

John Caldwell Calhoun

(18 Mar 1782 – 31 Mar 1850)

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989

A Representative and a Senator from South Carolina and a Vice President of the United States; born near Calhoun Mills, Abbeville District (now Mount Carmel, McCormick County), S.C., March 18, 1782; attended the common schools and Willington Academy; was graduated from Yale College in 1804 and from Litchfield (Conn.) Law School in 1806; was admitted to the bar in 1807 and commenced practice in Abbeville, S.C.; also engaged in agricultural pursuits; member of the State house of representatives in 1808 and 1809; elected as a War Democrat to the 12th through 15th Congresses and served from March 4, 1811 to November 3, 1817, when he resigned; appointed Secretary of War and served from December 10, 1817 to March 3, 1825; elected Vice President of the United States in 1824; reelected in 1828 on the Jackson ticket and served from March 4, 1825, to December 28, 1832, when he resigned, having been elected to the United States Senate on December 12, 1832, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Robert Y. Hayne; reelected in 1834 and 1840 and served from December 29, 1832, until his resignation, effective March 3, 1843; appointed Secretary of State March 6, 1844, entered upon his duties April 1, 1844, and served until March 6, 1845; declined the offer of the English mission tendered by Presidents Polk and Adams; again elected to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Daniel E. Huger; reelected in 1846 and served from November 26, 1845, until his death in Washington, D.C., March 31, 1850, interment in St. Philip's Churchyard, Charleston, S.C.

Cousin of John Ewing Colhoun and Joseph Calhoun

John C. Calhoun became a member of Congress at the time of the War of 1812, Secretary of War under President Monroe, Vice President with John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. He was Secretary of State under President Tyler, and then for many years Senator from South Carolina.

Calhoun was born of Scottish parents on a frontier farm in Abbeville County, S.C. His father died when he was very young and he received little early education. It is said that he seldom laughed and had no sense of humor. In 1804 he graduated from Yale College with highest honors. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1807. Calhoun began law practice in Abbeville. In 1811 he married Floride Bouneau.

After a brief term in his state legislature, Calhoun was elected to Congress in 1811. Here, with young Henry Clay, he became a leader of the War Hawks, who were urging war with England.

In the early years of his political life he was an ardent nationalist who urged the use of wide national powers. He also favored a protective tariff, a national bank, and a strong army and navy. During the next 12 years his views changed and he became a strong champion of states' rights. In 1828 the cotton-growing states of the South, especially South Carolina, were furious at what they bitterly called the "tariff of abominations." They claimed it levied tribute on the South for the benefit of New England manufacturers. Calhoun wrote a paper called the 'South Carolina Exposition', in which he stated that the protective tariff of 1828 was unconstitutional. He argued also that a state has the constitutional rights to refuse to obey a law and to declare that law null and void within its limits. In 1832, South Carolina tried to put his idea of nullification into practice. Calhoun, who was vice-president at the time, resigned to enter the Senate and lead the fight against the president's policies. The stern and resolute attitude of Jackson, combined with Henry Clay's compromise tariff, prevented an armed clash. Calhoun and Jackson became bitter enemies.

To the end of his life Calhoun was untiring in defense of his beloved South. He became a strong defender of slavery and while Secretary of State under Tyler negotiated a treaty for the annexation of Texas to extend slave territory. In the debate on the Compromise of 1850 he made his last public

appearance. He was so ill that he had to be carried into the Senate chamber and so weak that his speech had to be read for him. Within a month, on March 31, 1850, he died.

The National Intelligencer, April 1, 1850

Death of Mr. Calhoun

Died, yesterday morning at his lodgings in this city, the Honorable John Caldwell Calhoun.

It is known to all of our readers that this distinguished Senator and citizen has been suffering during the whole winter under a menacing pulmonic affection, which, during the last eight or ten weeks, has, with only a few brief intervals confined him to his room. Thus gradually sinking, he expired yesterday morning between 7 and 8 o'clock.

Mr. Calhoun was born the 18th of March, 1782, and was therefore just turned of 68 years of age. More than forty years of his life were spent in public service, and nearly the whole of that period in the Legislative or Executive Departments of the General Government. With ample materials before us, we yet deny ourselves the satisfaction of entering into the particulars of his long and brilliant career, and eminent character, as that grateful duty will be performed more fitly today in the Senate, by hands more worthy of the task. Without trenching on that privilege, we may be permitted to say of the deceased, that few of our public men, since those of the revolutionary era, have filled a larger space in the public eye; few have acted a more important part on the stage of American politics; few have left a larger void in the public councils, and not one has descended to the tomb with a deeper devotion on the part of personal friends, or with a larger share of public admiration, than this illustrious Carolinian.

