

Bragg, John ^[1]

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by C. E. Pitts, 1979

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John Bragg, lawyer and Democratic political figure prominent in both North Carolina and Alabama, was the eldest of six sons born to Thomas ^[2] and Margaret Crossland Bragg of Warrenton. Two brothers, Braxton ^[3] and Thomas ^[4], also had distinguished careers. For a brief family history, see the biography of Braxton Bragg ^[3].

Bragg received his early education at Warrenton Academy and was graduated in 1824 from The University of North Carolina ^[5], in the same class with James Bryan, Thomas Dews, William A. Graham ^[6], and Matt E. Manly ^[7]. Following graduation, he read law in the Warrenton office of Judge John Hall ^[8] of the North Carolina Supreme Court ^[9] and was admitted to the bar in 1830. He was also elected in that year to the North Carolina House of Representatives, where he served five terms. In 1835 he was appointed by President Andrew Jackson ^[10] to the prestigious board of visitors for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Though, by any objective standards, Bragg was becoming a successful young lawyer-politician, he became convinced that the "new lands" of the southwest offered far greater professional and political opportunity for an ambitious young man than did his native state. In the fall of 1835 he moved from Warrenton to Mobile, Ala., making the long overland trip in a small surrey that also carried all his personal belongings, accompanied only by a Black enslaved person on horseback.

Bragg established a successful law practice in Mobile and in 1836 temporarily took the editorship of the *Mobile Register* during the illness of its regular editor. The *Register* was a Democrat-oriented paper, and both the paper and its temporary editor supported Jackson's party during the 1836 presidential campaign. Bragg's affairs prospered, partly because in 1839 he became the attorney for the Branch Bank of Mobile, and in 1842 he was appointed to a vacancy as judge of the Tenth Judicial District Circuit Court of Alabama. He subsequently won election to the post and served for nine years as a circuit court judge.

Bragg was a states' rights ^[11] Democrat, not inclined to compromise his principles, and in the wake of the furor over the Compromise of 1850 he was induced to accept his party's nomination for the U.S. House of Representatives. His chief rival was Unionist party ^[12] candidate C. C. Langdon ^[13], editor of the *Mobile Advertiser*. Bragg opposed secession, declaring that it was not a viable course of action, and maintained that he was a better Unionist than Langdon. In fact, both men favored the antisecessionist "Georgia Platform," but Bragg was able to unite Langdon's opposition and so won handily. He served in Congress from 4 Mar. 1851 until 3 Mar. 1853 but was dissatisfied with the role of a congressman and emphatically refused to run for reelection to a second term. He returned to Mobile, where he practiced law and continued his interest in politics. In 1861 he served as a delegate from Mobile County to both the Alabama Secession Convention, where he voted for secession, and to the state's constitutional convention.

When war came, he was physically unable to perform military service, and he spent the war years as a planter in Lowndes County. In 1847 he had married Mary Frances Hall, daughter of Henry M. Hall, a planter and businessman of Lowndes County; the union ultimately produced six children ^[14]. His plantation home was destroyed by Union forces in 1865, and according to contemporary accounts only the entreaties of his wife and children prevented his being hanged as the brother of Confederate General Braxton Bragg ^[3].

Following the war he returned to Mobile to the practice of law until his death.

References:

C. P. Denman, *The Secessionist Movement in Alabama* (1933). ^[15]

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Additional Resources:

"Bragg, John, (1806 - 1878)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000758> ^[16] (accessed October 14, 2013).

John Bragg Papers, 1851-1887 (collection no. 02573). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/b/Bragg,John.html> ^[17] (accessed October 14, 2013).

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