of the convention assembled at Louisville, KY., under the "plan of separation" for the organization of the Methodist church, South. The general conference of 1824 adopted a resolution recommending that "each annual conference establish a seminary of learning under its own regulations and patronage." and at the session of the Virginia at Oxford, N. C.. March 2, 1825, Dr. Leigh was made a member of the committee to consider and report on the plan. As a result of his labors, the conference in 1829 adopted resolutions that a college be built, and appointed a committee to select a site. The charter was obtained from the Virginia legislature, Jan. 15, 1830, and on this document **DR. LEIGH**'s name heads the list of trustees. The location chosen was at Boydton, Va., both on account of the convenient situation and also in the hope of getting some substantial aid from the Virginia state treasury, which, however, was never received. Several generous people contributed largely to the endowment at various times. But there was a long struggle before the institution was firmly established. In 1868 it was removed to Ashland, Va., where a career of prosperity was fairly begun, with new buildings and equipment. The college was named for **JOHN RANDOLPH** of Roanoke and **NATHANIEL MACON** of North Carolina, and the blending of the two names was for the purpose of giving to both Virginia and north Carolina an identity of interest in the institution. **DR. LEIGH** was twice special agent of the conference to collect funds for the college, and its early success was largely due to his earnest efforts. He was also one of the first board of trustees for Greensboro female college, and an active worker in founding trinity college. In 1830 he purchased an extensive plantation near Boydton, Va., where he made his home during the remainder of his life. his powers as a preacher were strengthened by vigorous loyalty to christian teaching, and his presentation of the great doctrines of religion was logical and complete, ever carrying conviction to the minds of his hearers. he was married on Jan. 5. 1830, to **MARY JANE**, daughter of **RICHARD CRUMP**, of Northampton county. N. C., and had two daughters and four sons. He died at Boydton, Va., Sept. 18, 1853.