

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

**LEWIS WETZEL** of Point Pleasant, [West] Virginia as was presiding Judge and President of the County Court for many years, represented the people of Mason County as an assemblyman at the Wheeling Convention in June 13, 1861. He was with the firm of Seltzer, Beal & Co. and acting editor of The Weekly Register.

As a business man he was said to be an honorable man with exceptional character; and was trusted by all who had dealings with him. As a Judge, he was courteous, impartial and had the ability to handle the rigors of the court. The junior members of the courts often sought his council and would "defer to his...experience." As a politician he was explicit and to the point yet he maintained the highest of integrity. His support for the Union, and for the division of the State of Virginia, were clear. As acting editor, he had a platform from which to declare his conscience.

It was this airing of conscience that led to his untimely death. He had written an article entitled "suppression," that, for whatever reason, struck a nerve of local resident, John Hall, that caused him to "snap." He and Lewis Wetzel seemed to be of like minds when it came to the support of the Union but somehow they differed in the way they operated toward that end. It appears there was some sort of military command "for the suppression of the Register." Lewis Wetzel wrote an editorial that John Hall felt was "slandrous." Without giving Wetzel the opportunity to defend his view, John Hall

walked into the newspapers office, where Lewis Wetzel had just stepped into his “counting room,” “pulled his revolver” and shot him through the heart.

The article in question, was said to be written in a “bold, sarcastic tone, but it is general and indefinite, and more remarkable for what it promises to do and say, than for what it actually discloses.” John Hall, an older man, “approaching his dotage,” could see no other way to relieve his personal torment than through the blood of the tormentor. “Poor, unfortunate, misguided man!”

The Mason County community mourned his death; “[T]hus has been torn from us in the midst of his usefulness, one of our most respected citizens, endeared friends, and distinguished public men.”

Source: “The Murder of Hon. Lewis Wetzel.” *The Weekly Register*, October 20, 1862.