

John Calhoun (1793-1852)

By Jerry Long
c.2025



Judge John Calhoun (1793-1852)



Daily Journal, Louisville, KY, 19 July 1836, p.2:

The Hon: John Calhoun, member of Congress from Kentucky, passed through this city yesterday, He has served the people faithfully and ably, and deserves the gratitude of his constituents and of the State.



Daily Journal, Louisville, KY, 29 March 1837, p.2:

CIRCULAR LETTER OF JOHN CALHOON TO HIS CONSTITUENTS.

Fellow Citizens: – As the period for which I have been elected to represent you in Congress will expire in a few days, I feel that it is my duty to give you an account of the manner, in which I have discharged the important trust committed to my charge.

The struggles which have been carried on for the last twelve years, for the Presidency, have divided the people into different parties, and excited them to an extent which, in my judgment, has been highly prejudicial to the honor and interest of the country.

I think every patriot must feel that there is a strong necessity for putting an end to that strife which looks to the advantage of *party*, and the elevation of particular men, rather than to an enlightened and enlarged policy, which has in view the prosperity of the whole country. If this is not done, instead of presenting to other nations of the world the noble spectacle of an enlightened people; united under a system of government which aims at the prosperity and happiness of all its citizens, we shall present the miserable picture of a country divided into parties, and factions, warring under the banners of petty chiefs, to gratify personal ambition. These struggles for the Presidency have introduced the system of caucus nominations for all the important offices of the government, the effect of which is to destroy the right of suffrage in the people, and make them mere instruments for carrying into effect the orders of a few party leaders, who are most generally governed by personal considerations. I regard the establishment of the caucus system, as utterly subversive of the elective franchise.

The limits of this address will not allow me to do more than bring to your notice a few of the most important measures which have engaged the attention of Congress.

The appropriations for the year 1836 amount to *thirty-eight million five hundred and forty thousand two hundred and ninety-eight dollars and seventy-one cents*; subject to a deduction of four million six hundred and fifty thousand five hundred dollars.

Notwithstanding the amount of these appropriations, which was never equalled in time of peace, and only exceeded one year during the late war, still there was a surplus left of upwards of 37 million of dollars. The plan for disposing of this surplus, most strongly advocated by a portion of the leaders of the administration party, was to expend it in constructing fortifications on the seaboard; and a bill was presented, proposing to appropriate about sixteen millions of dollars to commence the works. I was well satisfied that if such a measure was adopted, it would require one hundred millions of dollars to finish and furnish cannon and arms for the different forts, to say nothing of the number of men which would be necessary to defend them, which could not have fallen short of forty thousand.

Another mode of expending the surplus, advocated by a portion of the administration party, was to construct armories in each of the States in the Union. The objection to this was, that we had now on hand about seven hundred thousand stand of arms, a greater number than belonged to any nation in the world, or than we would be required to use for many centuries to come. But the proposition which finally prevailed was to deposite the surplus with the different States, according to their representation in both branches of Congress. This I considered the most equitable measure which could be adopted, and the only one which would give to Kentucky anything like justice.

A very heavy item in the appropriation bills for several years past has been for the construction of harbors. When the power was given to Congress to regulate commerce, it could not have been supposed that it would ever be constructed to authorize them to tax the people of the United States for the purpose of constructing harbors at the mouth of every river and creek which puts into the lakes of this country. Such a construction has, however, been given, by a majority of both branches of Congress; and, acting upon it, they have been in the habit of appropriating millions every year for that purpose. This system of legislation is highly unjust to the interior States, and in a majority of cases is designed to build the fortunes of individuals at the expense of the national Treasury. The revenue is raised by a system of taxation which falls with equal weight upon every section of the Union, and a sound and just policy would require that, in

its disbursement, an equitable distribution should be made, as far as the situation of the country will permit; Congress should not pursue a policy which gives to particular sections great advantages over other parts of the country. Such is the effect of these harbor bills.

The appropriation for the year 1837 will amount to about twenty-eight millions of dollars; after taking out this sum it is believed a large balance will remain in the Treasury on the first day of January next. The House of Representatives have passed a bill for depositing this surplus with the States, upon the principle of the law of last year. Whether the Senate will concur in this measure is doubtful; I am inclined to think it will not, and that this surplus will remain in the deposit banks.

An extraordinary number of petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, has been presented to Congress this session. No one can doubt that the abolitionists are directing their efforts to the abolition of slavery in the States; and that very soon the aid of Congress will be openly demanded in favor of such a policy. Nothing can be more clear than that the question of slavery in the States is purely a domestic question for the States in which slavery exists; and however we may differ as to the policy of slavery in the abstract, every friend to his country, to the rights of the States, and to the perpetuity of the Union, will unite in resisting any attempt on the part of Congress to interfere on this subject.

