

# Archibald DeBow Murphey: Leader of Growing State Envisioning Change

By John Lauritz Larson \*

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Elected to the North Carolina Senate in 1812, Archibald DeBow Murphey fought for public education and statewide internal improvements. He believed that the success of a republic depended on the quality of its citizens and that any tax money spent on improving the intellectual or material parts of their lives would be repaid by improving their standard of living and quality of life.

Murphey's 1817 *Report on Education* proposed a system of primary schools and academies to prepare students for the existing state university in Chapel Hill. A state Board of Public Instruction, elected by members of the General Assembly, would be charged with managing a school fund; organizing the schools, curriculum, and instruction; and providing for the advancement of poor children (at public expense) through the highest levels of education their talents warranted. Although the state did create a "Literary Fund" in 1826, nothing came of Murphey's plan until the first general public school law of 1839.

Murphey's 1819 *Memoir of Internal Improvements* received wider attention. In it Murphey expressed his belief that government was obligated not just to preserve liberty but also to advance the welfare and progress of a whole community.

*\*At the time this article was written, John Lauritz Larson was teaching history at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.*