

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 Carolyn S. Quinlan

RICHARD MADISON COOK, was born November 5, 1820 to William and Katie (Stewart) Cook in Wyoming County, [West] Virginia. His paternal grandfather was a Revolutionary soldier of Shenandoah County, Virginia and established the first settlement in Wyoming County, in 1799. The following year, his maternal grandfather became the second permanent settler in the county. In 1840 he married Mary Gunnoe, known as Aunt Polly. Together they conceived and raised ten children: six boys and four girls. Two sons, William B. Cook and Lane S. Cook served in the Union army. Richard M. Cook, a third son, moved among various Baptist congregations as an exhorter.

In, December 1861, it was decided among the constitutional lawmakers at Wheeling, to include all counties west of the Alleghenies, i.e. McDowell, Mercer, Monroe, Greenbrier and Pocahontas, into West Virginia; and in so doing, they would force the need for representation. Colonel Thomas Little and some citizens of Mercer County, who may have transplanted themselves to Wyoming county, nominated and seated John Cook as a delegate to the Convention, even though Mercer County had not voted for annexation to the new State. However, John was not a citizen of Mercer County, he was admitted to membership on January 21, 1862 from Wyoming County where he held residence.

After serving a two-year term as superintendent of schools for Wyoming County in 1867, he was re-elected for another two-year term. He later became Deputy Assessor for Wyoming County and became a member and secretary to the board of education in his district.

He lived in Rockcastle Creek, near Pineville, West Virginia during the war and for the next fifteen years. In 1880, he moved to Turkey Creek, where he died, September 10, 1904. He was buried at his home place of Rockcastle Creek, in the Walker Cemetery.

Source: Ambler, Charles H., Frances Haney Atwood and William B. Mathews, eds. *Debates and Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of West Virginia, (1861-1863)*. Huntington: Gentry Brothers. 67-68.