

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 Kelly L. Pruett

### **Benjamin L. Stephenson**

Benjamin Le Master Stephenson (December 10, 1823-April 7, 1871), delegate from Clay County, was born at Enon in present Nicholas County, West Virginia, a son of colonel John Garner and Charity (Le Master) Stephenson. He was educated in private schools and was one of the first schoolteachers in Nicholas County. Through his father who served nine terms in the Virginia General Assembly and was in turn assessor, sheriff and clerk of Nicholas County, the son inherited a fondness for things political and for public service.

On July 7, 1853, he married Priscilla Ann Forsyth of Nicholas County, who bore him five children: Franklin; Oeola who married James Hamric; Charity; Sherman who married Agnes Legg and had three sons and one daughter; and Byron who died in infancy. For a period they made their home at Enon. About 1858, at the time of the formation of Clay County, (West Virginia, they moved to Buffalo Creek, in that county. He opposed secession and, following his services as a constitution maker, he organized in November, 1863, the "Clay County Scouts" which he commanded until the end of the war. From 1865 until his death, he was a delegate in the West Virginia Legislature. He was a Democrat and an active member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He died at Buffalo Creek, Clay County, and was interred in the Stephenson burial lot.

Sources:

Stephenson Family Records; Clay county Records.

Ambler, Charles H., Francis Haney Atwood and William B. Mathews, editors, *Debates and Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of West Virginia (1861-1863)*, p. 94, Huntington: Gentry Brothers Printers.