

Josiah Stoddard Johnston

(24 Nov 1784 – 13 May 1833)

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989

A Representative and a Senator from Louisiana; born in Salisbury, Litchfield County, Conn., November 24, 1784; moved with his father to Kentucky in 1790; sent to New Haven, Conn., in 1796 to attend primary school; was graduated from Transylvania University, Lexington, Ky., in 1805; studied law; was admitted to the bar and commenced practice in Alexandria, La. (then the Territory of Orleans); elected to the first Territorial legislature in 1805 and served until the adoption of the State constitution in 1812; appointed major in the Territorial militia June 6, 1809; colonel of militia in 1814 and organized a regiment for the defense of New Orleans, but reached the city after the battle; engaged in agricultural pursuits; member of the State house of representatives in 1812; State district judge 1812-1821; elected as a Democrat to the 17th Congress (March 4, 1821-March 3, 1823); unsuccessful candidate for reelection in 1822 to the 18th Congress; appointed to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of James Brown; elected and reelected and served from January 15, 1824, until his death, caused by an explosion on the steamboat "Lioness," on the Red River in Louisiana, May 19, 1833; interment in Rapides Cemetery, Pineville, La.

The National Intelligencer, Monday, June 10, 1833

We announce today an event which has stricken our own hearts with grief, and will convey a pang to thousands of bosoms throughout the Union: We allude to the untimely death, of Josiah Stoddard Johnston, the able and honored Senator of the State of Louisiana. The circumstances of this sad event, as disclosed in the account taken from the New Orleans papers, are so shocking as make the heart sicken at their recital, and are calculated to add to the poignancy of the general grief for the loss of so sterling a patriot, so upright a citizen, so accomplished a gentleman, so kind a friend.

If it would at all alleviate the regrets of our readers at this melancholy catastrophe, we could here remind them of the honorable station which he held, the prospect of a long and prosperous life, which lay before him, to be spent in the society of a most interesting and devotedly attached family; and we could moralize, from this sad event, on the deceitfulness of all earthly hope, and the transitoriness of all human blessings.

But, we refrain. To other and abler hands we relinquish the task of doing justice to the memory of the deceased, and, as far as possible, of consoling those who mourn his loss, by a proper tribute to his eminent private virtues and his exemplary public character.

The National Intelligencer, July 12, 1833

The Late Senator Johnston

From the New Orleans Argus on May 27

The citizens of New Orleans on Saturday last received a shock to their feelings, of which it is hoped they may be long spared the repetition. We give, in another column, the particulars of the loss of the Lioness steamboat on Red River. It will be seen what a frightful loss of valuable lives this unfortunate accident has occasioned. The death of Josiah S. Johnston, particularly, has caused a great sensation. It is not surprising. His loss is a loss to the State of Louisiana, which she will not easily repair. It will be difficult for her to replace in the Senate of the United States his talent, and still more difficult to replace

the influence acquired there by him--the result of sound talent, amiable manners, and great honesty of purpose.

Mr. Johnston was a native of Connecticut, but was taken in early infancy by his father to Kentucky. He received his education in the latter State, and emigrated to Louisiana at the close of the year 1804, or the commencement of 1805. His whole life since, with a few short intervals, has been spent in the public service. He served in the first Territorial Legislature which was convened in New Orleans, and he continued a leading and efficient member of that body until Louisiana was admitted into the Union. Immediately after the organization of the State Government he accepted an important office in the judiciary, and filled it with credit and usefulness, until he was elected to the House of Representatives of the United States. He continued to serve as a member of that body for two Congresses, and after a short interval was selected by the Legislature for the office of Senator in Congress, and there he has since remained; a period, if the writer mistakes not, of eleven years.

We have not the time to enumerate important measures connected with the prosperity of this State, of which he was either the promoter, or the ardent and efficient supporter. It is less necessary; for his public services are known to all. Those who only knew him as a public man will regret his loss. Those who knew him intimately will mourn it. It will be long again before they can meet with the same warm heart and cool head--the same absence of, and contempt for, profession and pretence; and the same ready performance of all the duties which friendship imposed.

