# Beeman, Joseph Henry [1]

## Beeman, Joseph Henry

by Ellen Barrier Neal, 1979

**17 Nov. 1833–31 July 1909**

Joseph Henry Beeman, Confederate [2] officer and congressman, was born in Gates County [3]. He moved with his parents to Morgan County, Ala., in 1847 and then to Mississippi in 1849. Brought up on a farm, he received an academic education and for a time worked as a teacher and merchant. During the Civil War [4] he served as a lieutenant in the Confederate Army. He spent most of his life, however, as a farmer in Scott County, Miss.

When discontented farmers, trapped between rising production costs and falling cotton prices, formed a state Alliance to improve agricultural conditions, Beeman became a founding member. In 1888 he served on a committee that urged Alliancemen to boycott jute bagging, "to maintain the contest being waged against the bagging trust," and recommended the establishment of a cotton bagging factory in the state as soon as possible. He also chaired the state executive committee for a time.

Similar discontent with economic conditions had fueled earlier successful Independent, Greenbacker, and Fusion [5] movements in Mississippi, and Beeman moved easily from his prominent position in the Alliance into state politics. He attended local and state Democratic conventions and in 1883 was chosen to represent Scott County in the state house of representatives, an office he held until 1891.

Beeman, who listed himself in the house directory as married, a Democrat [6], and a member of the Methodist [7] church, served in 1884 and 1886 on the committees on Claims and Corporations. In 1888 he was appointed to the more prestigious committees on Agriculture and Ways and Means and chaired the Claims Committee.

By 1890, Beeman had risen to a position of power in the house. He chose his seat before the general drawing, an honor usually reserved for the floor leaders of the dominant faction, and nominated the successful candidate for speaker. He served on the Rules Committee as well as the Ways and Means and continued as chairman of the Claims Committee. The most controversial issue before the legislature was a bill to call a constitutional convention, a proposal strongly supported by the Alliance. Beeman twice led the fight to defeat a substitute bill that called instead for a referendum on the proposal, and then successfully sponsored an amendment to the original bill that established a more democratic system of representation in the convention.

In August 1890 the Fifth District Democratic convention nominated Beeman for Congress on the 320th ballot. He campaigned on a platform stressing Republican hostility to the South (exemplified in the Force Bill) and the harmful effects of Republican economic policies (especially the McKinley tariff) on "agriculturalists and consumers." His off-year election campaign, in which the Alliance sub-treasury plan was the most absorbing issue, attracted less attention than the constitutional convention then meeting in Jackson.

On 4 Nov. 1890, the day after the convention adjourned, Beeman and one other Alliance candidate won election to the House. On 4 Mar. 1891, Beeman took his seat in the Fifty-second Congress, where he served on the committees on Manufactures and Education. While in Congress he introduced petitions from farm organizations in Mississippi in support of pure food laws, extension of rural mail service, currency expansion, and suppression of speculation in farm products.

At the end of his term in 1893 he returned to his home in Ely and engaged in agricultural pursuits until his death in Lena in adjacent Leake County. He was buried in the Beeman family cemetery in Lena.

**References:**

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Jackson (Miss.) *Clarion Ledger*, scattered issues.

*Mississippi House of Representatives Journal,* 1884–90.

Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History*, vol. 1 (1907).

**Additional Resources:**

Joseph Henry Beeman, Biographical Directory of the United States Congress:
http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000309 [8]

**Subjects:**

**Authors:**
Neal, Ellen Barrier [13]
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