

Biographies of western delegates who attended the 1861 Virginia Secession Convention were transcribed by undergraduate students enrolled in Dr. Billy Joe Peyton's Fall 2010 "Introduction to Public History" class at West Virginia State University.

By John Morrison

GEORGE WILLIAM SUMMERS, of Kanawha County (now in West Virginia), was born on March 4, 1804, in Fairfax County, Virginia and was born the son of Col. George Summers and Ann Smith Radcliffe Summers. His family moved to the Kanawha valley about 1813 and settled at Charleston, Kanawha County. Summers was educated at Washington College (Washington and Lee University) and at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. He was a lawyer and practiced in Charleston. In 1833 he married Amacetta Laidley, by whom he had five children.

Summers was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1830 to 1831 and from 1834 to 1836, and a member of the federal House of Representatives from 1841 to 1845. He was also a member of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850-1851. From 1852 to 1858 he was judge of the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit of Virginia.

He was a member of the "Peace Conference," which met at Washington early in 1861 in a vain attempt to find a basis for sectional reconciliation. As delegate to the Virginia State Convention from Kanawha County, Summers continued his efforts to keep Virginia in the Union, and he voted against secession on April 4 and on April 17. He then resigned his seat in the Convention and withdrew from further political activity, taking no part in the war or in the movement that led to separate statehood for West Virginia. He continued to practice law in Charleston until his death on September 19, 1868.

Sources : DAB, XVIII, 206-207; Ency. Va. Biog., III, 139-140; PMWV, pp. 214-217.