I was appointed upon a select committee to whom the subject of duties and restrictions imposed by foreign nations upon American tobacco was referred. Our examinations convinced me that this interest had not met with that attention from our Government which its importance required; indeed, since 1785, when Mr. Jefferson was our Minister at the court of France, nothing has been done to induce any of those governments to which our tobacco is exported so to modify their laws as to place this staple upon any thing like an equal footing with any other produce coming from the United States. In France, the American tobacco can only be sold to a single person, called the *Regie*, and to him in small quantities; in 1833 the quantity sold there was only about 6000 hhds. In England, the duty on tobacco is three shillings per pound, equal to 70 cents of our currency. In Austria, the duty is fifteen florins, equal to about \$7 on the hundred weight.

More than half of the American tobacco is sent to Germany and Holland; and when sold in any of the interior towns, it is subject to a duty upon manufactured of \$7 40 on the hundred weight; and of unmanufactured of \$3 70. When it is considered that with all of those nations we have an important commerce, and that we admit in our ports many articles free of duty, and many others with very low rates of duty, we can not doubt that, if the subject shall be properly presented to them by our Government, they will make such alterations in their rates of duty as will be highly advantageous to the planters of our country. The committee reported a resolution, which was passed by the House, making it the duty of the President of the United States to "instruct the American ministry at all the foreign courts, to use their exertions to place this article of our commerce upon the footing as the other staples of our country." Representing, as I do, a planting interest, I gave to this subject particular attention, and I have reason to hope that our exertions to benefit the planters will prove successful.

In conclusion, allow me to say that I will never cease to feel grateful for the honor which you have conferred upon me. I have the consolation to know that I have served you faithfully, and in all things endeavored to promote your interest.

I am a candidate for re-election, and if I meet with a continuation of your confidence, it will lay me under additional obligations of gratitude.

Your obedient servant,
JOHN CALHOON.



Daily Journal, Louisville, KY, 12 January 1842, p.3:

APPOINTMENT BY THE GOVERNOR. – Hon. John Calhoon, at present a Representative in the Kentucky Legislature, from the county of Breckinridge, has been nominated by the Governor as Judge of the 14th Judicial District, to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of Judge Alney McLean. The Senate has confirmed the nomination, and Mr. Calhoon accepts the appointment, and will immediately resign his seat in the House.



The Frankfort Commonwealth, Frankfort, KY, 30 December 1851, p.2:

House of Representatives, Saturday, December 27, 1851:

The following bills were reported by select committees, viz:

Mr. Cosby – a bill to charter the town of Calhoon, in Daviess County: passed.



Evening Bulletin, Louisville, KY, Saturday, 16 October 1852, p.1:

We are pained to have to record the death the Hon. John Calhoon, who died in this city about 4 o'clock yesterday morning. He had been laboring under disease of the liver and bowels for some months, and he came to this city for medical aid about two weeks ago; but the seeds of death were too deeply implanted. Mr. Calhoon was possessed of a very high order of talents and of much strength and force of character. He has filled many offices of public trust with much credit to himself, and honor to his native State. He was many times a leading member of the State Legislature, was four years in Congress, and a judge from 1841 until the new organization of the judiciary last year. It is pleasant to us to state that he died professing a confident religious hope.

We refer to the proceedings of the bar in the court of chancery in another column.



Evening Bulletin, Louisville, KY, Saturday, 16 October 1852, p.1:

[For the Louisville Journal]
LOUISVILLE CHANCERY COURT,
October 15, 1852.

Charles M. Thruston, Esq., announced the death of the Hon. John Calhoun, which took place at 4 o'clock this morning, in this city, whilst on a visit here, in a brief and eloquent recital of the several public trusts which he had held.

To which Chancellor Pirtle replied in language of strong sympathy, and dwelling with a becoming emphasis on the exalted talents and virtues of the deceased, whom he had known intimately for more than thirty-two years; and, in respect to his memory, he ordered an immediate adjournment of the court.

Thereupon a meeting of the bar was called to express their regret at the loss of distinguished friend and to offer their condolence to the family of the deceased.

Whereupon, Chancellor Pirtle was appointed chairman and Ben. R. Pollard secretary of said meeting.

