

Word, Thomas Jefferson ^[1]

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by H. B. Fant, 1996

ca. 1809–ca. 1856

Thomas Jefferson Word, lawyer and congressman from Mississippi, was born in Surry County ^[2], the son of Thomas Adams and Justiana Dickerson Word. His grandfather, Charles Word, died at Kings Mountain ^[3] on 7 Oct. 1780. In 1827 the younger Word held 350 acres in one tract and 72 in another. Elected to represent Surry County in the House of Commons in the session of 1832–33, he served on the committee on internal improvements ^[4].

Soon afterwards Word moved to Pontotoc, in north-eastern Mississippi, where he was admitted to the bar on 7 Nov. 1836. A contemporary who knew him at this time later described him as "a remarkably fine looking man" and mentioned his polished, agreeable manner. "Added to this," it was said, "he had a fine, humorous way of telling anecdotes, and could play well the violin." He contested a congressional election which was set aside, and Word was subsequently elected as a Whig ^[5]. He served from 30 May 1838 to 3 Mar. 1839.

Word was married about 1839 and during the 1840s moved to the fast-growing Holly Springs, Miss., seat of Marshall County on the Tennessee state line. A convention of Mississippians at Jackson in October 1849 chose him from the state's First Congressional District to go to the Nashville Convention scheduled in June 1850 to consider the South's constitutional future. Though apparently not a slaveowner himself, Word supported those who believed that the national government had no jurisdiction over slavery. The next year he was again elected to represent his county at a states' rights ^[6] convention in Pontotoc on 2 June.

Word's law practice made him a familiar figure in circuit, probate, and chancery courts in northern Mississippi, and some of his cases went to the High Court of Errors and Appeals, as the supreme court in Jackson was called. He spoke at various temperance, patriotic, and memorial gatherings but had faded from public notice by the mid-1850s. Neither the date of his death nor the place of his burial seem to be known.

The 1850 census records his wife as Mary E. Word, a native of Ireland, and their children as Justiana, 9; John J., 7; Jefferson, 4; and Sarah, 1.

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Biographies ^[8]

Lawyers ^[9]

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Origin - location:

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