

William Ashmead Courtenay

Born Charleston, SC Feb. 4, 1831, d. Columbia, SC, Mar. 17, 1908



WILLIAM ASHMEAD COURTENAY

Mayor of Charleston, 1879-1887

As Chief Magistrate

He administered the government with
firmness, impartiality and success.

Even amid the disasters of cyclone and earthquake,
signally illustrating the safe maxim, that,
"PUBLIC OFFICE IS A PUBLIC TRUST"

This memorial erected by his grateful fellow-citizens,
December 19th, 1888.

*The following biography is reprinted from "The News and Courier" Charleston, SC
Dec. 15, 1952, page 16:*

William A. Courtenay Ranks With the City's Greatest Mayors

A bust of William Ashmead Courtenay, considered by many persons to have been Charleston's greatest mayor, occupies a niche in the corner of the committee room to the west of the City Council Chamber in City Hall. It is almost as if this likeness of the man who guided Charleston's destinies through its greatest disaster, the 1886 earthquake, watches over the deliberations of the committees which mold the policies of city government.

ELECTED IN 1879

Naming of the new thoroughfare, to be created by the linking of Chinquapin, McLeod and Fifth Streets, Courtenay Drive came as an inspiration when a member of the streets committee of city council glanced at the white marble bust

on the wall in front of him. Mr. Courtenay was elected mayor in 1879 and served eight years. His greatest achievement was rehabilitation of Charleston after the earthquake of Aug. 31, 1886, which disaster had been preceded by a severe cyclone the year before. It has been said that the emperor Augustus found Rome built of brick and left it built of marble. Of Courtenay, it may be said that he found the traffic of the city moving on rotted plank roads and cobblestones and left the streets paved with granite blocks.

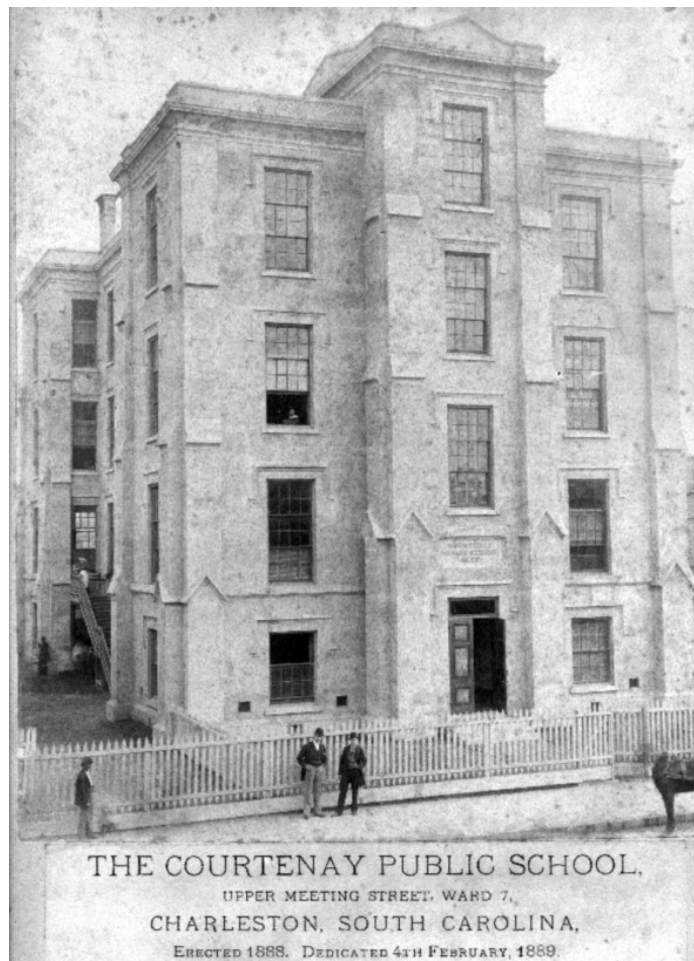
CITY HALL RENOVATED

He caused the heavy flagstones to be placed on East Battery to protect that promenade from action by the sea. He created Colonial Lake from the mud flats that constituted the Colonial Common and Ashley River embankment. The City Hall was renovated in its present form during his administration and he had City Hall park improved. He laid out the William Enston Home and it was at his suggestion that the Historical Commission of South Carolina was formed by legislative act. He served for many years as its chairman. He was born in Charleston South Carolina on February 4, 1831. Prior to the Civil War he conducted a large publishing and bookselling business on Broad Street, which was destroyed by the war.

COURTENAY PUBLIC SCHOOL

Although his business had been destroyed by war, Mr. Courtenay continued his interest in history and literature. It was through him that many historical facts were made available to scholars through research and publication. The result of much of his work exists in the historic appendices in the City Yearbooks published during his administration, as well as other books and pamphlets at his own expense. His interest in education is attested by the Courtenay Public School which was named for him. He was interested in the shipping business in Charleston after the War Between the States and served as president of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce. Following his service as mayor of Charleston, he moved to Newry and founded the Courtenay Cotton Mills. He later moved to Columbia. Mr. Courtenay was privileged to see his bust erected in 1888 "by his grateful fellow citizens." The bust is by Edward Virginius Valentine.

COURTENAY PUBLIC SCHOOL, CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA



The following story is reprinted from the November 24, 1958, issue of the Belfast Telegraph, of Belfast, Ireland. The feature is part of a series entitled "Ulster Names That Adorn U.S. History" and was written by E. R. R. Green.



