

## **Wilcox, John Alexander** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Wilcox, John Alexander**

by Juanita Ann Sheppard, 1996

**18 Apr. 1819–7 Feb. 1864**

John Alexander Wilcox, lawyer and congressman, was born in Greene County <sup>[2]</sup>, the son of Reuben and Sarah Garland Wilcox. The family moved to Tennessee where he attended school; afterwards he settled in Aberdeen, Miss., and became secretary of the Mississippi state senate until the War with Mexico <sup>[3]</sup>. During the war he was commissioned a lieutenant, served as adjutant, and was promoted to lieutenant colonel. Reuben Davis, a congressman from Mississippi and fellow resident of Aberdeen, is credited with securing advancement for Wilcox. Wilcox enlivened his camp in times of discouragement, and his men had unbounded confidence in him.

As a successful lawyer, Wilcox employed wit, humor, and anecdote to advance his cases. He was described as handsome, jovial, and popular with everyone. Twice a candidate for Congress, he was elected in 1851 from Mississippi's Second Congressional District. At that time he was a Union Whig <sup>[4]</sup> and the only man to win the favor of both Whigs and independents. Although he had little political experience, his perception was keen and clear. Nevertheless, his bid for a second term in 1853 was unsuccessful.

Following this defeat, Wilcox moved to San Antonio, Tex., and became a member of the Know-Nothing (American) party <sup>[5]</sup>. He also joined the Knights of the Golden Circle <sup>[6]</sup>, a secret, pre-Civil War <sup>[7]</sup>, pro-Southern organization. At the Know-Nothing state convention in Austin on 21 Jan. 1856, he was chosen a presidential elector for the state at large in the election of 1856. Wilcox again changed his political affiliation in January 1858, when he attended the Texas Democratic <sup>[8]</sup> State Convention and made a speech pledging allegiance to the Democratic party. He went to Austin in January 1861 as a delegate to the secession convention <sup>[9]</sup> and was a member of the Committee on Address, which prepared the Ordinance of Secession.

Wilcox was elected to represent the Texas First District in the House of Representatives of the First Congress of the Confederate States and was reelected to the Second Congress. He took office on 18 Feb. 1862 for his first term but died suddenly of apoplexy ten days before the First Congress adjourned.

In Congress Wilcox was appointed to the Inauguration Committee, Committee on Territories and Public Lands, Committee on Military Affairs, and Committee on Enrolled Bills. His correspondence with constituents indicated his deep interest in Texas affairs, and he worked hard for his state. The Confederate Congress paid for Wilcox's funeral expenses when he was buried in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, Va. He was survived by his wife and two children.

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#### **Additional Resources:**

"Wilcox, John A., (1819 - 1864)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000457> <sup>[11]</sup> (accessed March 12, 2014).

#### **Subjects:**

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Lawyers <sup>[13]</sup>

Public officials <sup>[14]</sup>

**Authors:**

Sheppard, Juanita Ann <sup>[15]</sup>

**Origin - location:**

Greene County <sup>[16]</sup>

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.<sup>[17]</sup>

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