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JOHN WALLACE AND THE WRITING OF RECONSTRUCTION HISTORY

by JAMES C. CLARK

John Wallace, who rose from slavery to become a leading black politician in Florida during Reconstruction, has been nearly forgotten, while other black leaders have received overdue recognition for their accomplishments. Unlike those who are remembered for advancing the cause of blacks, Wallace left behind a different legacy— a book that was critical of his fellow blacks and Radical Republicans, and frequently complimentary of white conservation Democrats. The book, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida: The Inside Workings of Civil Government in Florida After the Close of the Civil War*, published in Jacksonville in 1888, became a major source for a generation of historians who were critical of Reconstruction and who quoted Wallace liberally without examining his motivation or background.¹ A century after the appearance of the book, it remains unclear whether Wallace was the true author of the work that influenced the writing of Reconstruction history or whether someone else was responsible.

Although Wallace was critical of Reconstruction, his life is an example of what happened to many blacks in the South who obtained position and power during Reconstruction only to lose it when Federal troops were withdrawn after 1876 and Democrats regained political control. Wallace was born a slave in Gates County, North Carolina, in 1842. When a detachment of Federal troops moved through northeastern North Carolina in late February 1862, Wallace either escaped or was taken off by Union soldiers. He made his way to Washington, DC, and on August 15, 1863, enlisted in Company D of the Second Colored Infantry as a substitute.² His unit first trained at Camp Casey in

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1. John Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida: The Inside Workings of Civil Government in Florida After the Close of the Civil War* (Jacksonville, 1888; reprint ed., Gainesville, 1964).
2. Enlistment papers of John Wallace, August 15, 1863, Index to the United States Colored Troops, M589, reel 90, National Archives, Washington, DC.



John Wallace. Reprinted from his book, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*.

northern Virginia and in December 1863 was ordered to Ship Island, Mississippi, a Union-held fortress off the coast of Biloxi that was being used as a staging area for the attack on New Orleans.

On February 13, 1864, Wallace's unit was transferred to Key West, Florida, and one week later he was involved in a brief skirmish at Fort Myers. During the fighting a cannonball exploded near him throwing dirt into his eyes. Although Wallace did not seek medical help at the time, he complained about the injury for the remainder of his life.

Wallace was part of the expedition that left Key West aboard the steamer *Honduras* on February 23, 1865, under orders to

sail up the coast to Cedar Key and than to rendezvous with the Federal naval units blockading the Florida Gulf coast off Apalachee Bay. On March 4, 1865, the Union troops landed near St. Marks. Two days later, as they were advancing north of Newport, they were met at Natural Bridge by approximately 1,500 Confederates who forced them to retreat to their vessels. Federal losses were heavy, although Wallace escaped unharmed. The Battle of Natural Bridge saved Tallahassee from capture; it was the only Confederate capital east of the Mississippi that was not conquered before Lee's surrender at Appomattox.³

On August 9, 1865, Wallace's regiment arrived in Tallahassee, and he remained there after he was mustered out on January 5, 1866.⁴ Although Wallace had signed his enlistment papers with an "X" in 1863, by 1865 he had taught himself, or someone had taught him, to read and write. In Tallahassee he met William D. Bloxham, a former Confederate officer and Leon County planter. Bloxham hired Wallace to teach freedmen at a school he organized on his Tallahassee plantation. A letter to the editor of the conservative *Semi-Weekly Floridian* from an author using the pen name "Senex" on December 30, 1867, praised Wallace and the school. "This school was inaugurated as a experiment only last winter and now numbers under the excellent leadership of Mr. John Wallace over seventy pupils. . . . Mr. Wallace is one of the best qualified, most thorough and untiring of our colored teachers. His success must place him in the front rank of his race."⁵

In 1868, Wallace was a page at the Florida Constitutional Convention which opened in Tallahassee on January 20. He reported that most of the delegates—black and white—were either ignorant or foolish. Later the same year, Wallace was elected constable of Leon County. Wallace joined the Republican party and was outspoken in his defense of fellow blacks. He was often criticized by the conservative newspapers for having what they described as a violent temper. The *Weekly Floridian* said that when Wallace addressed a group of freedmen in 1868, he was "violent in language or was at least violently excited. . . .

3. Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3 vols. (New York, 1959), III, 1723.

4. Morning Reports, Company's A to K, vol. 5, National Archives.

5. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, December 30, 1867.

