

Owen, Allen Ferdinand ^[1]

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9 Oct. 1816–7 Apr. 1865

Allen Ferdinand Owen, lawyer, Georgia legislator and congressman, and U.S. consul to Havana, was born in rural Wilkes County ^[2], N.C. His family moved to Georgia when he was four. The census of 1830 for Upson County, Ga., reveals that his father was no longer living. The teenaged boy's Virginia-born mother, Mary Owen, headed a household of three children and thirteen blacks, one of whom was a freeman. Although both Thomaston and Franklin academies existed in his county, young Owen, coming from an apparently affluent background, is thought to have had the advantage of private tutors. His college and professional training, seemingly disjointed, included some contact with the University of Georgia and graduation with the class of 1837 from Yale College, where he is said to have entered as a sophomore.

Owen attended Harvard Law School between 23 Aug. 1837 and 3 Jan. 1838 and again from 3 May to 25 Oct. 1839. The Charleston, S.C., office where he read law and must have gained some practical insight was that of James L. Petigru, the famous South Carolina Unionist. In St. Philip's Church, Charleston, on 18 Dec. 1837, Owen married Emmeline Matthews, the daughter of South Carolinian Robert A. Matthews. On 23 Oct. 1839, the final year that Owen attended Harvard, the Circuit Court of the United States at Boston admitted him to practice as an attorney and counselor.

In 1840 Owen settled in Talbotton, Ga., the seat of Talbot County, adjacent to Upson. He represented Talbot County in the legislature in 1843 and 1845 and was appointed clerk of the Georgia House of Representatives in 1847. Elected to Congress ^[3], he took his seat in December 1849 as a member of the Whig party ^[4]. In the notable contest in which Georgia Democrat, Howell Cobb, was elected speaker, Owen and his fellow Georgia Whigs, Robert Toombs and Alexander H. Stephens, consistently voted against Cobb. At the beginning of the second session of the Thirty-first Congress, Owen became ill in Washington and remained so through nearly all of December 1850. With adjournment in March 1851, he accepted appointment under the Fillmore administration ^[5] as consul to Havana in Spanish-controlled Cuba.

Embarking from Charleston with his family on 1 May 1851, Owen warned Secretary of State Daniel Webster ^[6] that rumors of an intended filibuster from the United States filled the air. Indeed, the slippery Cuban patriot, Narciso Lopez, on 3 August, launched from New Orleans a third and final expedition. Because Spanish authorities intercepted and summarily executed a number of American citizens who were among the Lopez adventurers, and because Owen had followed the "steady aim and conduct to not intermeddle with the politics of Cuba," he was blamed for gross inattention to the interests of his countrymen. Owen attempted in vain to justify his course through a communication to an American newspaper. In November 1851 Secretary Webster reacted by naming a replacement, and the following month Owen returned to the United States with his family.

He resumed his role as attorney and community leader in Talbotton and, with the demise of the Whig party, became a Democrat. Governor Joseph E. Brown appointed him a delegate to the Southern Commercial Convention held in Montgomery, Ala., in May 1858. At the census of 1860, Owen reported a personal estate of \$12,000. This property included eight people who were enslaved by Owen. His wife, familiarly called Emma, was thirty-five. Their oldest child, Robert, about nineteen or twenty, was no longer with them. There were two daughters at home: Susan Hamilton, seventeen, and Mary A., sixteen. The four younger children were Charles, fifteen; Allen Richard, nine; Edward, born in Cuba, eight; and Franklin, five. Also now recorded with the household at Talbotton was Owen's mother, Mary, aged seventy-three, with a personal estate of \$6,000. This property included ten people whom Mary enslaved.

In time, Owen suffered a partial paralysis of his right side. While on a visit to relatives in a nearby county, he died at Upatoi just as the Civil War ^[6] was drawing to an end. He was buried at Oak Hill Cemetery, Talbotton.

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Additional Resources:

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[Lawyers](#) [11]

[Public officials](#) [12]

Authors:

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Origin - location:

[Wilkes County](#) [14]

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1 January 1991 | Fant, H. B.

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