



GOVERNOR HENRY DICKERSON MCDANIEL: THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED GOVERNOR OF GEORGIA

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Abstract

In working part time at the McDaniel-Tichenor house located in Monroe, Georgia, it became evident in researching the family history the impact that Governor Henry Dickerson McDaniel made on the state of Georgia not only in his lifetime but even now almost 100 years after his death. Governor McDaniel was a humanitarian and he believed as a civil servant that he needed to represent everyone equally. Governor McDaniel served as Georgia's 52nd governor (1883–1886), leading the state through post-Reconstruction recovery. A Monroe native and a Mercer University graduate, Civil War veteran, and dedicated public servant, McDaniel played a key role in Georgia's financial reforms, tax laws, higher education, and infrastructure development. He helped to establish what is to today the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, Georgia and oversaw the design, budget, and construction of the Georgia State Capitol. After his term was complete, he returned to Monroe to continue his law practice and became heavily involved with the University of Georgia board of trustees. His home in Monroe, Georgia is on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980. The house serves as a living museum and a community gathering place for all to share. In exploring his accomplishments, which is the most any governor has done for the State of Georgia, Governor McDaniel's ideologies and practices illustrates how a politician should represent the people by being unbiased, empathetic, and as a visionary, very prolific.

Keywords

Georgia History, Cotton Mills, Civil Servant, Governor, Politician, Lawyer, Political Leaders

Governor Henry Dickerson McDaniel was the 52nd Governor of Georgia from 1883-1886. He had a strong work ethic, which was evident in his military service, his daily job as an attorney, and his role as a fair and just civic leader. All these qualities, along with his accomplishments as a politician and humanitarian truly made him one of the best governors of Georgia.

Henry McDaniel was born in Monroe, Georgia, on September 4, 1836. Growing up between living on a farm and living in the city of Atlanta taught him the importance of hard work, a principle that he never relinquished. Henry's schooling was in Atlanta, where he fell in love with reading and learning. Governor McDaniel attended college at Mercer University, graduating in 1856 at the age of 20 with the highest honors. He then went on to take the bar exam and became a lawyer. Despite wanting a quiet life, Governor McDaniel would get involved with discussions about Georgia succeeding from the union.

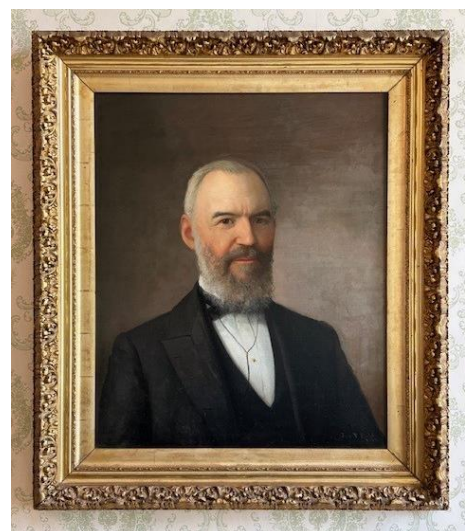


Figure 1: Governor Henry D. McDaniel

Governor McDaniel then became a member of the Secession Convention for the state of Georgia in 1861. He eventually enlisted in the Civil War and became a major but ended up with a near-fatal wound on July 10, 1863 in the Battle of Funkstown, Maryland. Fortunately for Governor McDaniel, he was sent to a physician's home in Hagerstown, Maryland, to recover (Simonich, 2006). From this point forward, he was a prisoner of war. While in the Civil War, Governor McDaniel corresponded with Hester Felker, his future wife, and gave firsthand accounts of what he witnessed throughout his service in the Civil War. These letters were later used by Anita B. Sams, a Monroe historian and a friend of the family, who wrote the history of Walton County in her book "Wayfarers in Walton, where she documented the men from Walton County who participated in the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. Additionally, she published "With Unabated Trust," which documented the courtship of Governor McDaniel and Hester Felker during the Civil War (Hilderbrand, 2012). Once he returns from the war, they marry on December 20, 1865, and reside in Monroe, Georgia.