In the course of his harangue he exclaimed, I understand that the Ku-klux are here. If so, let them come on, we are armed and ready for them. Thank God, some of us know how to lead you if you are not able to lead yourselves.”⁶

Tallahassee and Leon County stood as strongholds for blacks during Reconstruction. They outnumbered whites by a six-to-one margin, and the presence of the Union Army assured them of protection. In 1870, Wallace was elected to the Florida House of Representatives, finishing among the top four candidates with 1,322 votes.⁷ He was re-elected in 1872 with 1,358 votes despite having been arrested for assaulting a man on a Tallahassee street. The man was badly injured, and Wallace was fined \$30. The Tallahassee *Sentinel* wrote, “The spectacle of a Legislator going about the streets armed with a slung-shot for the purpose of committing an assault, is such an outrage upon all propriety.”⁸

In 1874, Wallace was elected to the Florida Senate, defeating John Stokes with 1,510 votes to 1,285.⁹ In 1878, Wallace lost his re-election to Everett C. Jones by a nine-vote margin—1,135 to 1,124. Wallace charged fraud, and after Jones had held the seat for only three weeks, the legislature voted eighteen to four to award it to Wallace.¹⁰

In the legislature, Wallace followed an unpredictable course, usually voting with his fellow Republicans, but frequently siding also with the Democrats. Wallace was not out of step with many other Florida Republicans who had little party loyalty. The party was a mixture of Northerners, including a number of Union veterans who had moved to Florida after the war, former Whigs who were willing to collaborate with the Federals, and blacks. Most of the blacks were former slaves with little or no education, but there were others—like Jonathan Gibbs who became the first member of his race to hold a cabinet position in Florida—who had come from the North and had never known slavery. There were bound to be conflicts in a party in which member-

6. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, September 15, 1868. The *Semi-Weekly Floridian* and the *Weekly Floridian* are the same newspaper. The paper changed the frequency of publication and its name.

7. Record Group 156, series 21, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

8. Tallahassee *Sentinel*, May 18, 1872.

9. Record Group 156, series 21, Florida State Archives.

10. Florida *Senate Journal*, January 20, 1879, 72.

ship ranged from former slaves to men who had accepted slavery and opposed giving political rights to blacks.

Throughout Reconstruction, the Republican party in Florida was beset by squabbles that prevented it from holding complete power. The party's problems began almost as soon as its first governor, Harrison Reed, took office. Reed, a native of Massachusetts who had lived in Wisconsin and Washington, DC, arrived in Florida in 1863 to serve as one of Florida's three Federal tax commissioners. He was forced to resign that position, but with the help of political friends was appointed by President Andrew Johnson as a special postal agent. He also became editor of the *Jacksonville Florida Times*, the leading Republican newspaper in Florida. Reed was in a position to advance his own ambitions. He controlled the moderate forces in the 1868 Constitutional Convention which drafted a document that provided for appointed judges and state officers and established an apportionment system that effectively prevented blacks and Radical Republicans from controlling the legislature. In May 1868, Reed was elected as Florida's first Republican governor, and almost at once the Republicans began to fight among themselves. There were four attempts to impeach Reed between 1868 and 1872, the most serious involving embezzlement and alleged bribes given to him in exchange for support of a railroad bond issue that he supposedly knew was fraudulent. Wallace was named to the legislative committee to investigate the charges against Reed. The Reed impeachment was only one of a series of issues in which Wallace was on both sides, confounding his fellow Republicans. As a member of the impeachment panel, Wallace claimed that the evidence against Reed had been forged and that he had never seen the impeachment report. Nevertheless, he voted in favor of approving the impeachment report, then switched his position and voted against impeachment.¹¹ Reed survived the impeachment attempts, but the Republican party was left weakened and badly divided.

Wallace's actions— such as his initial support of the impeachment of Reed— could be seen as benefiting Wallace's patron, William D. Bloxham. After the Civil War, Bloxham emerged as

11. Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule*, 160-65.

a leading Democrat, and he dominated the party for nearly thirty years. In 1870, Bloxham ran for lieutenant governor but lost to Samuel T. Day, an old Civil War Unionist from Columbia County. Bloxham challenged the results, claiming that Day did not meet the constitutional requirements for the office. The Florida Supreme Court on April 29, 1870, ruled in favor of Bloxham. If the effort to impeach Reed had been successful, Bloxham could have become governor.

