

Alexander, Mark ^[1]

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by Susan L. Bracey, 1979

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Mark Alexander, lawyer, gentleman farmer, and politician, was born at the family home, Salem, Mecklenburg County, Va., the son of Mark and Lucy Bugg Alexander. His ancestors, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians ^[2], had settled in Mecklenburg County ^[3], N.C. An uncle, Nathaniel ^[4], was governor of North Carolina and a United States congressman. As a young man, Mark Alexander's father moved to Mecklenburg County, Va.; he later served in the Virginia House of Delegates.

Alexander's education began in a local school. In 1805 he entered an academy in Louisburg, N.C., and in 1807 he matriculated at The University of North Carolina ^[5], where he was in attendance until 1810. Three years later he obtained a license to practice law in Virginia.

His career as a politician began in 1815 with his election to the Virginia House of Delegates. He was a member of the legislature until 1819, when he was elected to the United States House of Representatives. Ideologically an Old Republican, he believed in state supremacy, strict construction, and a laissez-faire economy. He served in the House until he declined reelection in 1833. While in Congress, he acted as chairman of the Committee on the District of Columbia for several sessions and was also a member of the Ways and Means Committee. He was also a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional convention of 1829–30. In 1845 he returned to the Virginia House of Delegates for one term.

During his political career and afterward, Alexander continued his law practice; he became a gentleman farmer, at one time owning approximately three thousand acres and a hundred slaves. He was also a devoted family man. On 1 June 1831 he married Sally Park Turner, daughter of ex-Senator and Governor James ^[6] and Betsy Park Turner of Bloomsburg, Warren County ^[7]. Most of the Alexanders' married life was spent at their home, Park Forest, in Mecklenburg County, Va. Five of their children lived to maturity: James T., Betty P., Robert Park, Mark T., and Mary Rebecca.

A portrait by Chester Harding supports the opinion of Alexander's contemporaries, one of whom (Hugh Blair Grigsby) said that he was "one of the most graceful men of his generation." Among his many friends were Virginia statesman Littleton Waller Tazewell and arch-conservative John Randolph of Roanoke.

Because of poor business judgment and lingering problems caused by the Civil War ^[8], Alexander lost Park Forest in 1882. He and his wife then moved to Scotland Neck to live with their daughter Rebecca and her husband, Norfleet Smith. There Mark Alexander, at the time supposedly the country's oldest living excongressman, died in 1883. He was buried in the cemetery at Trinity Episcopal Church in Scotland Neck.

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1 January 1979 | Bracey, Susan L.

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