Once Governor McDaniel came home and settled back into his law practice in Monroe, Georgia, he became more involved in civic duty. He served in the House of Representatives for the State of Georgia from 1872-1874 and was then elected into the Senate from 1874-1882, representing the 27th Senatorial District that included Clarke, Oconee, Newton, Rockdale, and Walton counties (Doster, 1962). During that time, he helped write and pass the Railroad Tax Act, which required the railroad to pay property taxes where tracks are laid to the state, therefore building up the state's treasury (Doster, 1962). His extensive knowledge of the law, especially tax law, helped him write and update the Georgia Constitution for the reconstruction of the South after the Civil War (Hildebrand, 2012). In 1879 the State of Georgia grants pensions to disabled veterans of the Civil War. Governor McDaniel, through his humanitarian efforts, continued to develop the pension program for veterans including widows (Doster, 1962). Then by 1894 this is expanded to include those in old age and in poverty. (NARA, 2010). Veterans received \$100 a year for life and any medical treatment due their injuries. There are no records that even Governor McDaniel ever received this benefit due to being a veteran himself, but his humanitarian efforts while in office significantly helped others through his civic duties from being in the House of Representatives though to his governorship.

Andrew Stevens became governor in 1883, unfortunately dying in office shortly after being elected. Temporary Governor James Boynton, then the president of the senate at that time, moved to have a special election to replace Governor Andrew Stevens. After 17 ballots and being deadlocked, Henry McDaniel was chosen to be the next Governor (NGA, 2025). Due to Governor McDaniel's financial shrewdness, familiarity with the law and the Georgia State Constitution, diplomacy, and fairness proved he was the right man for the job. Therefore, he was nominated for the role of Governor (Cook, 2005). Governor McDaniel was considered "incorruptible, able, painstakingly firm and true." (Doster, 1962). These qualities, combined with his performance in his first term as governor, gained him reelection in 1884 on his own accord (Doster, 1962). With reelection, Governor McDaniel continued to develop many institutions that we still use today.

As the Governor of Georgia, McDaniel set up the financial institutions for the State of Georgia, which are the banks, and bonds to help alleviate Georgia's debt (Doster, 1962). He negotiates bonds with a variety of New York City banks by issuing thirty year saving bonds. Governor McDaniel additionally established many current Georgia tax laws and was considered "three decades ahead of his time in advocating for tax reforms" (Doster, 1962). His plan provided for a county board of tax assessors to evaluate property because he believed taxes should be low but equal: "At every opportunity, he recommended legislation to equalize valuation of property for tax returns" (Doster, 1962). Additionally, Governor McDaniel helped establish the state's banking system by requiring savings accounts and monthly statements from the banking institutions to its patrons. He additionally established controls for insurance companies, requiring them to file semiannual reports, and if they failed, they would be shut down (Doster, 1962). These efforts were to protect Georgia's citizens. Governor McDaniel then continued to expand the insane asylums in Milledgeville to keep up with current standards of the 19th century, unfortunately it is no longer in use and in disrepair. (Doster, 1962). By expanding the insane asylums at that time for Georgia residents, both black and white, they were able to get the help they needed. For prisoners, Governor McDaniel made sure there were programs in place to treat prisoners fairly and helped to maintain their health and to put a stop to wardens profiting off of prison labor (Doster, 1962). He created and puts into place policies for the health and well-being of prisoners (Doster, 1962). To Governor McDaniel, prisoners are people, not animals.

Due to Governor McDaniel's understanding of finances and being prudent when it came to dealing with budgets, he oversaw the implementation of the new capitol building in Atlanta. Governor McDaniel's next achievement was overseeing the building of the new Georgia Capitol Building. He believed that Atlanta needed a capitol building "worthy of the dignity of the state," one that could adequately "protect public records, documents, and archives of priceless value" (Doster, 1962). It was confirmed that Atlanta would be the new capital of Georgia on June 12, 1877, and by August 16, 1883, an act for the new capitol building was passed. Once The Capitol Act of September 8, 1883, for appropriation of funds for the capitol was signed, Governor McDaniel appointed five commissioners to help oversee the construction of the building. He issued proposals to architects for design ideas, samples, and pricing. Four architects responded, and after much deliberation, the architects Edbrooke and Burnham of Chicago won the bid. Construction started on October 26, 1884 and was completed on June 1, 1889. Governor McDaniel oversaw the capitol construction and inspected it daily until he left office. This building is still in use today and has been renovated over time. During the 1880's it became apparent that the South needed to embrace the technical industry and the development of manufacturing in order to continue with rebuilding the South and to build its independence (Doster, 1962).

