

## Thomas J. Rusk

(5 Dec 1803 – 29 Jul 1857)

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

A Senator from Texas; born in Pendleton District, South Carolina, December 5, 1803; completed preparatory studies; studied law; was admitted to the bar and commenced practice in Georgia; moved to Nacogdoches, Texas in 1835; delegate to the convention which declared for the independence of Texas, March 21, 1836; first Secretary of War of the new Republic; at the Battle of San Jacinto took command of the forces after General Houston was wounded and retained command until October 1836 when he resumed his duties as Secretary of War; member of the 2nd Congress of the Republic of Texas; Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, 1838-1842; appointed brigadier general of militia of the Republic of Texas in 1843; president of the convention that confirmed the annexation of Texas to the United States in 1845 upon the admission of Texas as a State into the Union was elected as a Democrat to the United States Senate; reelected in 1851 and 1857 and served from February 21, 1846 until his death; was elected President pro tempore of the Senate March 14, 1857, in the special session of the Senate; died in Nacogdoches, Texas, July 29, 1857; interment in Oak Grove Cemetery.

*The Evening Star, August 12, 1857*

### **Death of Senator Rusk, of Texas**

We have intelligence of this sad event; by a gentleman who left Nacogdoches, the late residence of Gen. Rusk, on the 30th ult. He arrived on the Joseph Holden, from Alexandria, yesterday, and has called in to tell us that he was present at the funeral of Gen. Rusk on that day.

It is more painful to add, that Gen. Rusk committed suicide, by shooting himself through the head with a rifle on the 29th.

The event caused great consternation and grief. The town was clothed in mourning for the loss of this distinguished man, under such terrible circumstances. No cause is assigned for the dreadful deed, and we shall wait with intense anxiety for a development of the causes which overthrew so fine a mind, and broke down so lofty a courage, as have through life made Thomas J. Rusk a man of mark and promise. There are few men in the whole Union more widely esteemed, or with fairer prospects of advancement to the highest posts of ambition. To the South and Southwest, he was a true, outspoken, earnest, indefatigable, laboring friend, and his death will be their great loss. We have neither words nor space to enlarge upon the theme. The news is too sudden and startling and there is no reason to hope that it is not too sadly true. -- N.O. Picayune, Aug. 4th.

*The Evening Star, August 13, 1857*

### **The Death of Senator Rusk**

The extra which follows, from the Nacogdoches (Texas) Chronicle of July 30th, confirms the melancholy news of the death of Senator Rusk:

Gen. Rusk has, ever since the death of his lady, suffered under a mental depression, which, at times, bore him down beneath its weight. He has, to a great extent, secluded himself from society, and lately that despondency has been more marked and apparent to those familiar with him. A severe illness, from which he was just recovering, had prostrated him for weeks, and he was suffering greatly from a rising on the back of his neck.

On yesterday evening, about two o'clock, his family, hearing the report of a gun and the fall of a body, ran to the spot, and found him lying dead upon the ground, behind the gallery at the back of the house, with a rifle under him. A coroner's jury was summoned, from whose verdict we extract the following:

"The cause of his death was a gun-shot (rifle) wound on the forepart of the head, inflicted from a rifle gun held in his own hands and discharged by himself."

No further clue can be given to this mystery. No papers or writings of the same day have been found, except a letter addressed to a gentleman in New Orleans, ordering a tombstone for his wife with this inscription: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Let the people mourn the loss of a man who on the field of battle, and in the councils of the State and nation, has proved himself to be worthy the proud place already accorded him the affections of the people.

A duplicate of this extra, (says the New Orleans Picayune,) sent us by a correspondent in Nacogdoches, contains the following hasty postscript:

"An inventory of all his property was found in a portfolio, and the value of the same divided by the number of his children. He was buried this evening with masonic honors. An obituary address was delivered by the Hon. W.B. Ochiltree, which will appear in the next Chronicle, along with the full evidence in the matter."

*The Picayune adds:*

"These comprise all the circumstances that have reached us of Gen. Rusk's death. They betoken premeditation, and show a disturbed and disordered condition of mind. Great, indeed, must have been the afflictions, and sore the trials, which could drive into such a state of despair a man of heart so brave, and understanding so solid, and a temper so serene, as were those of Senator Rusk."