

Chester Ashley

(1 Jun 1790 - 29 Apr 1848)

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989

A Senator from Arkansas; born in Westfield, Mass., June 1, 1790; moved with his parents to Hudson, New York during infancy; attended the common schools and was graduated from Williams College, Williamstown, Mass., and the Litchfield (Conn.) Law School; was admitted to the bar in 1817 and commenced the practice of law in Hudson, New York; moved to Edwardsville, Ill., in 1818, to St. Louis, Mo., in 1819, and to Little Rock, Ark. in 1820, where he permanently established himself in the practice of law; elected as a Democrat to the U.S. Senate in 1844 to fill the vacancy caused by the death of William S. Fulton; reelected in 1846 and served from November 8, 1844, until his death in Washington, D.C. April 29, 1848; interment in Mt. Holly, Little Rock, Ark.

The National Intelligencer, Monday, May 1, 1848

IN THE SENATE

After a devout and impressive prayer from the Rev. Mr. Slicer, the Journal was read, when--

Mr. Borland, of Arkansas, rose and announced to the Senate, in feeling and appropriate terms, the lamented death of his colleague in that body, the Hon. Chester Ashley, who died in this city subsequent to the adjournment of the Senate on Saturday last..

Mr. Borland accompanied this painful annunciation with a lengthened eulogium of the deceased, in which he dwelt with much pride on the purity of his private life and the value of his public services. Of this address our Reporter took no notes, and failed also to obtain a copy of the original. We therefore cannot give it. When he concluded--

Mr. Breese rose and addressed the Senate as follows:

Mr. President: In rising to second the motion of the honorable Senator who has just made the solemn announcement of the death of one of our honorable associates--an event alike startling and sudden--I may be permitted, I hope, without intrusion, to add a few words to the beautiful eulogium he has so feelingly pronounced. I fear, in so doing, I shall disturb the harmony of its language whilst it is yet vibrating on the ear, and interrupt that generous flow of feeling it has so universally inspired. Yet, sir, there are circumstances in the life of the deceased, and of him who now addresses you, to which it may not be improper on this mournful occasion to advert, and which prompt me to offer a slight tribute to his memory. It is, sir, thirty years since we met for the first time in the then far-off wilderness of the West, he my senior by many years, then a practicing lawyer, I a student, preparing for that honorable profession; both buoyant with hope, with a bright and promising world before us, and both entering it with an ardor and a determination to win a name. Professional business, in the winter of 1819-20, called the deceased, temporarily, as he thought, to Arkansas, from which he did not return. Common report, which reached the friends he had left in Illinois, told them of the high standing he had acquired at the Bar of that State, and that he had, by a proper exercise of his talents, amassed a large fortune. I never saw him again until I met him here as an associate in this chamber, at the second session of the twenty-eighth Congress. Our acquaintance was at once renewed, and we had much to speak of the varied yet similar fortunes a quarter of a century had achieved for us. In the next Congress we were appointed on two of the most important committees of this body. We lived together at the same house, and an intimacy was established mutually cordial and sincere. Knowing him as I did, Mr. President, I may be permitted to say, that to every task to which he was called he brought to its accomplishment untiring industry, great research, and an unflagging zeal seldom surpassed. His talents

were of no common order; and he was never found unprepared upon any subject committed to his charge; and with six years' service still before him, who knows to what high honors he might have attained? The character of his mind was investigating; and, aided by a pleasing manner always courteous, and often energetic, he was enabled to make his views well understood by the Senate, and to produce a marked effect upon its deliberations. As a public man, sir, he was valuable, and gave certain promise of great usefulness and distinction.

In his disposition the deceased was eminently social. His suavity of manner, his unruffled temper, his freedom from irritation by all those little annoyances that disturb the pathway of our lives, was a subject of common remark to those who were intimately associated with him. But it was in the family circle he shone most conspicuous--as a husband, as a father, as one connected with those delicate relations of life in which humanity is exhibited in its most captivating form. In all of these, sir, he was a model and an example, lavishing all the tenderness of his nature upon those dear objects of his love, who returned it with the most sincere and devoted affection, and to whom it was permitted to receive his last sigh at that dread moment which must come upon us all. How terrible is this blow to them, who but a few days ago were all joy and gladness, now sobbing in anguish over his inanimate remains, conscious, painfully conscious, they are never more to feel the pulsations of that heart which best alone in love for them; and, as they take their lonely way back to their home, how agonizing will be the thought that they have parted forever with the idol of their hearts--their protector, their father, their dearest friend, and that his place at their once happy board is to be vacant forever!

