

## John Henry Harmanson

(15 Jan 1803 – 24 Oct 1850)

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

A Representative from Louisiana; born in Norfolk, Va., January 15, 1803; pursued classical studies and was graduated from Jefferson College, Washington, Miss.; moved to Avoyelles Parish, La., in 1830 and engaged in agricultural pursuits; studied law; was admitted to the bar and practiced; member of the State senate in 1844; elected as a Democrat to the 29th through 31st Congresses and served from March 4, 1845 until his death in New Orleans, La., October 24, 1850; interment in Moreau Plantation Cemetery, Pointe Coupee Parish, La.

### *The National Intelligencer, October 29, 1850*

#### **Death of a Member of Congress**

A telegraph dispatch from New Orleans says: Hon. John H. Harmanson, Representative in Congress from the 3d district of this state died here on Friday last.

#### *Obituary*

Mr. Morse rose and addressed the House as follows:

Mr. Speaker: Since the termination of the last session (but a few weeks since) death has been busy with the members of this body; and it becomes my duty to announce formally to this House, what is known to all, that my late friend and colleague, John H. Harmanson, is now no more.

Our acquaintance, which commenced with the 29th Congress, soon ripened into friendship, continued without interruption, and terminated with his death in the city of New Orleans in October last. Thither, accompanied by his wife, he repaired, in the vain hope that the kind attentions and medical skill of his friend and relative, Dr. Davezac, might arrest the disease which had deprived his constituents of his valuable services during most of the last protracted session of Congress.

Mr. Harmanson was born in 1803, in the borough of Norfolk in the State of Virginia. His father removed with his family, while John was but eleven years of age, to the parish of Rapides, in the State of Louisiana. His death, a few years after, threw upon his son at an early age the cares and responsibilities of a family, and his affection and devotion to their welfare is often spoken of by those who knew him at the time. Subsequently he removed to the parish of Ouachita, where he read law for a time with his early friend, Gen. Downs, (now one of the Senators from Louisiana;) but it is believed he renounced the profession partly from a disrelish, but more from a love of an active life and the labor of a planter, to which he was accustomed, and which was more congenial to his industrious and energetic habits.

He located himself in the parish of Avoyelles, where he followed diligently and successfully the happy life of a cotton planter. His sterling integrity and great information upon all political subjects soon attracted the attention of his fellow-citizens, and he was often solicited to become their representative, but the growing demands of a large family and his fondness for rural life induced him to decline. It was not until seven or eight years ago that he consented to become a candidate for the State Senate, to which place he was elected by a triumphant majority. After two years' service in that body, he was elected to the twenty-ninth Congress, and continued uninterruptedly to represent his district up to the period of his death.

As an evidence of the estimation in which he was held as a man by those who knew him well, I need only state that his district, being also the residence of the late Chief Magistrate, while it gave to General Taylor a majority of several hundred, re-elected Mr. Harmanson by seven hundred majority. His

pretensions had already been favorably canvassed throughout the State, as the next Democratic candidate for Governor.

John Harmanson possessed some remarkable traits of character, and among the most striking was a profound veneration for truth. He took nothing upon trust; popular errors and prejudices were discarded, and vanished before him like mist before the sun. In politics he was always a great way in advance of his party on every question of reform. While others hesitated, he was among the earliest champions of universal suffrage, free-trade, and the elective judiciary.

When it was proposed to amend the constitution of our State, many were deterred from advocating a convention, because they feared that the independence of the judiciary would be endangered by limiting their term of office. This was all the reform effected in that department by the convention, but we in Louisiana all recollect how Mr. Harmanson was denounced as a radical, an ultra, because he contended that the judges, like all other public officers, should be responsible to, and elected by the people.

To show the correctness of his views, although but five years have elapsed since the adoption of the new constitution, a bill expressive of the sense of the Senate in favor of an elective judiciary has passed that body unanimously.

Such was Mr. Harmanson's love of the right that I am satisfied that he abandoned the law, because he feared it might at some time impose upon him the necessity of advocating what in his conscience he might not deem to be the cause of truth and justice.

He made up for the deficiencies of an early education by diligent reading, and I may now say of him dead, what living his modesty would have forbidden, that no man with whom I have been associated in the last four Congresses better understood the subjects of the revenue and the finances of his country.

Such, sir, is a brief and very imperfect sketch of the character of our deceased colleague. We have lost a firm and devoted friend; our State has lost an honest and patriotic public servant. His family--but who can estimate that loss I forbear intruding into that sanctuary of grief, whose light and ornament has been forever extinguished. If anything but time and religion can moderate the anguish of those he leaves behind, it may in some measure solace their grief to know that his memory will long be cherished by all who knew him.

Representatives! this is the third impressive lesson which has been read to us. May we not regard these potent warnings as rebukes to that unchecked self-confidence in which we are over-apt to indulge. May we so use our time and talents as to be always ready!

Henceforward let it be seen that statesmen have higher and nobler aims than the indulgence of the petty jealousies and wranglings which are too often manifested here. Let us keep in view the noble sentiment of that bard who wrote "not for a day, but for all time."

"Gentlemen, the time of life is short. To use that shortness basely, 'twere too long."

Sir, I move the following resolutions:

Resolved, That this House has received with deep sensibility the intelligence of the death of the Hon. J.H. Harmanson, a member of this House from the State of Louisiana, which took place at the city of New Orleans on the 25th of October last.

Resolved, That, as a testimony of respect for the memory of the deceased, the members and officers of this House will wear the usual badge of mourning for thirty days.

Resolved, That the Clerk of this House be directed to communicate a copy of these proceedings to the family of the deceased.

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Resolved, That the Clerk be directed to communicate a copy of these resolutions to the Senate; and that, as a further testimony of respect to the memory of the Hon. J.H. Harmanson, this House do now adjourn.

The question being on the adoption of the resolutions--

Mr. Bayly rose and said: Mr. Speaker: The warm regard I entertained for the lamented dead must be my apology for detaining you a moment while I add a word to what already has been so well said by his colleague. His family were from my district, where now reside many of his relatives and friends. This circumstance brought me into intimate acquaintance with him soon after he took his seat on this floor. His ancestors were among the early settlers of Virginia, and from the time of their arrival in the colony they have always been characterized by great respectability and worth. No blot rests upon their escutcheon.

Mr. Harmanson was not born to wealth; but he carved out for himself, by humble toil in his early life, a fortune and a name. He was taken by his father to Louisiana in his youth, where his sterling qualities soon won for him the confidence of the community, and finally wealth and distinction. He possessed in a high degree those attributes which ennoble our nature. Intelligence, frankness, integrity, and courage were his. His loss to his country is great; to his family it is irreparable. In their bereavement they have the heartfelt sympathy of many of the most respectable of my constituents--and, God knows, of their Representative--as they have, I doubt not, of all of us.

The question was then taken on the adoption of the resolutions, and they were unanimously agree to; And the house adjourned.