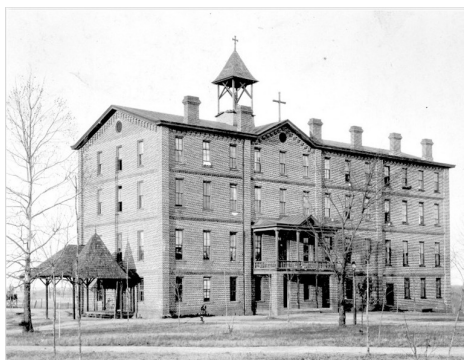


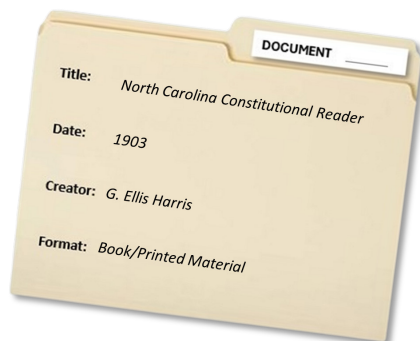
Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

## BACKGROUND: 1903 North Carolina Constitutional Reader



Lyman Building, St. Augustine's Normal School,  
Raleigh,  
circa 1890, N.80.2.25, State Archives of N.C.



**Meet the Author** - Governor Ellis Harris, known as "G. Ellis," (1861-1933) was born near Littleton in Halifax County. He grew up on a 100-acre farm called "Sunnyside Plantation." Harris's father, Osborne Harris, Sr., bought the land after the Civil War from his enslaver, who was also his father. Harris went to a one-room schoolhouse for his early education and later attended St. Augustine's Normal School in Raleigh, which was founded in 1867 to train emancipated people to become teachers.

Harris graduated from St. Augustine's in 1881 and returned to Littleton to teach. In 1901, he became the principal of the Old Town-Field Public School in his hometown and began writing the *North Carolina Constitutional Reader*.

Harris published the book through St. Augustine's printing office to challenge the 1901 amendment's literacy test requirement. Since many formerly enslaved people could not read and write, the amendment worked to prevent Black men from voting. Harris dedicated the book "To the many thousands of colored men in North Carolina who are unable to read and write and especially to the youth of the state."

At least one local newspaper promoted and praised Harris's book. On October 19, 1904, Raleigh's *Morning Post* described it as "one of the most novel publications seen in North Carolina." The article highlighted Harris's unique way of combining information about the state constitution with basic education.

### Quick Fact Check

1. Why did G. Ellis Harris write *The North Carolina Constitutional Reader*?
2. What legislative change inspired Harris?
3. Where did Harris go to school?
4. What professional background did Harris have that could make him qualified to write this book?

# ACTIVITY: Literacy Test

The 1901 amendment of the state constitution required a literacy test to register to vote. G. Ellis Harris wrote the *North Carolina Constitutional Reader* in 1903 to help others in his community pass the literacy test and vote.

**Directions:** Review the transcription of the 1868 constitution. Working with a partner, select a section to read aloud to your partner and have them write down what you are saying. When you are finished, check each word of their transcription for correctness. First, try an easy section. Then, try to stump your partner with a harder section.

**Extra challenge:** Review pages 10, 11, and 13 of the *Constitutional Reader* (below) and try writing letters in cursive and numbers in Roman numerals.

WRITTEN TEST OF ABILITY TO READ AND WRITE  
ANY SECTION OF THE STATE CONSTITUTION IN  
THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

## SECTION OF CONSTITUTION

EVERY PERSON PRESENTING HIMSELF FOR  
REGISTRATION SHALL BE ABLE TO READ AND  
WRITE ANY SECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION  
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Literacy test, detail, Stanly County, 1968, CR.089.912, State Archives of N.C.

## CONSTITUTIONAL READER 13

### Lesson 2

#### The Seven Roman Letters.

I stands for the number 1, one.  
V " " " " 5, five.  
X " " " " 10, ten.  
L stands for the number 50, fifty.  
C " " " " 100, one hundred.  
D " " " " 500, five hundred.  
M " " " " 1000, one thousand.

All other numbers may be expressed by repeating or variously combining these seven capital letters.

Their principal use is to indicate the hours on clocks and watches, and to denote the articles of the Constitution, and the chapters of the Bible, etc.

## 10 NORTH CAROLINA

### Alphabets.

#### CAPITAL LETTERS.

A A  
B B  
C C  
D D  
E E  
F F  
G G  
H H  
I I  
J J  
K K  
L L  
M M  
N N

#### SMALL LETTERS.

a a  
b b  
c c  
d d  
e e  
f f  
g g  
h h  
i i  
j j  
k k  
l l  
m m  
n n

## CONSTITUTIONAL READER 11

O  
P  
Q  
R  
S  
T  
U  
V  
W  
X  
Y  
Z

&

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y  
z

&

G. Ellis Harris, *North Carolina Constitutional Reader, Being a Handbook for Primary Use in One Part*, Raleigh: Printing Office, St. Augustine's School, 1903, VC.25, State Archives of N.C.