

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

**ELBERT HALSTEAD CALDWELL** was born April 21, 1809 in Wellsburg, Virginia. His father, Alexander Caldwell of Western Virginia, was the first judge of the Federal District and was a member of the bar for a period of time after having studied law under Philip Doddridge. He moved his family to Wheeling, Virginia and this is where Elbert was educated and grew to maturity. He took "a special course in one of the New England colleges." He had been practicing law at Grave Creek and Elizabethtown, but when Marshall County was formed in 1835, he decided to try his luck there.

Marshall County is where he began his political career. He became the first commonwealth attorney and was later re-elected. An honorable man, recognized by the people, he was elected in 1838 as the county clerk. While serving this position he was also elected to represent the county in the Virginia Assembly, from 1838 to 1841. During this time the Virginia Secession Ordinance was adopted but he refused to participate in any attempt to destroy the Union. He became a member of the Second Wheeling Convention. He was instrumental in forming the first constitution of West Virginia and served on a committee of five who submitted it for referendum. In 1863, after West Virginia received Statehood, he was elected judge of the First Judicial Circuit Court. In 1865 he was re-elected and served in that position until his death.

He was married to Ellen McMechen, daughter of Benjamin McMechen of Wheeling. He and his wife were among the first members of the Trinity Parish Episcopal Church of Moundsville, West Virginia, where he served as one of the first vestrymen. His sister was Mary Elizabeth married to Sobeski Brady, a one-time mayor of Wheeling and secretary of the State of West Virginia when Henry M. Mathews was serving as Governor.

He died on June 16, 1869. Then Governor, Arthur I. Boreman, along with other state officials, attended his funeral. The Ohio County Bar attended and to show solidarity, they “wore mourning for thirty days.” He was survived by: his wife, Ellen McMechen Caldwell; and their five children: Benson M., Alexander H., Eliza Jane, Mary O. (Brady), and Ella M.

Source: 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. 64-65.