

Biographies of West Virginia statehood leaders were prepared by Marshall University Humanities Program graduate students enrolled in Dr. Billy Joe Peyton's Fall 2010 "Historical Studies" class at Marshall's South Charleston campus.

By Carolyn S. Quinlan

JAMES HENRY BROWN was born on December 25, 1818 in Cabell County, [West] Virginia. He received his post-secondary education at Marietta College, Marietta, Ohio and graduated in 1840 from Augusta College, Augusta, Kentucky. He apprenticed in the law office of John Laidley of Cabell County, [West] Virginia and in 1842 he receive his license to practice law. For nearly fifty years he served in various courts. He served Cabell, Lincoln and Kanawha Counties in the Circuit Courts and served in the United States District Court and the Court of appeals of Virginia and West Virginia and in the Supreme Court of the United States.

He moved from Cabell County to Kanawha County in 1848 where he took up residence in the city of Charleston. He was a delegate to the Democratic State Convention at Staunton, Virginia, when Henry A. Wise was nominated for Governor in the winter of 1854-55. He was nominated for the State Senate in 1855, but was defeated. He served as a delegate from Kanawha County to the Democratic Convention at Parkersburg, where Albert G. Jenkins of Cabell County was nominated for Congress.

A staunch advocate of the Constitution, he deplored secession. Even though he believed in the rights of the States and the powers set aside for them, he also defended the powers of the National Government. He believed all government would eventually be destroyed by secession.

He was a delegate to the Union Convention that met in Parkersburg in the spring of 1861; the Honorable John S. Carlile was nominated for Congress during this Convention and it was during the same time the Richmond Convention was passing the Ordinance of Secession.

In 1861 he was a leading delegate to the Wheeling Convention that voted to reorganize Virginia and save the western portion from secession; and later, he became a member of the Legislature of the Restored Government of Virginia. He had to give up his position as legislator when he received judgeship of the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit of Virginia in 1861-62. He was elected as one of three judges to the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals on May 23, 1863.

He switched his politics to Republican with the hope of succeeding himself as a member of the State Supreme Court of Appeals, but was not elected. He was the caucus nominee for election to the United States Senate. He was twice nominated to represent the Third West Virginia District in Congress. In 1883 he served in the West Virginia Legislature as a Republican along side his son, James F. Brown, Democrat.

Though educated under Methodist influence, he became active in the Presbyterian faith and was successful in urging associates in the congregation to remain loyal to the North. He is noted as perhaps one of the strongest and most loyal supporters of Northern sympathies.

He was married twice: First, to Louisa M. Beuhring of Cabell County, [West] Virginia and second, to Sally S. Shrewsbury of Charleston, West Virginia. He died October 28, 1900.

Sources: Atkinson, George Wesley and Alvaro F. Gibbens, *Prominent Men of West Virginia*, Wheeling: W. L. Callin, 1890.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=vLYUAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=prominent+men+of+ww&source=bl&ots=9mO46TGFfl&sig=d3B9o7HLgIMG2tPSb9a87-#v=onepage&q=brown&f=false>.

Ambler, Charles H., Frances Haney Atwood and William B. Mathews, eds. *Debates and Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of West Virginia (1861-1863)*. Huntington: Gentry Brothers. 73-74.