

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 Wesley A. Kuemmel

Presley M. Hale:

Born near Morgantown on August 25, 1826, Presley M. Hale represented Lewis County at the Second Wheeling Convention. Hale was shopkeeper in Weston at the outbreak of the Civil War. Hale was an early and ardent supporter of the creation of a new state after Virginia's secession from the Union in 1861. (Smith 292) Early census records list Hale's occupation as hatter, and Hale's shop was said to have been the hub of Union activity in Lewis County at the outbreak of the Civil War. Hale served in West Virginia's First Legislature and was a proponent of free education, helping to craft the first education laws in the new state of West Virginia.(Smith 293) In his later years, Hale was a building contractor and built a number of prominent buildings in Weston, to include the courthouse, jail and part of the Weston Insane Asylum, where he also served on the board of directors for a number of years.

Besides his service at the Second Wheeling Convention and in the legislature, Hale's most significant contribution to West Virginia statehood occurred in 1861 when, at his urging, Federal troops commandeered state funds being held in the Exchange Bank at Weston. The funds, amounting to \$27,000, had been disbursed by Richmond for the

construction of the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum near Weston. These funds were crucial to the stability of the nascent state, and Hale's role in securing them caused him to be victimized by raiding Confederate forces throughout the course of the war. (Atkinson 1009-10)

Hale died in 1916, at the age of 88.

Atkinson, Geo W. and Gibbens, Alvaro F. *Prominent Men of West Virginia*. Wheeling: W.L. Callin, 1890. Print.

Smith, Edward Conrad. *A History of Lewis County, West Virginia*. Weston, W. Va.: The author, 1920. Print.