In the 1872 gubernatorial election, the Democrats nominated Bloxham. The Republicans were divided between a faction led by Marcellus L. Stearns of Maine who had lost his arm fighting for the Union at the Battle of Winchester, and another led by United States Senator Simon Conover, a native of New Jersey who had served as a surgeon in the Union Army during the Civil War. Wallace supported Conover whom he called "the only Republican who ever recognized the prominent colored men as officeholders."¹² The party compromised and nominated Ossian B. Hart, whose father was the founder of Jacksonville, and gave Stearns the nomination for lieutenant governor. The Republicans won, but Hart died in 1874, and Wallace's enemy, Stearns, became governor. Wallace led a revolt against Stearns over control of delegates to the party nominating convention and claimed Stearns had offered a bribe in exchange for Wallace's support.¹³ The Wallace challenge further damaged the Republican party.

In 1875, another Wallace vote confused and hurt the Republican cause. Neither party was able to organize the Florida Senate, and control depended on whether Republican state Senator E. T. Sturtevant of Brevard County was seated. Initially, Wallace supported the move to oust Sturtevant which would have given the Democrats control.¹⁴ He then reversed himself, apparently out of fear that his fellow blacks might harm him.¹⁵

By 1876, the combination of Republican infighting and Democratic resurgence had imperiled the cause of black rights. The Democrats nominated George F. Drew of Ellaville for gov-

12. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, July 15, 1873.

13. Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet; Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (Gainesville, 1974), 298.

14. Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule*, 315-16.

15. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 298.



Members of the Florida legislature assemble on the capitol steps, ca. 1875. John Wallace is at the far left. Photographs courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Archives.

error. Drew, a Northerner by birth and reputedly the wealthiest man in the state, was put forward by the Democrats who thought he would have a better chance of winning than a former Confederate like William Bloxham. The Republicans nominated Stearns. To show his displeasure with Stearns's nomination, Wallace declared his candidacy for Congress on a splinter ticket that included former Governor Harrison Reed who was running for another term as governor. As late as October 6, 1876, Reed noted that Wallace was still working for the ticket.¹⁶ Wallace was unable to gain much support, however, and he withdrew before the election. Wallace's failure to support the ticket damaged Stearns who lost the election by less than 500 votes— 24,613 to 24,116.¹⁷ The fighting among the Florida Republicans in 1876 cost the party the state election. Republicans would not regain the governorship in Florida until 1967.

In the election, Drew attracted some black votes by promising them protection from white dominance. Even before the soldiers were withdrawn from Florida in 1877, following the

16. Harrison Reed to Edward L'Engle, L'Engle Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

17. *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U. S. Elections* (Washington, DC, 1975), 403.

election of Rutherford B. Hayes as president, blacks were quickly losing what power they had accumulated. In a letter to the *Weekly Floridian* in 1878, Wallace complained that blacks had lost rights under Drew, including the right to serve on juries.¹⁸

Wallace believed that most Republicans were interested in blacks only for their votes and that the Democrats had no interest at all. Some blacks briefly considered switching over to the Democratic party and held a rally in 1878 to discuss the issue, but when they found that the Democrats had little interest in unification they decided to remain in the Republican party.¹⁹ Bloxham had also proposed a merger of black voters and conservative Democrats as a reform ticket, but when his fellow Democrats showed no enthusiasm for such an alliance, he abandoned the plan.²⁰

With the removal of the Union troops in 1877, the Democrats no longer had to compromise in their choice of a candidate for governor. In 1880, they nominated William Bloxham, who defeated Simon Conover by nearly 5,000 votes—28,372 to 23,307.²¹

In 1882, Wallace became a leader of the Florida Independent movement with a goal of uniting liberal whites and blacks. The Independents nominated several candidates, and Wallace withdrew from the Republican nomination to run as an Independent for a state senate seat. He finished a weak third in a field of three, gathering just 432 votes to 1,540 for the winner, John Proctor a Democrat.²² In 1884, the Independent movement that Wallace had helped organize nominated Frank Pope for governor. The Republicans considered nominating a candidate, but with Pope gaining support from blacks and a significant number of white Republicans, the party gave him its endorsement. At the party convention in Tallahassee in July, Wallace predicted, “We are going to win this time.”²³ But Pope lost

18. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, March 5, 1878.

19. *New York Times*, May 17, 1878.

20. William Bloxham to Robert M. Davidson, July 30, 1872, misc. manuscript, box 15, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

21. *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U. S. Elections*, 403.