How quick, Mr. President, is the passage from the Senate to the grave! How fleeting and transitory the hopes and promises of this life! Anod how full of warning should be this sad event, so sudden and so startling--prompting us to recur often to the injunction, "Be ye also ready!" for no one of us can tell at what moment that awful summons may break upon our ear! No one can tell when the dread messenger may appear--

"Leaves have their time to fall
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath--
And stars to set--but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death!"

When Mr. B. resumed his seat, the usual resolutions of respect for the memory of the deceased were adopted, and the Senate adjourned to attend the funeral tomorrow at 12 o'clock.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

...the full possession of his intellect to the latest moment, but with a heart full of solicitude for his bereaved family, he died reconciled with God and the world, calm and resigned. He died in the midst of friends that were attached to him, and his family that worshipped him. Blessed with the kind offices of a Christian ministry, he was calmed in the hour of his last sleep with the elevated thoughts, the pure and soothing consolations of the Christian religion. He died, sire, whilst yet at the summit of a just ambition, whilst yet in the enjoyment of the proudest honors to which an American and a patriot could aspire. Happy, sir, are these circumstances; few can be favored with a death like this.

He was born in Westfield, Massachusetts, and, when less than a year old, was taken with his father and family, who removed to Hudson, New York. He was educated to the legal profession, and, at the age of twenty-seven, emigrated to Illinois.

He afterwards married in Missouri, and in 1819 removed to and settled in the then Territory of Arkansas. Urged by a spirit of enterprise sustained alone by a firm and active intellect, he fixed his habitation in a region whose boundaries were unexplored, whose lands were an unbroken wilderness, whose limits were filled with strange and savage tribes, and of which legend and tradition could tell but

little. There, sir, without wealth, acquaintance, or resources, at opening manhood, near thirty years ago, he cast his lot. He closed his life, sir, a Senator.

The National Intelligencer, May 2, 1848

Obituary

A message was received from the Senate announcing the decease of the Hon. Chester Ashley and the proceedings of the Senate thereon. The resolutions of the Senate having been read -- Mr. Johnson, of Arkansas, rose and addressed the House as follows:

Mr. Speaker: The message just received from the Senate announces to this House the melancholy intelligence that death has again visited the halls of our National Council. The honorable, Chester Ashley, late a Senator of the State of Arkansas, is no more.

He is the second Senator, in the brief existence of Arkansas as a State of this Union, who has died, in the maturity of years which promised wisdom and usefulness, in the full vigor of a sound constitution, and the enjoyment of a general good health that promised long life.

He died, sir, on Saturday last, the 29th of April, at two o'clock in the afternoon, after a short but painfully afflicting illness. Conscious of his approaching dissolution he made the fullest preparation. Granted to him, as it was, to enjoy the full possession of his intellect to the latest moment, but with a heart full of solicitude for his bereaved family, he died reconciled with God and the world, calm and resigned. He died in the midst of friends that were attached to him, and his family that worshipped him.

The National Intelligencer, Tuesday, May 2, 1848

Order of Procession For the Funeral of the Hon. Chester Ashley, A Senator of the United States from the State of Arkansas

The Committee of Arrangements, pall-bearers, and mourners will attend at Blackwell's Hotel, the late residence of the deceased, at 11 o'clock a.m. this day; at which time the corpse will be removed, in charge of the Committee of Arrangements, attended by the Sergeant-at-arms of the Senate, to the Senate chamber, where divine service will be performed.

At 12 o'clock m. the funeral will move from the Senate chamber to the place of interment, in the following order:

1. The Chaplains of both Houses of Congress
2. Physicians who attended the deceased
3. Committee of Arrangements
 - Mr. Hannegan Mr. Butler
 - Mr. Greene Mr. Dayton
 - Mr. Houston Mr. Mangum
4. Pall-Bearers
 - Mr. Bagby C Mr. Breese
 - Mr. Davis, of Mass. O Mr. Hale
 - Mr. Johnson, of Md. R Mr. Atchison
 - P
 - S
 - E
5. The family and friends of the deceased
6. The Senator and Representatives from the State of Arkansas as 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 of the United States, preceded by their Speaker and Clerk
11. The President of the United States (Polk)
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. Judges of the United States
16. Officers of the Executive Departments
17. Officers of the Army and Navy at the seat of Government
18. The Mayor of Washington
19. Citizens and Strangers

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