

Robinson, James Lowrie ^[1]

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by Alan B. Bromberg, 1994

17. Sept. 1838–11 July 1887

James Lowrie Robinson, legislator, lieutenant governor, and railroad champion, was born in [Franklin](#) ^[2], [Macon County](#) ^[3], the son of James, a merchant and native of Tennessee, and Matilda Lowrie Robinson, a niece of Governor [David L. Swain](#) ^[4]. Robinson attended the local schools in Franklin and studied for a year at [Emory and Henry College](#) ^[5] in Virginia before returning to Franklin in 1856 to begin a career as a merchant. At the outbreak of the [Civil War](#) ^[6], he enlisted as a private in Company H, Sixteenth North Carolina Regiment. Robinson soon became quartermaster sergeant and was commissioned captain of his company on 25 Apr. 1862. He served at the Battle of Seven Pines, where he was wounded, and at Second Manassas, Chantilly, and Antietam. On 12 Oct. 1864 Robinson married Alice L. Siler, by whom he became the father of three daughters and one son.

After the war he entered politics as a Democrat and soon rose to prominence as a staunch opponent of Republican Reconstruction policies. He won a seat in the state house of representatives in 1868 and was reelected three times in succession, serving as speaker during the sessions of 1872–74 and 1874–75. In 1876 and 1878 he was elected to the state senate and served as president of that body during both terms. After the election of Governor [Zebulon B. Vance](#) ^[7] to the U.S. Senate in 1879 and the consequent promotion of Lieutenant Governor [Thomas J. Jarvis](#) ^[8] to the governorship, Robinson became acting lieutenant governor. He won election to a full term in that office in 1880 as Jarvis's running mate, and at the expiration of his term in 1884 he was again elected to the lower house of the legislature. From 1 to 28 Sept. 1883, while Jarvis was out of the state, Robinson served as governor. He also was a trustee of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[9] from 1877 to 1886.

During his entire political career, Robinson was an ardent champion of the interests of western North Carolina and an unflinching promoter of the construction of the [Western North Carolina Railroad](#) ^[10]. In 1875 he served with Governor [Curtis H. Brogden](#) ^[11] and Robert F. Armfield on the commission that purchased the scandal-racked railroad for the state. In the 1876–77 session of the legislature, Robinson was a participant in the understanding that won eastern support for the construction of the road in return for western support for the county government act, which removed the election of county commissioners and justices of the peace from the people in order to prevent blacks from winning office in the eastern counties. In 1877 Robinson was named a director of the Western North Carolina Railroad by Governor Vance, and in 1885 he sponsored the bill that provided for completion of the road to its western terminus at Murphy, in [Cherokee County](#) ^[12].

In 1885, after the inauguration of President Grover Cleveland, Robinson was rewarded for his services to the [Democratic party](#) ^[13] with an appointment as special paymaster for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in order to arrange for the payment of a government annuity to the Winnebago Indians in Wisconsin. While engaged in this duty he contracted malaria and returned to North Carolina in 1887 to regain his health but instead died at his home in Franklin soon after his return.

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press. ^[28]

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