22. Record Group 156, series 21, Florida State Archives.

23. *Land of Flowers*, July 29, 1884.

the election. Four years later Wallace again ran for his former seat in the state senate, but finished last in a field of thirteen candidates with just 166 votes. Most Florida blacks were no longer voting in state elections.²⁴

Wallace's personal life also suffered. On December 23, 1880, just four months after the birth of his second son, his wife Patsy died of pneumonia at the age of thirty.²⁵ His health also deteriorated, and beginning in 1877, Wallace frequently complained of pain in his eyes. Although government officials maintained that there was "no evidence that he was injured while in service," Wallace insisted that the pain was a result of the dirt thrown into his eyes during the skirmish in 1864 at Fort Myers, and he tried to have his pension benefits increased.²⁶ A medical examination on October 18, 1878, in Tallahassee found "no objective signs of injury or diseases."²⁷ On December 3, 1881, another doctor examined Wallace and ruled that he was "one-half incapacitated" and entitled to a pension.²⁸ In an undated statement filed with the United States Pension Commission, it was reported that Wallace had "three children to support, and that he has mortgaged all of the property he has to support his children, and to buy medicine and to pay doctors bills . . . which he cannot pay unless he was able to see, or use his eyes or do manual labor."²⁹ In 1885, he hired the Washington firm of Jas. H. Vermilya & Co. to press his claim for a larger pension, but the effort failed.³⁰ After his senate term ended, Wallace used his Republican party connections to secure a post as night inspector at the Custom's House at the port of Key West. He was nominated to the post December 29, 1883, and took the oath of office on January 14, 1884.³¹ It was one of the low-paying gov-

24. Record Group 156, series 21, Florida State Archives.

25. Isaac Jenkins to the United States Pension Office, March 1894, file XC2682365, Veterans Administration, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as V. A. file).

26. Report of Thomas Vincent, assistant adjutant general, July 17, 1877, V. A. file.

27. Certificate of Periodical Examination by Citizen Surgeons, October 18, 1878, V. A. file.

28. Examining Surgeon's Certificate, December 3, 1881, V. A. file.

29. John Wallace, undated statement, V. A. file.

30. Declaration for the Increase of an Invalid Pension, September 16, 1885, V. A. file.

31. Record Group 56, General Records of the Treasury Department, National Archives.

ernment jobs—\$2 per day. In Key West his health problems became worse, and at one point he was confined to bed for three months.³² When Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, became president in 1885, Wallace lost his job.³³

As Wallace's eyesight worsened, and he was again refused a pension increase, he became increasingly bitter. He remarried in 1886, and two years later his wife bore him another son, increasing the pressure for more money. On June 10, 1891, Wallace once more asked for a pension increase. In a letter to the commissioner of pensions he claimed that a member of the Jacksonville medical board had showed "favoritism to his particular friends and in one case where he allowed one applicant twenty dollars per month when the applicant was not half as disabled as your petitioner." Wallace said the board member "is prejudiced against Negro ex-soldiers and will not give them justice as he would give white ex-soldiers."³⁴ Wallace was allowed to take an examination in DeLand, but his pension was not increased.

By 1902, Wallace's pension was \$14. He sought more money, arguing that his pension "is unjustly and unreasonably low and disproportionate to the rate drawn by other pensioners for similar or equivalent disabilities."³⁵ His final pension increase request came in December 1906, and by then he also claimed that he was suffering bowel problems brought on by "eating unfit or putrefied hard tack while stationed in Ship Island, Mississippi."³⁶

After leaving Key West he returned to Tallahassee, and then moved to Jacksonville where he opened a law office at 8½ East Bay Street.³⁷ Wallace became an attorney in 1874 while serving in the legislature. At the time, there were no specific state requirements to be an attorney. His vision problems made it difficult for him to practice law, and Marcus C. Jordan, a white Jacksonville attorney, received one-half of Wallace's legal fees to help him with reading. Jordan's office was at 18½ West Bay

32. Statement of William M. Artrell, October 20, 1892, V. A. file.

33. Record Group 56, General Records of the Treasury Department, National Archives.

34. John Wallace to Commissioner of Pensions, June 10, 1891, V. A. file.

35. Declaration for the Increase of an Invalid Pension, July 28, 1902, V. A. file.

36. Surgeon's Certificate, December 19, 1906, V. A. file.

37. *Webb's Jacksonville Directory*, W. S. Webb, compiler (Jacksonville, 1889), 242.

