

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA**  
**SESSION 2001**  
**RATIFIED BILL**

**RESOLUTION 2002-13**  
**SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1469**

A JOINT RESOLUTION HONORING THE LIFE AND MEMORY OF WILLIAM JOSEPH GASTON ON THE 225<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH.

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston was born on September 19, 1778, in New Bern, North Carolina; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston's father, Dr. Alexander Gaston, a patriot during the American Revolution, was killed by Tories in August 1781 when William Joseph Gaston was a young boy; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston was reared by his mother, Margaret Sharpe Gaston, to adhere to the beliefs and principles of the Roman Catholic church; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston began his formal education as the first student at Georgetown College in 1791; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston later graduated from the College of New Jersey at Princeton; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston, after graduating from college, returned to New Bern, North Carolina, to study law under a well-known lawyer, Francois-Xavier Martin; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston was admitted to the North Carolina State Bar in 1798 and later developed an expertise in property and criminal law; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston became very active in the political affairs of the State and nation; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston served the people of Craven County in the State Senate during the Assemblies of 1800, 1812, 1818, and 1819; and

Whereas, in the 1818 Assembly of the Senate, William Joseph Gaston served as chair of the joint legislative committee that proposed the creation of the North Carolina Supreme Court; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston represented the Town of New Bern in the North Carolina House of Commons in 1807, 1808, 1809, 1828, and 1829, and served partial terms in 1827 and 1831; and

Whereas, during the 1808 Assembly of the North Carolina House of Commons, William Joseph Gaston was elected Speaker and served as a presidential elector; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston served in the United States House of Representatives from 1815 to 1817; and

Whereas, in 1833, William Joseph Gaston, a devout Catholic, was elected to the North Carolina Supreme Court, notwithstanding Article 32 of the North Carolina Constitution, which denied anyone from holding a State office who did not believe in "the Truth of the Protestant Religion"; and

Whereas, in 1835, William Joseph Gaston purchased a library for the State Supreme Court while on a trip to New York City to enable the justices to render better decisions; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston served as a delegate to the North Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1835, where he spoke out in favor of continued suffrage for free blacks, federal representation as the basis for representation in the North Carolina House of Commons, and biennial meetings of the State legislature; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston, during the 1835 Convention, also spoke against the religious test for office contained in the North Carolina Constitution at that time, which later resulted in the removal of the word "Protestant" and the substitution of the word "Christian" throughout the constitution; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston was well respected and admired by all who knew him; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston was awarded numerous honorary degrees and memberships from colleges, universities, and organizations throughout the nation; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston served as a trustee of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 1802 until his death; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston donated money for the construction of St. Paul's Church in New Bern, the oldest Roman Catholic church building in North Carolina; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston wrote the words for North Carolina's official State song, "The Old North State", which he adapted from a melody sung by a group of Swiss bell ringers who visited the capital; and

Whereas, Gaston County and the City of Gastonia are both named for William Joseph Gaston; and

Whereas, William Joseph Gaston died on January 23, 1844; and

Whereas, as the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of William Joseph Gaston nears, the General Assembly celebrates his life and memory and his many contributions to our State and recognizes his stand on religious tolerance; Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the Senate, the House of Representatives concurring:

**SECTION 1.** The General Assembly honors the memory of William Joseph Gaston for the service he rendered the State and nation.

**SECTION 2.** The Secretary of State shall transmit a certified copy of this resolution to the Cities of Gastonia and New Bern and to the Counties of Gaston and Craven.

**SECTION 3.** This resolution is effective upon ratification.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 5<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2002.

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Beverly E. Perdue  
President of the Senate

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James B. Black  
Speaker of the House of Representatives