

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2001**

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**SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1469**

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Sponsors: Senators Carpenter; Allran, Ballantine, Forrester, Foxx, Horton, Kerr, and Thomas.

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Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate.

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July 1, 2002

1 A JOINT RESOLUTION HONORING THE LIFE AND MEMORY OF WILLIAM  
2 JOSEPH GASTON, A STRONG DEFENDER OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, ON  
3 THE 225<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH.

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

6 Whereas, William Joseph Gaston's father, Dr. Alexander Gaston, a patriot  
7 during the American Revolution, was killed by members of the Tory Party in August  
8 1781 when William Joseph Gaston was a young boy; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

36          Whereas, as the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of William Joseph Gaston  
37 nears, it is important to remember that he fought against the use of religion as a means  
38 of prohibiting citizens from participating fully in political life; and

39          Whereas, North Carolina has benefited and improved as a result of the  
40 contributions of citizens of all religious persuasions in the political process; and

41          Whereas, all barriers prohibiting religious persons and groups from fully  
42 participating in the political process should be removed; Now, therefore,  
43 Be it resolved by the Senate, the House of Representatives concurring:

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

3           **SECTION 2.** The Secretary of State shall transmit a certified copy of this  
4 resolution to each member of North Carolina's congressional delegation, the Board of  
5 County Commissioners of Gaston County, the City Council of the City of Gastonia, and  
6 the Parish Council of St. Paul's Catholic Church of New Bern.

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