On motion of Chas. M. Thruston, Esq., a committee was appointed consisting of Messrs. Thruston, B. Ballard, J. Guthrie, Walker Morris, and W. W. Fry to prepare a suitable preamble and resolutions, who retired and in a short time B. Ballard from said committee reported the following preamble and resolutions, which were read and unanimously adopted:

Death has removed from the scene of his labors the Hon. John Calhoon, late of Daviess county, distinguished member of the Kentucky bar. He died in Louisville, whither he had come for medical attention, on the morning of the 15th, just in the 56th year of his age. His father, George Calhoon, who was eminent for his virtues and stirring worth, was one of the earliest settlers in Kentucky, and here the deceased was born and reared. Though deprived the advantages of a collegiate education, his strong intellect and his untiring exertions enabled him to distinguish himself both as a statesman and as a lawyer. Besides being for many years a distinguished practicing lawyer, he was successively a member of the Legislature, and of the House of Representatives of the United States and a Circuit Judge. His tall and handsome person, added to his clear intellect, graceful manner, and persuasive eloquence, made him a most successful advocate. As a politician, he was bold and honest, and though ardent, was always conciliatory to his opponents. As a statesman, he was judicious and enlightened. His legal leaning was sound, and this, with his quick intuitive intellect and his upright character, eminently qualified him for the office of Judge. In his private character and in all the relations of life he was much beloved. This distinguished jurist and citizen has finished his career, and the members of the Bar of the city of Louisville are desirous to testify the respect in which they held his virtues, his services, and his fame: Therefore –

Resolved, That the members of the bar of the city of Louisville having received the intelligence of the death of the Hon. John Calhoon with emotions of deep sensibility and that they doubt not their feelings in this respect will be shared by their brethren in the profession throughout the State.

Resolved, That the members of the bar tender to the widow and family of the deceased their sympathy and condolence, and that with the permission of the family they will join in a body in the ceremonies of the funeral.

Resolved, That the chairman of this meeting cause a copy of these resolutions to be transmitted to the widow and family of the deceased, and that he request the several courts of the city to spread them on their records.

HENRY PIRTLE, Chairman.

B. R. POLLARD, Secretary.



Ohio County, Kentucky in the Olden Days:

A series of old newspaper sketches of fragmentary history, by Harrison D. Taylor (Louisville, KY, 1926) pp.85-87 [originally published in the serial, "Fragments of the Early History of Ohio County, by Harrison D. Taylor, Hartford Herald, Hartford, KY, 5 December 1877, p.1 & 19 December 1877, p.1:

John Calhoun was the son of old Judge Calhoun of Daviess County. He was reared in the wilds and swamps of Green River, with most limited education, and had looked into Blackstone only far enough to answer such stereotyped questions as judges were in the habit of asking. He came to town, as his brother George afterwards said, "in a perfect state of nature." He was rather too prone to fall into the wild, rollicking customs of the day indulged in by too many citizens of the town, but his fine personal appearance, his pleasant address, strong common sense, clear, discriminating intellect, and personal combat during the sitting of court with old Philip Thompson, who was then looked upon as the lion at the bar, soon rendered him a popular lawyer.

It was frequently remarked that without any apparent embarrassment, or any reference to law books or legal authority, he would argue profound and intricate questions of law, relying alone upon the broad principles of natural justice and equity. His social qualities were most fascinating, and his love of fun unbounded. Of this an amusing incident is given in our sketch relating to his "setting" Dr. Charles McCreery's neck after a fall from his horse. Another story illustrative of the manners and customs of the times may amuse the reader.

There was a whole neighborhood on Caney Creek remarkable for its love of fun and frolic. Young and old delighted to "trip the light fantastic toe" on every occasion. It was Christmas time, and John Calhoun had been invited to the Caney Creek festivities. Frolicking kept up as they went from house to house for several days and nights. John Calhoun had participated until worn out. "Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep" invited him to repose in the first bed he could procure. The grand field marshal of all this fun and frolic was Old Jake, of African descent, who, with his wooden leg and fiddle was seated in a corner like

"A towzie tike, black, grim, and large;
To give them music was his charge."

Now the same human nature that abolitionists claim should bring about an amalgamation of the races induced Old Jake to seek repose also, and where he sought it we will proceed to relate. Some time in the night Calhoun's lower extremities came in contact with something too hard and cold for human flesh and blood. Half frightened, half asleep and half awake, he gave a tremendous kick which landed Old Jake on the floor. Calhoun, indignant at the insult, was about to pounce upon him, but Old Jake in an entreating voice exclaimed: "'Fore Heaven, Massa, I didn't know it was a gentleman in that bed. I thought it was Massa Frank." Master Frank had been a ringleader in all the hilarities. This made Calhoun reflect on his associations, and the result was he mounted his horse the next morning for home.

Had John Calhoun confined himself to law alone, few men in the State, although it was then shining with a galaxy of stars in the legal profession, would have surpassed him. He had every qualification except close application to study, yet what he failed to acquire by reading he seemed to absorb and gather up by his intercourse and practice at the bar.

