

## William Armisted Burwell

(15 Mar 1780 – 16 Feb 1821)

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### Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989

A Representative from Virginia; born near Boydton, Meckleburg County, Virginia, on March 15, 1780; was graduated from William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Va.,; moved to Franklin County in 1802; elected a member of the State house of delegates; private secretary to President Jefferson; elected as a Democrat to the 9th Congress to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Christopher Clark; reelected to the 10th through 16th Congresses and served from December 1, 1806 until his death in Washington D.C., February 16, 1821; interment in Congressional Cemetery.

*The National Intelligencer, Saturday, February 17, 1821*

We have the pain of announcing the death of another Member of Congress. The Hon. William A. Burwell, a Member of the House of Representatives from the state of Virginia, breathed his last about two o'clock yesterday, after an illness of two or three weeks.

Though not much older than forty years, Mr. Burwell had been a member of the House of Representatives for fifteen successive years, and was nearly the oldest member of the House. He was a man of sterling integrity, which passed untouched, even by the breath of slander, the ordeal of this life. As a politician, he was virtuous, and he was consistent: As a friend he was beloved and admired. To his late wife, by whose side is about to be laid, he was an exemplary consort, and to his only son a most affectionate father. He retained his senses to the end, and almost his last words were, that he had no reason to fear the approach of death.

*From the Senate*

A message having been received from the House of Representatives, announcing the death of the Hon. Wm. A. Burwell, a member of that House from the state of Virginia --  
On motion of Mr. Pleasants, it was

Resolved, unanimously, That the members of the Senate will attend the funeral of the Hon. Wm. A. Burwell, late a member of the House of Representatives from the state of Virginia, tomorrow, at 10 o'clock, a.m.; and, as a testimony of respect for the memory of the deceased, will go into mourning, and wear crape for thirty days.

On motion of Mr. Barbour, The Senate adjourned to Monday.

*From the House*

Mr. Nelson, of Virginia rose, and announced to the House that his colleague, Mr. Burwell, had just departed this life. He therefore moved that the bill should be laid on the table. Which motion was unanimously agreed to.

Mr. Nelson then stated, that it was the wish of his late colleague, that his remains should be carried to Baltimore for interment, and that it was proposed to move the corpse from the lodging of the deceased at 10 o'clock tomorrow.

On motion of the Mr. Nelson of Va. the house then unanimously came to the usual resolutions, to wear crape for thirty days in testimony of their respect for the deceased, and to attend the funeral from the Capitol at 10 o'clock tomorrow.

The following gentlemen were appointed to superintend the funeral ceremonies:

Messrs.	Nelson, of Va.	McCoy
	Randolph	Tyler
	Newton	A. Smyth
	Barbour	

And the House then adjourned to 10 o'clock tomorrow, at which hour the Funeral will take place from the Representative Chamber.

*The National Intelligencer, Monday, February 19*

The House of Representatives met, on Saturday, at 10 o'clock, for the purpose of paying the last respect to the remains of Mr. Burwell, lately a Member of that body.

The corpse of the deceased was brought into the Hall and rested in front of the Speaker's Hall, and rested in front of the Speaker's chair. The Senate, preceded by its President and Secretary, having come into the Hall, and the President of the Senate being seated at the right hand of the Speaker of the House, an appropriate exhortation was delivered by the Rev. Mr. Campbell, and a prayer by the Rev. Dr. Ryland, the Chaplains to Congress; when the corpse was taken from the Hall, attended by the pallbearers, and by the Representatives from the state of Virginia as mourners. Next followed the Sergeant at Arms of the House; then the House of Representatives, preceded by its Speaker and Clerk; next, the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate, followed by the Senate.

The pall-bearers were Messrs. Parker, of Mass.; Wood of N.Y.; Bateman of N.J.; Balwin of Penn.; Smith of N.C.; and Robertson of Kentucky.

The procession attended the hearse some distance on the road towards Baltimore, and then returned, leaving the remains of the deceased in the hands of his friends, to be conveyed to that city.

Immediately on returning to its Chamber, the House of Representatives adjourned. The Senate did not sit on Saturday.

Note: Mr. Burwell's wife died in Washington, D.C., December 17, 1816 and was removed to Baltimore for burial in her family's plot.

### **Dictionary of American Biography**

Legislator. b. in Mecklenburgh county, Va., 15 March 1780; d. in Washington, D.C., 21 Feb. 1821. He was graduated from William and Mary college, and in the following year removed to Franklin county, Va., which he subsequently represented in the legislature. He was residing on his plantation in 1804, a wealthy tobacco planter, when he was invited by President Jefferson to become his private secretary. Accepting the offer, Mr. Burwell removed to Washington, where he remained throughout Jefferson's administration. He was also elected a member of the ninth congress as a Democrat, and seven times re-elected, serving from 1 Dec., 1806, until his death. While in congress Mr. Burwell handed to Josiah Quincy an old manuscript account of Bacon's rebellion that had been preserved in the family, with the request that it might be preserved in the archives of the Massachusetts historical society, there being at that time no similar association in Virginia. From this record Bancroft afterward wrote his account of the first American rebellion. The Virginia Burwells were descended in one line from the Bacons, the estates originally intended by President Nathaniel Bacon for his nephew, Nathaniel, "the Rebel," having been bequeathed to the niece of the former, Mrs. Burwell, of Gloucester county, Va. Mr. Burwell enjoyed the friendship of Mr. Jefferson, who wrote for his tomb the following epitaph: "Died at his post in Congress; his Body here, his Spirit with its Kindred--the Just, the Good, the Beloved of Men."

Family Notes:

1. Major Lewis Burwell (Carter's Creek, settled 1640, m. Lucy Higginson)
2. Major Lewis Burwell (m. Abigail Smith, b. 1632-d. 11/13/1672)

His mother--Rebecca (Belinda) Burwell (b. 4/15/1750), cousin of Nathaniel Burwell (son of Carter Burwell, grandson of Robert King Carter), declined Thomas Jefferson's proposal of marriage.

Wm. A., born May 15, 1780. Member of Congress, died in Washington Feb. 21, 1821. Married Miss Letitia McCreery of Baltimore. He left on son, Wm. M., editor in New Orleans who married Frances O. Steptoe of Bedford Co., Virginia. Their issue:

1. Letitia M.
2. Kate, married Dr. Thomas Bowyer
3. Fanny m. James Breckenridge of Roanoke, Va., d. 1872
4. Rosa m. Dr. Todd of Owensburg, Ky.

Parents of Letitia McCreery: William McCreery, b. Sept. 23, 1785, merchant, m. Letitia Nelson, daughter of Robert Nelson of Fells Point-merchant.