The National Intelligencer, July 16, 1833

Notice of Mr. Senator Johnston

From the New England Magazine For July

The melancholy tidings reached us about a fortnight since, of the shocking death of Mr. Senator Johnston, of Louisiana. The circumstances of this most distressing event, as related in the newspapers, are substantially as follows: The steamboat *Lioness*, on her way from Alexandria, on the Red River, to Natchitoches, blew up, on the morning of the 19th of May, about daylight, and as the boat was passing the Rigolet Bon Dieu. Three successive explosions, following each other with great rapidity, were heard at a considerable distance. The fore cabin, the deck above the boiler (which in the Western steamboats is placed on the main deck forward, towards the bow of the vessel,) and the hold under the boiler, were scattered in fragments over the water. Many of the passengers, who were thrown from the boat, saved themselves, by laying hold of these fragments. In about two minutes after the explosion, the hull of the boat sunk, leaving a portion of the ladies' cabin floating on the surface. Several gentlemen and all the ladies who were passengers in the boat, were saved in this part of the wreck. The disaster is said to have been occasioned by a quantity of gunpowder, which had been shipped in the boat, and which was ignited by a candle taken into the hold by two of the crew. Among the passengers severely wounded or bruised, was Mr. Edward D. White, Representative of the New Orleans district in Congress. Of those who perished, was Mr. Josiah S. Johnston, one of the Senators of the United States from Louisiana.

The loss of this gentleman is justly to be accounted a public calamity. He sustained, in the Congress of the United States, a reputation for intelligence, candor, and probity, not surpassed by that of any other member. His death, in the prime of life, and in the meridian of his usefulness, by a most distressing casualty, and at a distance from his family, make it an occurrence, which cannot but strike the public mind, and must be regarded by his friends in every part of the Union with the most painful emotion. The following brief outline of his active and useful career, will apprise those who were unacquainted with him of the extent of the loss which the public has suffered from this most unexpected and distressing event.

Mr. Josiah Stoddard Johnston was a native of Connecticut. At the age of nineteen or twenty he removed, with his father, the late Dr. Johnston, of that State, to the neighborhood of Maysville, where

his father continued to reside, till his decease the last year. Mr. Johnston's professional education was received in Kentucky; but after a short time passed there, he resolved to enter on the wide field of liberal adventure, which was opening in the southwestern part of the Union. After a short time spent at Natchez, he determined to repair to the Red River country, where he established himself at Alexandria, in the parish of Rapides, in the profession of the law. Nothing could seem more uninviting than the state of society, which then existed in this part of the country. The population consisted of a remnant of Spanish colonists, and of adventurers from the United States. The neighborhood of the Spanish frontier rendered it a stopping place for many persons, whose relations to society, in the old States, were such as to make it very convenient for them to be able, at any moment to escape into a foreign jurisdiction. The new government was, as yet, scarcely organized; and, in a population of this description, could derive no strength from that public opinion, which is the best support of all governments. Something very near a state of nature accordingly prevailed, with very little borrowed from civilization but its vices. Fatal quarrels were continually happening. The neighborhood was distracted by feuds of the most embittered character. Affrays in the streets were of constant occurrence, and duels not less so. Everybody went armed; and life was too easily taken to be a high account. Where life is so little regarded, manners of course are wild and reckless.

Such was the population, in which Mr. Johnston, a young New Englander, established himself at the age of two or three and twenty, in the practice of the law,

The National Intelligencer, July 16, 1833

We observe that in the sketch of the life of Senator Johnston, he is said to have married the daughter of Dr. Sibley of Mass. Of that state Dr. Sibley was we presume a native but for many years preceding his emigration to Louisiana, he had been an inhabitant of Fayetteville, in the state of North Carolina.