His personal magnetism, love of excitement, and young ambition soon drew him into the great vortex of politics, in which he had a tolerable success. He was elected without much trouble to the A-B-C school of young politicians—our state legislature. Next [in 1824] he became a candidate for Congress against Dr. William S. Young of Elizabethtown. Dr. Young's location in the most populous portion of the district, and his extensive family connections gave him a decided advantage; yet he beat Calhoun by only twenty or thirty votes. This only inspired Calhoun with

increased ambition. Hardinsburg being a more central point in the district than Hartford, he removed to that place. In the meantime the "Gog and Magog," the Jackson and Clay contest that convulsed not only Kentucky but the whole Union, had loomed up.

Mr. Calhoun, true to the instincts of a Kentuckian, was for the Great Commoner; the hero of New Orleans was represented by the celebrated Thomas Chilton. No man was more thoroughly ridiculed, vilified, and abused than Mr. Chilton on his first appearance on the political stage, but justice compels the admission that he was highly endowed with all the qualifications of a public speaker. He was enthusiastic and honest in his belief, as was afterwards proved by his denouncing his party and again taking the stump against the political prescriptions and vindictive partisan measures of the Administration.

Mr. Calhoun made his second race against this man, and was again defeated by only about twenty votes. In some obscure precinct the election had not been conducted in due accordance with the requirements of law. The sheriffs of the district, who then met and compared the polls, refused to count the votes of that precinct, which being excluded gave Calhoun a majority and certificate of election. In the then feverish state of public opinion Mr. Calhoun, although entitled to his seat by the strict rules of law governing elections, threw up his commission, and the governor issued a new writ of election, which took place in the month of November. Almost the whole of the political world seemed to sympathize with the election in this district. Barrels of whiskey were shipped from Louisville to most of the prominent voting places; Jackson's deeds were immortalized; Adam's brass carpets" were wrung in every ear; Calhoun's magnanimity was lost sight of; even nature's elements, by pouring upon the earth the greatest flood that had occurred for years, could not keep the voters from the polls. They swam, they waded, seized on skiffs and canoes, built rafts, and rushed to their places of voting. The result of this excitement was another defeat for Mr. Calhoun by a very few votes.

However, Mr. Calhoun was finally successful in being elected to one or more sessions of Congress [1835-1839], which seemed to satisfy his political aspirations.

After the death of Judge Alney McLean [in December, 1841] Mr. Calhoun was appointed to succeed him as circuit judge. His sound common sense, clear and discriminating intellect, and wonderful memory of the decisions of superior courts upon similar questions, soon distinguished him as an able judge. After several years he wearied of this office and removed to Calhoun, where he engaged in milling and where he died. [He was born on April 13, 1793, and died on October 15, 1852.]

Like most men who take a prominent part in active life, Judge Calhoun had his friends and his enemies. It would have been almost impossible during the excitement of the times to have evaded having enemies. He was accused of being fickle in his friendships, and it was said that:

"He threw off his friends like a huntsman his pack,

For he knew when he wished, he could whistle them back."

Ardent and impetuous in his manner and feelings, he frequently, on the stump and at the bar, gave offense to persons professing to be his friends, but no man surpassed him in the pleasing, winning way in which he could conciliate and win them back again. Taking him altogether he was an impulsive, talented, generous, manly Kentuckian.



(Cincinnati, Ohio, J. M. Armstrong & Company, 1878) p.695:

CALHOON, HON. JOHN, Lawyer, was born in 1797, in Henry County, Kentucky. He studied law; was elected, from Ohio County, to the Legislature in 1820; subsequently settled in Breckinridge County, and represented that county in the Legislature in 1829, 1830, and 1840; from 1835 to 1839, was a Representative in Congress. He died several years ago. He was a man of marked ability, and distinguished himself not only as one of the first men in his profession, but also displayed fine traits as a legislator. He made a good record while serving in Congress, and was very highly esteemed in his section of the State, as one of its most valuable men.



History of Daviess County, Kentucky,
(Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1883) p.54:

George Calhoon a little later settled about seven miles southwest of Owensboro on the same farm owned and occupied by his son, Rev. Samuel Calhoon. He was at one time Assistant Circuit Judge of the district. He raised a remarkable family of boys, all of whom became men of note, and with the most limited means for an education — only what the wilderness afforded. John Calhoon was the first Deputy in the Daviess County clerk's office. He studied law at odd times, commenced practice at Hartford, was a Member of the Legislature, and for six years was a Member of Congress, again a Member of the Legislature, and then Circuit Judge. He afterward settled at old Vienna, on Green River, and when McLean County was established, the writer had the honor of naming the county seat Calhoon, in honor of Judge Calhoon. Three of the other brothers, George, Henry and Mitchell, became lawyers, one of whom was a Judge in Mississippi; Samuel became a preacher of the Cumberland Presbyterian church, and has continued to preach for more than fifty years. He is quite infirm in body, but his mind is still strong. Ralph Calhoon was a man of fine mind, a fluent talker, and of vast information. He died some twenty years ago at what is known as Calhoon's Ferry, on Green River.



