

Lyon, Francis Strother ^[1]

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by Buck Yearn, 1991

25 Feb. 1800–31 Dec. 1882

Francis Strother Lyon, lawyer, congressman, and bank commissioner, was born in Stokes County ^[2]. His father was James Lyon, a Virginian who had moved to North Carolina and become a prosperous tobacco planter; his mother was Behethel and Gaines Lyon, the daughter of Revolutionary ^[3] soldier James Gaines of Moore County ^[4]. After attending the local schools, Francis, at age seventeen, went to live with his uncle, who was an Indian agent in St. Stephens, Ala. His excellent penmanship gained him work as a bank clerk, then as clerk of court; at night he studied law. He was admitted to the bar in 1821 and began a practice in Demopolis.

From 1822 to 1830 Lyon was secretary of the state senate. In 1833 he was elected to the senate, and in 1835 he won a seat in Congress as a Whig. After two terms Lyon returned to his law practice and soon became one of Alabama's foremost attorneys, noted for his skill in cross-examination. By 1860 he had also become one of the wealthiest planters in his district. In 1846 he was appointed sole commissioner to liquidate the state bank. Years of mismanagement had hopelessly muddled its affairs, and Lyon's efforts won him a wide reputation in public finance.

By 1860 Lyon was a Democrat. He was chairman of the state party in 1860 and a delegate to the Charleston convention, where he supported the radical Southern position. On Abraham Lincoln ^[5]'s election, Lyon demanded immediate secession. He served briefly as a state senator in 1861 but in December was elected to the Confederate House of Representatives. In 1863 he won reelection without opposition.

Lyon's wealth and experience won him a place on the House Committee on Ways and Means, and in the Second Congress he was its chairman. Besides his routine committee duties, he proposed to double all taxes, repudiate all old Treasury notes and replace them with new issues of paper money, and permit the Confederate government to seize any railroad equipment it needed. He was just as much a Confederate nationalist on all other administration programs, making him one of President Jefferson Davis's most stalwart supporters.

Lyon had subscribed so heavily to the Confederate cotton loan that the end of the war found him almost bankrupt. His postwar years, therefore, were largely devoted to recouping his fortune through his law practice. In 1875 he was a member of the constitutional convention that returned Alabama to conservative white control, and in 1876 he was elected to the state senate for one term. He died at Demopolis and was buried in the Old Glover Vault.

A contemporary described Lyon as a handsome and cultivated individual who worked long but unhurried hours at practical pursuits, "a gentleman of the Old School with the energy of the New." On 4 Mar. 1824 Lyon married Sarah Serena Glover, the daughter of Allen and Sarah Glover of Demopolis. They had seven children: Mary Amanda, Sarah Norwood, Helen Gaines, Amelia, Eugenia, Ida, and Frank Glover.

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Additional Resources:

"Lyon, Francis Strother, (1800 - 1882)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=L000542> ^[9] (accessed June 30, 2014).

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[15]

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