

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

Atkinson, John H.

John H. Atkinson (1820-?), delegate from Hancock County, was born in Ohio. New Cumberland attorney, he drafted the state's first free school law while serving as chairman of the committee on education in the state Senate. As a young man he surveyed most of the land in Hancock County, then went to New Cumberland and worked with his father, Thomas Atkinson, in manufacturing fire brick. He married Melissa G. Haigh in 1841.

When Hancock County was formed in 1848, he was elected clerk of circuit and county courts and was commissioner of chancery in the circuit court. He helped organize the Republican Party in 1854, and in 1856 chaired the Virginia convention which nominated Fremont. After serving as a delegate to the Wheeling Convention which established West Virginia, he served in the state Senate until 1868. In 1871 he was a delegate to the convention that framed the state constitution.

Sources:

George W. Atkinson and Alvaro F. Gibbens, *Prominent Men of West Virginia (1890)*, pp. 379-380.

Comstock, Jim, Editor, *The West Virginia Heritage Encyclopedia*, Volume 1, p. 215, Richwood: Jim Comstock Publishing, 1976.