

Biographies of western delegates who attended the 1861 Virginia Secession Convention were transcribed by undergraduate students enrolled in Dr. Billy Joe Peyton's Fall 2010 "Introduction to Public History" class at West Virginia State University.

By Jack Stephenson

John S. Carlile (Harrison)

JOHN SNYDER CARLILE of Harrison County (now in West Virginia), was born of Scotch-Irish parents in Winchester, Virginia, on December 16, 1817. His father died while he was still a small boy, and he was educated at home by his mother. He became a merchant, but he soon turned from business to the law and began the practice of his profession at Beverley, Randolph County (now in West Virginia). He was a member of the Virginia Senate from 1847 to 1851, and he was also a member of the Convention of 1850-1851. Carlile moved to Clarksburg in Harrison County, and he was living there when, in 1854 he was elected to the federal House of Representatives, in which he served from 1855 until 1857. His pro-Unionist sentiments, which were shared by many of his constituents, won him election as delegate from Harrison County to the Virginia State Convention.

He was one of the most vigorous spokesmen in that body for Virginia's continuance in the Union, and his efforts drew fierce criticism from such advocates of secession as the *Richmond Examiner*. Carlile voted against secession on April 4 and again on April 17. He then returned to Clarksburg, and his pro-Unionist activities led to the calling of the Wheeling (or Restored Government) Convention, and he was a member of that Convention.

He was elected to the federal Congress from "loyal" Virginia but before he could take his seat in the House of Representatives, the Wheeling Convention elected him to the United States Senate. Carlile became a member of the Senate Committee on Territories, and in that capacity he helped guide the legislation which resulted in the establishment of the state of West Virginia. He served in the Senate until 1865. He was defeated for reelection and returned to private life. Carlile died at Clarksburg on October 24, 1878.

Sources: DAB, III, 493; BDAC, p. 662; PMWV, pp. 207-208; RGA, p. 356.