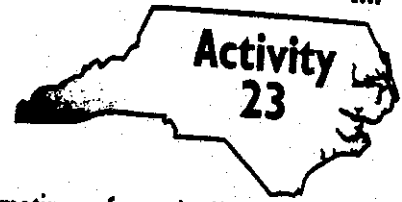


# Archibald Murphey: A Vision for the Future



★ **OBJECTIVE** Describe the role that Archibald Murphey played in promoting reforms in North Carolina. (NC Curriculum Objective 6.1)

North Carolina lagged behind other states in the early 1800s. Farming, transportation, manufacturing, and education were undeveloped. It was even nicknamed the "Rip Van Winkle State," after a character in a Washington Irving short story who fell asleep for 20 years.

The state's backwardness had several causes. Most people lived on isolated farms. Roads were poor, if they existed at all. There were few bridges over streams and rivers. Rivers were hard to navigate because they were shallow or had swift rapids. Backcountry farmers had to spend much of what they earned from selling their crops just getting them to market.

Trade within North Carolina was limited. Eastern planters were more likely to send goods by land or water to South Carolina or Virginia than they were to trade with westerners in their own state. Almost half the population could not read and write. North Carolina had no public schools and only a few private academies.

Poor conditions led many people to emigrate, or leave, North Carolina. Between 1815 and 1850, about one third of the population moved to Tennessee, Alabama, Ohio, and points farther west. People were daily "abandoning the places of their birth," James Seawell noted in 1833. North Carolina, he warned, was losing its young and most productive citizens.

*"The tide of emigration, which never ebbs, not only carries with it a great portion of the enterprise and prime of our youth, but much of the productive and most valuable description of the State's wealth... Go into any neighborhood and inquire of the seniors or heads of families... 'How many children they have raised, and in what State do they reside?' and in nine cases out of ten, the answer will be, 'I have raised some six or eight children, but [most] of them have migrated to some other states.' And adds the parent, 'I am anxious to sell my lands, to enable me to follow them.'"*

Seawell felt that people were leaving because of "the distance to and expense of sending" goods to markets. Those problems meant that farmers could not make a decent living.

## Easterners Oppose Change

Despite these problems, many Tar Heels, especially wealthy landowners in the East, saw no need for change. To them, public schools and road building were local issues and should not be handled by the state. They opposed taxes on land to pay for schools or roads.

Easterners dominated the legislature even though more people lived in the Piedmont. Under North Carolina's constitution, each county had an equal number of representatives, regardless of its population. To keep control of the legislature, eastern lawmakers created new counties in their region each time a new county in the West was added. They did so by dividing older counties.



Archibald Murphey  
North Carolina Collection,  
University of North Carolina  
at Chapel Hill

## Murphey's Vision

Archibald Murphey, a lawyer, judge, and lawmaker from Orange County, advanced plans to bring progress to North Carolina. As a state senator from 1812 to 1818, he promoted the idea of public schools for all white children. To progress, North Carolina needed educated citizens, he said.

Murphey drew up ambitious plans for internal improvements, the building of roads, bridges, and canals to link all parts of the state. Rivers would be deepened and widened. Swamps would be drained

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Block \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 23 (continued)

to create farmland on the eastern shore of the Albemarle Sound. Only the state government, Murphey declared, could organize and pay for such improvements.

To keep eastern lawmakers from blocking his plans, Murphey called for a convention to revise the state constitution. It would require representatives to be elected on the basis of population, not by counties. The legislature would then become more democratic.

When Murphey died in 1832, he had yet to see his dreams fulfilled. Yet North Carolina did make progress slowly. The chart below shows what was accomplished by 1835 when the state finally got a new constitution.

In the next 25 years, Murphey's vision became a reality as public schools were built and transportation improved. The "Rip Van Winkle State" had come to life.

### ★ANALYZING A CHART

The chart shows Murphey's program and what parts of it were eventually put into effect in North Carolina. Based on the chart and your reading above, answer the following questions.

Area of Concern	Murphey's Program	Response of State Lawmakers
Public Education	1817 Free public schools.	1825 Set up Literary Fund for education; funds misused. 1837 First public school act.
Internal Improvements	1815 Improve roads statewide, build bridges, canals. Deepen, widen rivers. Drain swamplands in Albemarle region.	1819 Set up fund for internal improvements; fund mismanaged. Poorly planned projects fail. 1827 Canal projects dropped as railroads appear.
Government Reform	1816 Constitutional convention to change representation in legislature.	1816 Rejected call for constitutional convention. 1835 Convention meets.

1. Why was North Carolina nicknamed the "Rip Van Winkle State"?
2. Describe three reasons for the state's economic backwardness.
3. How did Archibald Murphey propose to solve North Carolina's problems?

### ★CRITICAL THINKING

4. **Problem Solving** Why did Murphey's ideas meet with so much resistance? What skills might successful leaders use to get others to accept bold new ideas?

### ★ENRICHMENT

5. **Writing Activity** To North Carolina historian William Powell, "Murphey was a prophet, not a builder." Find out more about Murphey and his work. Then write an essay agreeing or disagreeing with Powell's view.

paragraph

Homework : Due: Wed. 2/25 and Thurs 2/26  
 Answer # 1-5 in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.