Another accomplishment for Governor McDaniel was signing the act to start a technical school on October 13, 1885. The act established the School of Technology, now the Georgia Institute of Technology, with a startup of \$10,000.00 and seven acres of land. By establishing this school, it marked an important moment for the New South Creed to develop a post-war rebuilding and establishing a self-sufficient South (Georgia Tech Alumni Magazine, 2007). Additionally, at this time, farmers needed help with pesticides, crops, etc., so instead of dissolving per the farmer's request due to the lack of support from the agency, the Georgia State Agricultural Department, Governor McDaniel sets up the University of Georgia (UGA) to establish learning centers for agriculture. He saw the need and the potential for the State of Georgia to focus on its agricultural strengths such as peanuts, cotton, poultry, dairy, fruits and vegetable and forestry, so he sympathized with the farmers due to his past experience of working and living on a farm. This dominoes into 1884 to help establish the College of Agriculture, School of Forestry, and the Pharmacy at UGA. From this point Governor McDaniel is on the Board of Trustees for 15 years for UGA, then becomes the Chairman of the Board until 1923. (Doster, 1962). In the 19th century and into the 20th century, Georgia becomes a great provider of cotton. This stems Governor McDaniel to become director of the High Shoals Manufacturing; director of the Monroe Cotton Mills (1895); and director of the Walton Cotton Mills (1900) which facilitated housing and jobs for almost one hundred years in the Monroe area. In 1968, both mills merge to become the Walton Cotton Mills. Eventually, the old mill, or Monroe Cotton Mill closes in 1985 due to foreign competition and safety reasons. The building was purchased in 2008 and has been repurposed as an antique mall with a variety of other local businesses. Governor McDaniel helped to put Monroe on the map as a textile producing town that provided economic stability, education, and community for almost 100 years.

Once Governor McDaniel turned over the reins of governorship to John B. Gordon, he resumed his life with his family back in Monroe, Georgia. He continued his law practice and managed his investments in the cotton mills and the railroads (Luckett, 2018). He oversaw the design and construction of his home in 1887, which was in the Victorian Italianate Style and then later is remodeled in the 20th century by his daughter, Emma "Gipsy" McDaniel Tichenor, into the Neoclassical Style in 1930 with her husband Edgar Tichenor and with the help of architect and son-in-law Francis Boddie Warfield. After the passing of Gipsy and Edgar, the house became Governor McDaniel's grandson's home, Henry Tichenor, who married Ms. Emily Burney in 1944. In 1979, Mrs. Emily Tichenor applied for the house to be on the National Registry of Historical Places which was awarded in 1980. They both resided in the house until his death in 1965, and Emily's death in 1990. Today the house serves as a living museum, event space, and community center in the city of Monroe, Georgia (McDaniel-Tichenor Estate, 1991).

As mentioned before, the list goes on for all the contributions that Governor McDaniel achieved in his long career as a civic leader (See Table 1). He attended and delivered several speeches over the years to UGA graduating students. His love of learning and being connected to education and establishing equity for all was truly apart of his humanitarian side, and he facilitated so much for the citizens of Georgia. By establishing technical and agricultural schools, setting up the banks and insurance companies to do their due diligence as businesses and to treat all people equally was vital. He understood the needs of the people that surrounded him, and through his fair and just ways, he used his civic duty to implement the variety of institutions that would benefit all. Despite all of Governor McDaniel's accomplishments, he is not mentioned in many history books, there is no statue of him at the capitol building, just his portrait

modestly hung on the first floor. No plaque commemorating his accomplishments, and that is a shame since he did so much for the city of Atlanta, its citizens, and the State of Georgia. Governor McDaniel was the most productive governors that Georgia ever had and he should be celebrated, so the current goal is to apply for a Historical Marker for the McDaniel-Tichenor House, located in Monroe, Georgia.

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