Ben Hardin: His Times and Contemporaries, by Lucius P. Little,
(Louisville, KY, Courier-Journal Job Printing Company, 1887) pp.483-484:

JOHN CALHOON.

Judge Calhoon was born in Henry county, Kentucky, in 1797. He had such advantages as a sprightly youth could make of the primitive schools of the Green river country, to which his father had removed at any early day. His father was an associate justice in Daviess county, while circuit courts had officers of that character.

Judge Calhoon for a considerable period was a deputy in the clerk's office of Ohio county. In 1817 he came to the bar and began practice at Hartford. In 1822 he was an applicant to the governor for the appointment of Commonwealth's attorney in the newly-created district of which Ohio was part. He had for a competitor Mr. Hardin's cousin, John Hardin McHenry, then of

Leitchfield. Judge Calhoon met Governor Adair, at Frankfort, but soon learned that his aspirations were in vain—that the governor had already decided to appoint McHenry. It was, perhaps, to McHenry's advantage that his kinsman and preceptor, Martin D. Hardin, was near the throne—in the capacity of secretary of State. At the instance of Calhoon, the commission for his rival was prepared and he brought it to Leitchfield on his return—he and McHenry being warm personal friends. Meeting the latter, Calhoon gravely informed him that he had obtained the appointment, whereat McHenry warmly congratulated him. "Yes," said Calhoon, "I have got it—here is my commission." McHenry glanced over it and discovering his own name in it, asked what that meant. "Why that is strange," said Calhoon, with feigned surprise, "it is evidently a mistake." But it was not possible to carry the deception further, and the next day McHenry accompanied his friend to Hartford, where he began a long, honorable, and successful career.

Judge Calhoon was for several years a member of the State Legislature; in 1820 as a member for Ohio county, and for Breckinridge county (to which he had removed) in 1829, 1830, and 1840. He served two terms in Congress (1835-39), defeating Thomas Chilton, a noted politician, for the first. Chilton and Calhoon had been competing candidates for Congress in 1827. The election was close, but the former had a small majority. The officers in declaring the result excluded a precinct for irregularity, and gave Calhoon the certificate. Both gentlemen started to Washington, but meeting at Louisville they agreed to resign and have a new election. At the new election Chilton's majority was decisive. On Judge McLean's death Calhoon was appointed circuit judge by Governor Letcher—an office he held until the new Constitution displaced him. For this appointment he had again contested with Mr. McHenry, but this time with better success. At the election of 1851 he was defeated by the eminent jurist and statesman, Elijah Hise, for judge of the Appellate Court, after a brilliant canvass.

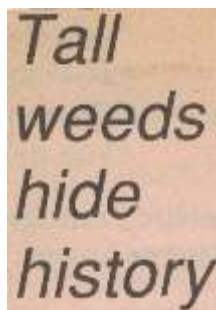
The county seat of McLean was called by his name, and there he spent the close of his life. Judge Calhoon was a life-long Whig—ever the friend and admirer of Mr. Clay. In a letter to Francis Brooke in 1839 Mr. Clay wrote: "Mr. Calhoon, of our State, being on a visit of business at Richmond, I have given him a letter of introduction to you. He is intelligent, shrewd, and trustworthy. You may give him all confidence." Hardin and Calhoon were also friends. They met at the bar and on the circuit as lawyers. Both brilliant—like attracted like. In 1829-30 they were both in the State Legislature, though in different houses. In 1835-37 they were colleagues in Congress. After Judge Calhoon was in failing health (not a year before his death) Mr. Hardin visited him and spent a day or so with him. On his return he observed to an acquaintance that the signs of death were visible on his old friend. Hardin himself had apparently good prospects for many years of life—yet they died within a month of each other—Hardin preceding. Judge Calhoon was in Louisville under treatment of an eminent physician when the end came, and his professional brethren of that city appropriately expressed the public loss at a meeting held at the time.

He was an orator, a wit, and an able, skillful, and accomplished lawyer. He was a profound judge of human nature, and at his best before the jury was omnipotent. It is related that he obtained the acquittal of a negro girl who had burned her master's house by depicting the cruelties of the latter to his slaves. His faculty for humor and power of repartee had many illustrations. In a case in Hancock Circuit Court, Judge McLean presiding, he and Mr. McHenry were on opposite sides. Calhoon suggested that an order had been made at a former day of the term, which opposing counsel denied. The record was examined and the order found to be as stated. Said Judge McLean, "the court must have been asleep or bereft of its senses when that order was made." "Possibly your honor is right," retorted Calhoon, "but my esteem for the court prevents me taking either side of the question."

After his career began he supplied in large measure the defects of early training. He was a large, handsome man—over six feet in height, and of fine presence and address.