Street, only a short distance away from Wallace's.³⁸ As a lawyer, Wallace argued a number of cases before the Florida Supreme Court. A study of those cases shows that most involved domestic disputes and such crimes as arson, receiving stolen goods, and robbery. Wallace had all but disappeared as a public figure when *Carpetbag Rule in Florida* was published in 1888. The book is largely a compilation of documents, lists, and letters that reflected Wallace's views of the events and people of the Reconstruction era. His book appeared in the midst of a statewide political campaign and was a useful campaign tool for the Democrats. Wallace was critical of most Republicans, complimentary toward many Democrats, and assured blacks that the Democrats were their true friends. Even though Reconstruction had ended in 1877, there was still a viable Republican party in Florida in 1888 when the Republicans nominated V. J. Shipman, a strawberry farmer from Lawtey, for governor. Shipman, a carpetbagger and ex-Union Army officer, received nearly 40 percent of the vote, a figure that would stand as the highest percentage for a Republican gubernatorial candidate until 1960.³⁹ Shipman was defeated by Francis P. Fleming, a former Confederate soldier and a member of a distinguished Jacksonville family. The 1888 gubernatorial race was the first post-Civil War campaign in which Florida Democrats could be overtly racist in their appeals to white voters.⁴⁰ Democratic party campaigners were able to use Wallace's criticism of Republican leaders to good advantage.

Wallace's book might have been dismissed as just one more campaign tract had it not been for the historians who used it as a major source in writing their versions of Reconstruction history. Not only were his words highly quotable, but as a black he was useful to the critics of Radical Reconstruction. What better critic of Republican party rule than a former slave? The first serious studies of the Reconstruction era were conducted by historian William A. Dunning of Columbia University and his students. Their works portrayed a South at the mercy of scalawags and carpetbaggers who sought to plunder and exploit the region for their personal gain. In a typical excerpt, one

38. Statement of M. C. Jordan, October 20, 1892, V. A. file; *Webb's Jacksonville Directory*, 242.

39. *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U. S. Elections*, 403.

40. Peter D. Klingman, *Neither Dies Nor Surrenders: A History of the Republican Party in Florida, 1867-1900* (Gainesville, 1984), 109.

historian wrote that “the South was now plunged into debauchery, corruption, and private plundering unbelievable—suggesting that government had been transformed into an engine of destruction.”⁴¹ The first nationally recognized historian to quote Wallace was Walter Fleming in his two-volume *Documentary History of Reconstruction* published in 1906-1907. Fleming selected eighteen lengthy excerpts from Wallace’s book that cast Reconstruction in the worst possible light. Quoting Wallace, Fleming wrote, “The Republicans witnessed the spectacle of their candidate for Governor (Marcellus L. Stearns) being charged with stealing the meat and flour given by the government as a charitable contribution to helpless men, women and children . . .; the second man of their ticket, Daniel Montgomery, publicly charged with arson; the third man on the ticket, W. J. Purman, burdened with the crime of causing the slaughter of innocent victims.”⁴² In a second book, *Sequel to Appomattox*, published in 1921, Fleming wrote that “Governor Stearns of Florida was charged with stealing government supplies from the Negroes.”⁴³ In his 1937 book *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, J. G. Randall turned the Wallace statement into, “another carpetbag governor was charged with stealing and selling food of the Freedmen’s Bureau.” Randall cites Fleming as his source, not Wallace.⁴⁴ The Wallace claim that Stearns was corrupt was simply a political charge, but by the time Randall used it in 1937, it appeared as though there were criminal charges against Stearns rather than an attack by a political enemy.

For the historian seeking to prove that Reconstruction was evil, Wallace’s remarks provided excellent material. In the 1927 best seller *The Tragic Era*, which combined elements of the Dunning School and a novel, Claude Bowers quoted Wallace as describing Tallahassee as a town where “the hotels and boarding-houses are filled with shabby strangers, the meanest of the carpetbaggers drinking champagne and the poorest in possession

41. E. Merton Coulter, *The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (Baton Rouge, 1947), 148.

42. Walter Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction: Political, Military, Social, Religious, Educational & Industrial, 1865 to the Present Time*, 2 vols. (Cleveland, 1906-1907), II, 40-41.

