

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

**FRANCIS H. PIERPONT** was born in Monongalia County, [West] Virginia on June 25, 1814. As a young boy, he worked on his father's farm and in the tanyard until he became of age. He occasionally attended school near his home. In 1840 he graduated from Allegheny College in Pennsylvania and then moved to Mississippi to teach school. He wanted to be a lawyer, so he developed a systematic reading program for himself that allowed him to study law while teaching school. After a couple of years he passed the Bar exam and returned to Virginia where he was admitted to the Bar at Fairmont, [West] Virginia in Marion County. He situated himself in his community in such a way that he was able to build a reputable law practice in Fairmont, where he spent most of his life. At the age of seventy-five he continued to practice and bear the fruits of his labor.

It was natural that he would be an Abolitionist since he was from the North and received his education there. He had such strong convictions that he never missed an opportunity to speak out against slavery and join in on any discussion about political events of the day (State and National). Because of his unique ability as a platform speaker, he was often invited by the citizenry to speak on the current issues.

After the State of Virginia had seceded from the Union, he was elected Governor at the Wheeling Convention of June 11, 1861 to re-organize State Government. He was elected by an almost unanimous vote by the delegates from the forty counties, to the

Convention. He held the office for a year and then was elected by the people to fill the unexpired term of two years. The people then re-elected him as governor for the full four-year term. President Lincoln recognized him as the legitimate Governor of Virginia. He was a War Governor who had the untimely task of ordering troops to the front to defend the flag of the United States. He remained strong in a time that would weaken most.

He moved the State archives to Alexandria, called the Legislature into session and remained in Alexandria for two years. He called for a convention in 1864 that voted to abolish slavery in the State of Virginia. He moved the seat of government from Alexandria to Richmond after it fell to the Union; and had it up and running within a few months. He was a man of high integrity and patriotic loyalty. He would never hire anyone into a political office who did not carry the same ideals. He was never under suspicion of defrauding the public trust.

After his term as Governor, he returned to practice law in Fairmont. He was elected to the West Virginia Legislature in 1870. Although he was an intelligent man, it was his high moral character and individual loyalty that held him in public office for so many years. He did much to shape legislation in the years he served. President Garfield appointed him as Collector of Internal Revenue until the consolidation of the First and Second Districts, which legislated him out of office.

Since he was eighteen years of age he was a member of the Methodist Protestant Church. He served the church as representative to General Conferences and was a member of many of the important conventions.

A kind man, known for his simplicity and noble character, spent his latter days in Fairmont, West Virginia where he died at the age of eighty-five. He is buried in the Woodlawn Cemetery.

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+wv&source=bl&ots=9mO46TGFfl&sig=d3B9o7HLgIMG2tPSb9a87-#v=onepage&q=PIERPONT&f=false>.