

Biographies of West Virginia statehood leaders were prepared by Marshall University Humanities Program graduate students enrolled in Dr. Billy Joe Peyton's Fall 2010 "Historical Studies" class at Marshall's South Charleston campus.

By Andrew J. Wood

John J. Brown, the son of Annie Hawthorne Brown was born on November 19, 1825 in Kingwood, Preston County, Virginia. He was educated at Monongalia Academy, Morgantown, Virginia and then graduated from Washington College, Washington, Pennsylvania in 1845. After graduation, he began studying the law with his uncle William G. Brown, who was a Virginia representative of the 29th, 30th, 37th, and 38th Congresses. In 1849, he was admitted to the bar and formed a partnership with his uncle from 1849-1861. During the Secession crisis, he was selected as a delegate to the 2nd Wheeling Convention and the Constitutional Convention. After the new state was formed, he was elected as a Senator in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, West Virginia Legislatures. In 1864, he moved from Kingwood to Morgantown, where he became the President of the Merchants National Bank. During his time as President he interested others in different enterprises, mainly the proposed railroad of February 26, 1870, which was purposed to connect northern and southern West Virginia by way of Morgantown, Fairmont, Clarksburg, Charleston, and Wayne County. He was married to Mary Ellen Gay on December 30, 1868, the daughter of Mathew Gay of Morgantown. There were three children from this marriage: Gay Alexandria, Margaret, and James M.G. In 1869, with Dr. Alexander Martin, Senator Waitman Willey, John A. Dille, George C. Strurgiss and others helped organize the West Virginia Historical Society. When Brown died on September 30, 1905 he was a fifty year member of the Methodist Episcopal Church as well as a Mason.

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