43. Walter Fleming, *Sequel to Appomattox* (New Haven, 1921), 192, 224.

44. J. G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1937), 849.

of the finest of beaver hats."⁴⁵ In *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, William Watson Davis, a Pensacola native and one of Professor Dunning's students, also used a Wallace quotation to describe the city. "Tallahassee was filled with a motley job of blacks and whites more or less under the influence of cheap liquor and wild political talk."⁴⁶

A continuing theme of the Dunning historians was that the agents of the Freedmen's Bureau were ineffective and often corrupt. E. Merton Coulter of the University of Georgia, the last of the major historians to utilize Wallace as a source, quoted him to the effect that the freedmen would have made "better citizens and more honest legislators if they had not been contaminated by strange white men who represented themselves to them as their saviors." Coulter concluded from Wallace that "many Negroes were to learn too late that they had misplaced their confidence."⁴⁷ In his 1938 book, *The Story of Reconstruction*, Robert S. Henry wrote that Wallace showed how "the errors and excesses of that period were due not to the newly enfranchised colored citizens but to the contamination and contrivance of strange white men who came among them persuasively representing themselves as saviors of the race."⁴⁸

On nearly every topic relating to Reconstruction, Wallace questioned the role of black and white Republicans. His description of Radical legislators was used by Bowers. "Nights find bright lights and abundant whiskey in hotel rooms, whence members, won by money, stagger joyously."⁴⁹ Randall used Wallace to support claims of voter fraud. "To colored voters in Florida, acting under instructions from Radical leaders, the motto seemed to be 'Vote early and often.'⁵⁰ Fleming, among others, quotes Wallace to support the claim of corruption among black legislators. "In Florida the Negro members of the Legislature thinking they should have a part of the bribe and loot money which their carpetbag masters were said to be receiving,

45. Claude Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln* (Boston, 1929), 361.

46. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1964), 735.

47. Coulter, *The South During Reconstruction*, 126-27, 184.

48. Robert S. Henry, *The Story of Reconstruction* (Indianapolis, 1938), 152.

49. Bowers, *The Tragic Era*, 361.

50. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 848.

went so far as to appoint what was known as a smelling committee to locate the good things and secure a share."⁵¹

Wallace even supported the Black Codes that were enacted by southern legislatures in 1866, and were designed to limit the right of the newly freed blacks by restricting their freedom to work and to move about and established harsh penalties for those who violated them. Fleming again, using Wallace's book, argued that the codes "were passed only to deter the freedman from committing crimes."⁵²

Most of Wallace's stories are impossible to substantiate. In both *Sequel to Appomattox* and *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, Fleming quoted a Wallace story in which students were taught to respond to the question, "What should the colored people do with the men who is trying to get Governor Starns [sic] out of his seat?" by saying, "They should kill them."⁵³

The historians who cited Wallace praised both his writing and reliability. In *The Story of Reconstruction*, Robert S. Henry said Wallace "gives the liveliest version of the 1876 campaign."⁵⁴ Jonathan Daniels in *Prince of the Carpetbaggers*, the biography of notorious carpetbagger General Milton S. Littlefield, said Wallace "left the best eyewitness account of the period in his *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*."⁵⁵ But these historians ignored questions about Wallace's integrity and the accuracy of his writings. Although they were quick to accept Wallace's flimsy charges of Republican party corruption, they failed to mention that in 1870 Wallace had been accused by an employee in the federal land office of accepting a bribe, although no charges were brought.⁵⁶

The errors in Wallace's book are numerous and frequently rather obvious. For instance, he recalled that the 1865 Florida Constitutional Convention was willing "to sustain Negro suffrage to a limited extent" even though it was clear that the conservative white delegates were intent on denying blacks the right

51. Fleming, *Sequel to Appomattox*, 226.

52. Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, I, 272.

53. Fleming, *Sequel to Appomattox*, 218-19; Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, II, 206.

54. Henry, *The Story of Reconstruction*, 560.

55. Jonathan Daniels, *Prince of the Carpetbaggers* (Philadelphia, 1958), 237.

56. *State v. Kriminger*, case 33, Leon County Circuit Court Records, Tallahassee.

to vote.⁵⁷ He accused dozens of political enemies of crimes, yet presented no evidence, and there were seldom any other witnesses.