McLean County News, Calhoun, KY, 29 September 1988, p.



by Gina Hancock, NEWS managing editor

A vital part of Calhoun's history was uncovered recently that has been hidden in a field of tall weeds.

After the City of Calhoun purchased 12 acres of land from the estate of Annie Sandefur Timmons, clean-up operations revealed the location of the John Calhoon Family Graveyard.

The cemetery has given into the toll of time and neglect.

Portions of the iron fence have fallen or been moved. Weeds and debris almost cover some of the tombstones. A grove of trees shades the cemetery and some of the branches have fallen. A few of the tombstones are broken or have sunk into the ground.

Among the years of neglect, lies the grave site of Calhoun's namesake, John Calhoon, who died October 15, 1852.

Calhoon played a role not only in McLean County's past but in that of Kentucky's and the nation's.

He was born on April 13, 1793 in Henry County, Kentucky. His family moved to Daviess County in 1812.

Calhoon became a prominent lawyer and was a member of the bar in Hartford. In 1820, at the age of 30, he became a member of Kentucky's State legislature. In 1824, he ran for Congress against Dr. William S. Young.

After Young died before completing his term, Calhoon was elected to complete his term. A controversy arose over the vote count and he petitioned the governor for a new election. He was soundly beaten by future president Andrew Jackson.

Politics eventually became kinder for Calhoon was elected as a Whig to Congress from 1835 to 1839.

When Judge Alney McLean died in December, 1841, Calhoon filled the Circuit Judge's seat for a short time.

In January, 1852, the Kentucky legislature passed an act authorizing Calhoon, Thomas Shackelford, F.M. Humphrey's James Landrum and Rash Kelly to lay off no more than 100 acres to establish a town to be known as Calhoun [sic, should be Calhoon]. These men were also appointed trustees of the new town.

Calhoon died two years before, McLean County was established and Calhoon was chosen as the county seat.

Calhoon has often been referred to as John C. Calhoon, but research done by Kenny Ward in 1976 found that there is no documented references to a middle name for Calhoon. Some how he became connected to the famous South Carolina statesman John C. Calhoun.

Calhoon [sic] was the first person buried at the cemetery site located on the north side of First Street on the hill behind Calhoon Holiness Church overlooking the Green River.

Those buried in the cemetery were documented by Katharyn C. Leachman and M.J. Edgeworth and published in McLean County Cemeteries--Volume I.

Others buried there are: Calhoon's wife Mary (Morton), Loyd W. Gates and his wife Irene (Calhoon), Forest L. Gates, Helen W. Gates, Abbia Griffith, Attlie Calhoon Houston and Lee J. Houston, Corilla Calhoon Hawes, Mary M. Ramsey and James Shrader.

The last person buried in the cemetery was Charles Hobson who died in 1943. The following members of his family were also buried there: Carrie B. Hobson, Woodville T. Hobson and Alice B. Hobson.

Time and neglect have not completely wiped out the silent reminders of these people and maybe, with time, they will be restored.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Information for this article was obtained from a story done by Kenny Ward on July 1, 1976. He referred to "A History of Daviess County Kentucky," "Ohio County in the Olden Days".



Left: This is the site of Calhoon's grave. Right: This tombstone was just one of many that has suffered from the trials of time and neglect. (NEWS staff photo by Gina Hancock)



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 30 May 1992, Kentucky Portrait issue, p.22:

Calhoon named for 'wild, rollicking' lawyer

By Glenn Hodges, Messenger-Inquirer

As a lawyer, John Calhoon was talented, impulsive, generous, and could be a lion in the combat of the courtroom. He became a respected judge, served in Congress, and the county seat of McLean County bears his name – although the spelling has been modified.

He was the son of Judge George Calhoon, a first lieutenant in the rangers during the Revolutionary War. After the war, George migrated to Henry County, Ky., where some or all of his eight children were born, including John. In 1812, the family moved to Daviess County, settling about seven miles southwest of Owensboro.

Born April 13, 1793, John was reared in the wilds and swamps of the Green River, and received the most limited education that life in the wilderness afforded. In his youth he was one of the first deputies in the Daviess County Clerk's office and a justice of the peace.

He studied law at odd times from Blackstone's Commentaries and began his legal practice at Hartford.

Calhoon was a controversial figure and early historians had differing viewpoints of him.

As a lawyer, judge and politician, "he was superior to any other man of his time in this part of the country," the 1883 History of Daviess County said.

Another 19th century history, "Ohio County in the Olden Days," written by Harrison Taylor said: "Without any apparent embarrassment, or any reference to law books or legal authority, (Calhoon) would argue profound and intricate questions of law, relying alone upon the broad principles of natural justice and equity. His social qualities were most fascinating and his love of fun unbounded." But Taylor added that Calhoon made his share of enemies during his public life: "He was rather too prone to fall into the wild, rollicking customs of the day indulged in by too many citizens of the town."

