

Bynum, Jesse Atherton ^[1]

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Bynum, Jesse Atherton

by Daniel M. Mcfarland, 1979

23 May 1797–23 Sept. 1868

Jesse Atherton Bynum, lawyer, congressman, and planter, was born in [Halifax County](#) ^[2], attended [Princeton](#) ^[3] in 1818–19, studied law, and practiced in [Halifax](#) ^[4]. He represented Halifax borough in the House of Commons in 1823, 1824, 1827, and 1828 and represented Halifax County in 1829 and 1830. In 1823 he was leader in the assembly of the William H. Crawford forces in opposition to the [Fisher Resolutions](#) ^[5], which condemned the caucus nomination of Crawford by Congress. No member was elected from the Halifax borough to the House of Commons in 1825, because of fighting between supporters of Bynum and of [Robert Potter](#) ^[6].

While in the assembly, Bynum was a member of the [Richard Dobbs Spaight](#) ^[7] strict constructionist faction. He championed the interests of the Roanoke section, opposed creation of new counties in the West, and denied the power of the federal government to support [internal improvements](#) ^[8] or protective tariffs.

In 1831, Bynum announced that he would be a candidate for the Halifax-Tar River seat in Congress but withdrew in favor of [John Branch](#) ^[9], who had just been forced to resign from Jackson's cabinet. Branch was not a candidate in 1833, and Bynum easily won the position over [Andrew Joyner](#) ^[10]. Bynum was elected to four congressional terms and served from March 1833 to March 1841. He served variously on the committees on Claims, Manufactures, the Judiciary, and Foreign Affairs.

Bynum gained the reputation of a spitfire [Democrat](#) ^[11] and antiabolitionist in the House. He was especially violent against abolitionists, identifying them with [Whigs](#) ^[12]. The violence of his remarks caused a duel with Daniel Jenifer of Maryland in June 1836, during the debates on the admission of Texas and Arkansas. On 24 Jan. 1840, [John Quincy Adams](#) ^[13] recorded: "Bynum spoke nearly four hours, with all his characteristic venom and vehemence and his usual disregard of truth." In April 1840, Bynum's remarks sparked a fight with Representative Rice Garland, Whig of Louisiana, on the floor of the House.

Bynum did not seek reelection in 1841, and his place was filled by John Daniel. Shortly afterward he moved to Alexandria, Rapides Parish, La., where he lived through the trying fifties and [Civil War](#) ^[14] period as a planter. He died during the depths of [Reconstruction](#) ^[15] and was buried in Rapides Parish Cemetery, Pineville, La.

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Authors:

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