One of Wallace's stories has been retold many times to demonstrate the unreliability of newly freed blacks. Wallace wrote that a black named Joe Oats was selected to attend the National Negro Convention in Washington in 1866. According to Wallace, Oats was "a mulatto of intelligence, of rascally practice and of suave tongue." Wallace said fellow blacks gave Oats money to attend the conference in Washington, but that the man never went to Washington and instead spent the money on high living. The truth is that Oats did go to Washington and did meet with President Andrew Johnson at the White House. Historians, including William Watson Davis, were quick to accept Wallace's account without attempting to verify it, and Oats entered the history books as an example of black dereliction rather than as a man who was one of the first blacks to meet with a president of the United States to press for civil rights.⁵⁸

The historians who cited Wallace failed to question his accuracy in recalling events and in quoting others. Wallace wrote his book nearly two decades after most of the events but was able to recall direct quotations, even though there is no evidence that he kept a diary or notes. Was Wallace the true author of *Carpetbag Rule in Florida* or was it written by someone else who wanted to remain anonymous? The question of authorship has been raised before, but without reaching any conclusion. In a footnote to *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, William Watson Davis wrote, "Ex-Governor Bloxham told me that he aided Wallace in the compilation of his work."⁵⁹ In the preface to the 1964 facsimile reprint of *Caretbag Rule in Florida*, Rembert W. Patrick wrote, "The extent of Bloxham's authorship of the volume is unknown. . . . At times we are tempted to see Bloxham holding the pen, or at least strongly directing it."⁶⁰

If Bloxham, a conservative Democrat who was a key figure in the overthrow of Republican party rule in Florida, was the

57. Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule*, 12.

58. Peter Klingman, "Rascal or Representative? Joe Oats of Tallahassee and the Election of 1866," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 51 (July 1972), 52-57.

59. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 625.

60. Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule*, xii.

real author, then the contradictions and anti-Radical views are easier to understand. The book was published in the midst of the 1888 political campaign, and it warned of the perils of the return to Republican party rule and tried to show blacks that the Democrats were their friends. The final paragraph of *Carpetbag Rule in Florida* makes the argument that blacks were better off under the Democrats than the Republicans. "Although the carpet-bag Government was overthrown in 1876, a certain property was bequeathed to the colored people by the carpetbaggers which has been and still is to a certain extent very damaging and burdensome to them. . . . The demoralization in which our people were left by the carpetbaggers is gradually being wiped out by the labors of the best men and women." Wallace argued that the return of the Democrats "has proved a blessing in disguise. . . . Prejudice on account of color is passing away, and the Negro has experienced his worst day in this State." The book concludes with an attack on black ministers who gained influence as black politicians lost their offices. "These men have in times past been guilty of every wrong that can be committed against innocence and virtue, and have violated every moral law and obligation."⁶¹

Nearly every politician active during the Reconstruction period in Florida is criticized except Wallace's former employer, Bloxham. In describing Bloxham's nomination for lieutenant governor in 1870, Wallace called him "a political giant, who was destined to overthrow the carpetbag dynasty of Florida. . . . In fact, the Democratic party of Florida had no cohesiveness until Bloxham became its candidate [for lieutenant governor] in 1870, and it was Bloxham who rallied the masses against Stearns in 1876."⁶² In *The Tragic Era*, Bowers used this Wallace quotation as the basis to write that Bloxham "stepped forth to give cohesiveness and courage to the opposition and to revive the spirit of the native whites in a brilliant campaign of denunciation."⁶³

It is impossible to prove whether *Carpetbag Rule in Florida* was written by Governor Bloxham or John Wallace. However, the more significant question may be why the book was pub-

61. *Ibid.*, 346.

62. *Ibid.*, 127.

63. Bowers, *The Tragic Era*, 361

lished. Was the book designed to aid the Democratic party and to undercut blacks and Republicans? The answer may lie not in the author but the publisher. From his constant pleading for a pension increase, it is clear that Wallace lacked the financial resources to publish a book. It is also difficult to envision a large readership for a book that is as ponderous as *Carpetbag Rule in Florida*. The book was published in 1888 by DaCosta Printing and Publishing House of Jacksonville which was owned by Charles W. DaCosta. The firm did commercial printing and published a number of small business newspapers.⁶⁴ Within months of the publication of the Wallace book, DaCosta's fortunes improved dramatically. The new Democratic governor, Francis P. Fleming, named DaCosta to the newly created post of state printer. The position enabled DaCosta to purchase new equipment, and in 1889 he was advertising his firm as the "largest and most complete printing establishment in all Florida."⁶⁵ DaCosta also purchased the Tallahassee *Floridian* which faithfully supported the Democratic party. In 1891, Fleming named DaCosta, then thirty-five, as a Jacksonville alderman, and in 1893 DaCosta was elected to the post.⁶⁶ After Governor Fleming's term ended, DaCosta's fortunes began to decline. He lost his post as state printer, and his printing firm failed.⁶⁷ By 1904, he owned a smaller printing and stationery business, but by the following year the firm was no longer listed in the city directory, and DaCosta was living in a rooming house.⁶⁸