Calhoon was accused of being fickle in his friendships, and "frequently on the stump and at the bar, gave offense to persons professing to be his friends."

He was first elected to the legislature in 1820 at the age of 27 and served there in 1821 and 1822, representing Ohio County.

In 1824, he ran for Congress against Dr. William Young of Elizabethtown. Young lived in the most populous part of the congressional district and had extensive family connections there. It helped him defeat Calhoon in the election by 20 to 30 votes.

Realizing that Hartford and Daviess County at that time were on the fringe of the congressional district he sought to serve, Calhoon moved to the more populous Hardinsburg and began practicing law there.

After losing two more races for Congress, he was finally elected as a Whig in 1834 and served from 1835-1839.

Following his service in Congress, Calhoon moved to St. Louis. In December 1841, his friend, Judge Alney McLean, died and Calhoon was appointed to succeed him as circuit judge.

In this position, Calhoon became known as a distinguished, able judge displaying "sound common sense, clear and discriminating intellect and wonderful memory of the decisions of superior courts on similar questions."

He was judge from April 11, 1842, to Jan. 21, 1851, serving the 14th Judicial District that included Daviess, Muhlenberg, Butler, Ohio, Breckinridge and Hancock counties.

In 1834, Calhoon had purchased a 1,500-acre tract of land on the Green River which encompassed the old town of Vienna. Between 1845 and 1848, he moved to Vienna and went into the milling business while continuing as circuit judge.

In January 1852 the legislature passed a law authorizing Calhoon, Thomas Shackelford, F.M. Humphrey, James Landrum and Rash Kelley to lay out 100 acres of land and establish the town of Cahoon. The five men were appointed trustees of the town until the end of their term in April 1852.

On Oct. 15, 1852, John Calhoon died in Louisville.

His body was returned to his home community and buried on a hill overlooking the Long Falls of Green River.

Less than two years later when the county of McLean was established, the county seat chosen was Calhoon, the town named for John Calhoon.

Calhoon and his wife, Mary Morton, had five daughters and two sons, one of whom was Isaac Calhoon.

Isaac's son, John C. Calhoon, became a dentist in Owensboro, served on the city council and became mayor of Owensboro in 1918. He led the effort to build a new city hall for Owensboro during his four-year administration.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 30 April 1996, p.1D:

“McLean County community has had several names, identities since 1700s”

By Glenn Hodges, Messenger-Inquirer



Judge John Calhoon

[Ed. note by Jerry Long: The preceding picture and copy of same on page 1 of this file was hung in the Daviess County Courthouse in 1912. In 1964 it was transferred to the new courthouse and in 1990 it was removed to the new Morton J. Holbrook Judicial Center, where it hangs in the Daviess County Circuit Court room. See “Pictures Being Hung of Former Circuit Judges”, Owensboro Messenger, 3 September 1912, p.3; “Judges’ portraits return to court”, Messenger-Inquirer, 17 June 2013, pp.1A & 2A; and “Biographical Sketch of Circuit Judge John Calhoon” by Circuit Judge Robert M. Short, on display with John Calhoon’s portrait in the Judicial Center.]



McLean County News, Calhoun, KY, 18 February 1999, p.3A

“Meandering in McLean”, by Ken Ward, historian:

**John Calhoon: One of the
areas most valuable men**

(This is the first of a two-part series on John Calhoon, the man for whom Calhoun is named.)

John Calhoon is a shadowy figure who had a town named after him. Most people have no clue why. Some people may think it should be John C., that famous pre-Civil War South Carolinian.

He apparently was a distant kinsman of the famous Southerner. But John Calhoon, with two "os," was a local citizen.

The community on the north bank of Green River, opposite the thriving town of Rumsey, was named Calhoon for a "prominent lawyer, a Circuit Judge, and a member of Congress," the 1883 History of Daviess County called John. "He was far superior to any other man of his time in this part of the country."

John was the son of George Calhoon. At three years old, George headed to Kentucky with his and other families. Indians attacked the party, killing or capturing most of the whites. Among the killed were George's parents; among the prisoners, George.

For four years, George lived with the Indians. A party under a Judge Cotton rescued George when he was seven. Cotton then raised George, who married one of the judge's daughters.

During the Revolution, George served as first lieutenant in the Pennsylvania Rangers. He often served as courier, "carrying messages through the trackless wilderness from one army to another," according to an 1896 biography.

Gen. George Washington reportedly complimented Lieutenant Calhoon "on the field of battle." George Washington told the lieutenant that "he had never failed him." The general then entrusted him with an important message, "which was done at the risk of his life."

George moved to Henry County, where most or all of his children were born, John was born on April 13, 1793. In 1812, George moved his family to Daviess County. In Daviess County among other professions, he served as an associate justice, "while circuit courts had officers of that character."