He Built A Village and Named It Newry

by E. R. R. Green

Two sons of Edward Courtenay and his wife, Jane Carlisle, emigrated from Newry to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1791. One of the brothers, Edward, established a school in Charleston, and the other eventually settled in Savannah, Georgia. Edward Courtenay had a son, William, born in 1831, who later ran a bookselling and publishing business in Charleston in partnership with an older brother. Later, William Courtenay became head of the business department of the Charleston Mercury newspaper. As a publisher, he was a personal friend of many of the leading literary men of the Old South, who lived in Charleston before the Civil War.

He was elected mayor of Charleston in 1879 and again in 1883, serving eight years in all. In persuading the legislature to establish the State Historical Commission, the equivalent of our Public Record Office, he performed a wider service to the community.

Courtenay was also one of the pioneers of the industrial movement which had transferred the bulk of the American cotton industry from New England to the Southern states where the raw material is produced. The South in the days before the Civil War had despised manufacturing, but the men who rebuilt the war-ravaged Southern states were well aware of the importance of industrialization.

The new era began with the opening of the Piedmont Mill in the upper part of South Carolina in 1876. Sixteen years later there were fifty-one mills in South Carolina alone, making the State first in the nation in power looms and second in spindles. It was not many miles away from Piedmont that William Courtenay built his cotton mill and a village of workers' houses to which he gave the name of Newry, in memory of the original family home in Ireland. He also built a house at Newry which he called Innisfallen and lived there until he moved to Columbia, the state capital, where he spent the last years of his life.



Innisfallen, Newry, South Carolina

Newry still survives, a typical Southern mill village and one of the oldest in a cotton manufacturing area which has expanded greatly in recent years.

QUOD VERUM TUTUM IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM ASHMEAD COURTENAY Born in Charleston, S.C. 4 Feb., 1831.

Entering on life's duties in early youth without educational advantages he won his way to high business and civic positions.

Enterprising, Public Spirited, Liberal.
No one ever lost by his business.
President Chamber of Commerce 1885-'88.
As Mayor of Charleston 1880 - '87
he reorganized the city government,
elevated its finances, initiated permanent
improvements, advanced the cause of education.
Collected the bequest of William Enston
made by will in 1860 and founded
the William Enston Home 1882.
The Colonial Lake & Marion Square
were developed and beautified under his
official influence and effort.
In the calamities of cyclone and earthquake,
1885 - '86, he was active in restoring the city.
In 1887 he was elected a trustee of
The Peabody Education Board.


In 1900 the degree of L.L.D. was conferred on him by the South Carolina College and University of Tennessee. In 1885 the Legislature of S.C. at his suggestion created the Historical Commission of S.C. of which he was for years a member.

He died at Columbia, S.C. on March 17th 1908.


Mayor William Ashmead Courtenay's residence, located at 95 Ashley Avenue, Charleston, South Carolina. Courtenay (1831-1908) was mayor of Charleston from 1879 to 1887. He used his business expertise to professionalize the city administration and made many permanent improvements, including the paving of major streets, such as King and Meeting streets, for the first time. His home was an older single house which was remodeled in the Queen Anne style, sometime between 1883 and 1893. Ashley Avenue was first laid out as Lynch Street, for Thomas Lynch (Mazyck & Waddell, illus. 2, 71; Archer, 7; News & Courier, Sept. 1, 1882; Sept. 2, 1883).





Other sources containing further information on William Ashmead Courtenay:


 Fraser, Walter, Jr., "Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City", University of South Carolina Press, 1989, first paperback edition 1991. pp. 303 - 321. ISBN: 0-87249-643-0 ISBN (paperback): 0-87249-797-6.

 The Manuscript Collection of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 29208

 Many manuscript collections listed, in particular units: #293, 505, 817, 902, 1306, 1307, 1340, 1849, 1923, 2457, 2467 for COURTENAY, William Ashmead.

 Also COURTENAY FAMILY units # 293, 504, 1185, 2379, and COURTENAY W.C. and COMPANY unit # 1950

 The South Carolina Historical Society (microfiche in many Public Libraries) VOL: PAGE - William Ashmead Courtenay 78:259, 80:187-189, 81: 38n, 44n, Many others, see the SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY INDEX 1900-1931, 1980-1990.

 The following microfilm contains correspondence between William A. Courtenay and W.L. DePass relating to their aborted duel! Catalog listing: Auburn University Library (Auburn, AL). Filmed from the holdings of the Charleston Library Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

Author: Courtenay, William A.

Title: Correspondence (microform).

Publication Information:

(S.l. : s.n., between 1861 and 1865)

Description: Microfilm. New Haven, Conn. : Research Publications, (1974).
On reel 83 of 143 microfilm reels ; 35 mm. (Confederate
imprints, 1861-1865 ; reel 83, no. 2564).
15 p. ; 21 cm.

LOCATION:	CALL NUMBER	STATUS:
MADD Microfilm Collection	no. 4012	Check Shelf

Search Request: S=COURTENAY AU Library Catalog
BOOK - Record 2 of 3 Entries Found Long View

Title: Correspondence

Subjects: DePass, W. L.
Dueling--Confederate States of America.

Notes: Microfilm. New Haven, Conn. : Research Publications, (1974).
On reel 83 of 143 microfilm reels ; 35 mm. (Confederate
imprints, 1861-1865 ; reel 83, no. 2564).
Title from cover.
Correspondence between William A. Courtenay and W.L. DePass
relating to their aborted duel.
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Charleston, South Carolina.

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