For nearly half a century, Wallace was quoted in many Reconstruction studies. After 1947, the use of Wallace as a source became infrequent as historians grew more suspicious of his contentions. In *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877*, published in 1965, Joe M. Richardson wrote that Wallace's "statements should be accepted with a good deal of skepticism," and that "the book contains many inaccuracies and is pro-Democrat."⁶⁹ In his 1974 book *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of*

64. S. Paul Brown, *Book of Jacksonville: A History* (Poughkeepsie, NY, 1895), 172.

65. *Webb's Jacksonville Directory*, 102.

66. Brown, *Book of Jacksonville*, 172.

67. *Titusville Star*, January 6, 1893.

68. *Jacksonville City Directory*, 1904.

69. Joe M. Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* (Gainesville, 1965), 190, 193.

Reconstruction, 1863-1877, Jerrell H. Shofner was also highly critical of Wallace.⁷⁰

Carpetbag Rule in Florida had no apparent impact on Wallace's life. He continued to seek pension increases and to practice law in Jacksonville. He stayed out of politics for nearly a decade before becoming the last black to run for statewide office in Florida in the nineteenth century. By 1896, the Republican party was divided into two groups—the Lily Whites and the Black and Tans. Despite the name Lily Whites, and the party's platform which excluded blacks, it did have black members, including Wallace. The Black and Tans tried to attract both whites and blacks and ended up with a number of Republican politicians who had been prominent during Reconstruction. In 1896, support for the Populist movement peaked as the Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan whose message encompassed much of the Populist platform. In the South, Populists combined with the remnants of the Republican party and mounted a threat to the Democrats in some states, particularly North Carolina where a Republican-Populist coalition won seven of the nine congressional seats and the governorship.⁷¹ The Lily Whites and the Black and Tans both fielded candidates in Florida, including Wallace who ran for attorney general as a Lily White. As it became clear the two groups would only divide the opposition vote, they combined into one ticket, but Wallace did not appear on the November ballot.⁷² The Democrats that year nominated for governor their old standby, William Bloxham, who won with 66.6 percent of the vote, one of the lowest percentages for the Democrats between 1892 and 1960. Undoubtedly, Bloxham would have won even if the Republicans had not been divided, but once again Wallace, as he had in 1876, helped create a division that aided Bloxham and the Democratic party.

After his abortive campaign for attorney general, Wallace ended his political career and spent the remainder of his life practicing law. Between 1891 and 1904, he appealed eleven cases to the Florida Supreme Court and won four. In 1901, in *Hicks v. State*, Wallace, working with Jordan who helped prepare

70. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 213, 298.

71. *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U. S. Elections*, 679.

72. Klingman, *Neither Dies Nor Surrenders*, 110-211.

the case, won a reversal for a man convicted of arson.⁷³ Wallace argued his final case before the Florida Supreme Court in 1904 and lost.⁷⁴

Wallace died on November 25, 1908, in Jacksonville of cystitis, with prostate enlargement, at the age of sixty-three. He was buried in the Mount Olive Cemetery located at 1685 West 45th Street in Jacksonville.⁷⁵ His second wife Alice survived him. She died November 19, 1941.⁷⁶

In recent years, two black Florida Reconstruction leaders, Jonathan C. Gibbs and Josiah T. Walls, have received recognition for their accomplishments—Gibbs as the first black to serve in the Florida cabinet and Walls as a member of the United States House of Representatives. Wallace, who held elective office longer than any other black in Florida, faded after serving the purposes of white historians for nearly half a century.

73. *Hicks v. State*, Supreme Court of Florida, March 5, 1901, *Southern Reporter* 29, 631-33.

74. *Johnson et al. v. Wilson*, Supreme Court of Florida, division B, June 28, 1904, *Southern Reporter* 37, 179-80.

75. John Wallace, Standard Certificate of Death, November 25, 1908, Duval County, Jacksonville.

76. Frederick D. Wallace, Jr., to U. S. Treasury Department, December 5, 1941, V. A. file.