The National Intelligencer, Tuesday, April 2, 1850

Congress

There was no business transacted in either House of Congress yesterday, beyond the melancholy proceedings occasioned by the death of the distinguished Senator, John C. Calhoun, and the tributes paid to his character by the most eminent members in both Houses. These were solemn and impressive in the highest degree, and were listened to with the profoundest attention and interest by as many auditors as could find room in the galleries, lobbies, and doorways of both halls. The funeral will take place today.

The National Intelligencer, Wednesday, April 3, 1850

Funeral of the Hon. J.C. Calhoun

The two Houses of Congress were yesterday engaged in the performance of funeral rites over the remains of the Hon. John C. Calhoun, and the Senate chamber presented a solemn and deeply interesting aspect. The corpse of the deceased Statesman--enclosed in a metallic case, bearing the following simple inscription on the plate: "John C. Calhoun: born March 18, 1782; died March 31, 1850"--was placed on a bier in the center area, around which were grouped relatives and friends, amongst whom were a son of the deceased, the surviving Senator and the Representatives in Congress from South Carolina, and veteran statesman as pall-bearers, some of whom have been Mr. Calhoun's contemporaries during the many years he has been in the National Councils--Mr. Clay and Mr. Webster, Mr. Mangum and Mr. Cass, Mr. Berrien and Mr. King. The other members of the Senate, in two semi-circular rows of seats, enclosed the melancholy group.

The President of the United States was present, seated on the right of the Vice President, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives occupied a chair on his left. The Chaplains of the Senate and House of Representatives occupied the Secretary's desk, to the right and left of whom were the

Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House, and immediately in front were the Committee of Arrangements. The subordinate officers of the two Houses were in appropriate positions around the platform.

The Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States, and its officers, in their robes, and two of the Judges of the United States Court for the District of Columbia, were assigned seats in the chamber on the extreme left of the Presiding Officer, and the extensive Diplomatic Corps were on the right. The Members of the House of Representatives, with the Heads of Departments, occupied the residue of the body of the chamber, leaving the outer circle behind the bar for Officers of the Army and the Navy. Ex-Cabinet officers, Senators, Members of the House of Representatives, Mayor and Councils of Washington, Heads of Bureaus, and other civilians entitled to admission, were accommodated beneath the marble gallery and in the adjacent aisles.

The circular gallery was exclusively appropriated to ladies, leaving only the limited space in the marble gallery behind the Reporters for such male spectators as could gain admittance.

The Service performed was that of the Episcopal Church, of which the Chaplain to the Senate, the Rev. C.M. Butler, is a Minister. The ritual, commencing with "I am the Resurrection and the Life," was followed by a Sermon, brief but impressively appropriate, from Psalm 82, 6 and 7: "I have said ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High. But ye shall die like men and fall like one of the princes."

The funeral cortege left the Senate chamber for the Congressional Burial Ground, where the body is for the present deposited, in the following order:

1. The Chaplains of both Houses of Congress
2. Physicians who attended the deceased
3. Committee of Arrangements
 - Mr. Mason Mr. Dodge of Wisconsin
 - Mr. Davis of Miss. Mr. Dickinson
 - Mr. Atchison Mr. Greene
4. Pall-Bearers
 - Mr. Mangum Mr. Cass
 - Mr. Clay Mr. King
 - Mr. Webster Mr. Berrien
5. The family and friends of the deceased
6. The Senator and Representatives from the State of South Carolina's mourners
7. The Sergeant-at-Arms of the Senate of the United States
8. The Senate of the United States, preceded by the Vice President of the United States and their Secretary
9. The Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Representatives
10. The House of Representatives, preceded by their Speaker and Clerk
11. The President of the United States (Taylor)
12. The Heads of Departments
13. The Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States and its officers
14. The Diplomatic Corps
15. The Diplomatic Corps
16. Judges of the United States
17. Officers of the Executive Departments
18. Officers of the Army and Navy
19. The Mayor and Councils of Washington
20. Citizens and Strangers.

"Some when they die, die all; their mould'ring clay
"Is but an emblem of their memories;
"The space quite closes up through which they passed:
"That some have liv'd, they leave a mark behind
"Shall pluck the shining age from vulgar time
"And give it whole to late posterity."