George "raised a remarkable family of boys, all of whom became men of note and with the most limited means for an education – only what the wilderness afforded."

Harrison Taylor wrote that John was "reared in the wilds and swamps of Green River, with most limited education." He had only "such advantages as a sprightly youth could make of the primitive schools of the Green River country."

According to John's brother, George, John moved to town "in a perfect state of nature."

John worked for a time as a deputy in the clerk's office in Ohio County. In 1817, he passed the bar and began to practice law at Hartford.

One report states that Calhoon "had looked into Blackstone only far enough to answer such stereotyped questions as judges were in the habit of asking." That seems to have been enough.

"It was frequently remarked that without any apparent embarrassment, or any reference to law books or legal authority," Taylor states, "he would argue profound and intricate questions of law, relying alone upon broad principles of natural justice and equity."

As a lawyer John Calhoon soon acquired a reputation as "able, safe and reliable." With "few of the natural gifts of an eloquent declaimer," Calhoon still "seldom failed to win the confidence of a jury, and from his thorough knowledge of law always had the respect and attention of the court."

Lucius Little called him "a profound judge of human nature, and at his best before the jury was omnipotent."

According to one report, Calhoon obtained the acquittal of a Negro girl who had burned her master's house. He used the master's cruelties to his slaves to win the case.

In 1822, Calhoon applied to the governor for the appointment as Commonwealth's Attorney in the newly created district which included Ohio County. His chief opponent for the office was his good friend John Hardin McHenry. McHenry won the position.

Even earlier, in 1820, Calhoon had entered politics. "His personal magnetism, love of excitement, and young ambition soon drew him into the great vortex of politics, in which he had tolerable success. He was elected without much trouble to the A-B-C school of young politicians – our state legislature."

Next, in 1824, he became a candidate for Congress against Dr. William S. Young, of Elizabethtown. Young, coming from a more populous area of the state and with extensive family connections, had a decided advantage. But he still beat Calhoon by less than 30 votes. "This only inspired Calhoon with increased ambition."

Deciding Hardinsburg was a more central point from which to pursue his political ambitions, Calhoon moved there.

In 1827, John Calhoon ran for Congress against Thomas Chilton, a "noted politician" of the day. Chilton won by a small majority, usually given as about 20 votes. However, voting officials excluded one precinct for irregularities and gave the congressional seat to Calhoon.

Both men headed for Washington but got together in Louisville. They both agreed to resign and have a new election.

Chilton was an Andrew Jackson supporter. Many Kentuckians were not. (Jackson said Kentuckians ran at the Battle of New Orleans, a remark some, including Alney McLean, never forgave him for; Jackson also was an opponent of Kentuckian Henry Clay.) Jackson needed support in congress so he and his supporters supported Chilton.

"Almost the whole of the political world seemed to sympathize with the election in this district," Harrison Taylor recalled. "Barrels of whiskey were shipped from Louisville to most of the prominent voting places; Jackson's deeds were immortalized."

In spite of Calhoon's magnanimous behavior, Chilton again defeated Calhoon by a small majority.



McLean County News, Calhoun, KY, 25 February 1999, p.3A

"Meandering in McLean", by Ken Ward, historian:

Calhoon one of county's most respected politicians

(This is the second of a two-part series on John Calhoon, the man for whom Calhoun is named.)

John Calhoon had again lost a Congressional race but he was by no means retiring to hermitism in the backwoods.

In 1829 John Calhoon returned to the State Legislature. And again in 1830.

He finally won a seat in the Congress in 1834, serving from 1835-1839. This "seemed to satisfy his political aspirations." He did serve in the State Legislature again in 1840.

Calhoon was a "life-long Whig," and a friend and supporter of Henry Clay. In a letter to Francis Brooke in 1839 Clay wrote "Mr. Calhoon, of our State, being on a visit of business at Richmond, I have given him a letter of introduction to you.

He is intelligent, shrewd, and trustworthy. You may give him all confidence."

Judge Alney McLean died in office in 1841. John Calhoon was appointed to succeed him as circuit judge. "His sound common sense, clear and discriminating intellect, and wonderful memory of the decisions of superior courts upon similar questions, soon distinguished him as an able judge."

Apparently about the time Calhoon was appointed circuit judge, the Calhoons moved to the community on the north side of Green River.

After several years as circuit judge, John Calhoon resigned. One report states he "wearied of this office," more likely his health became a problem.

On the banks of Green River John engaged in milling. In January 1852, the Kentucky Legislature authorized Calhoon, Thomas Shackelford, F.M. Humphreys, James Landrum and Rash Kelly to lay off no more than 100 acres to establish a town to be called Calhoon. These men also were appointed trustees of the new town.

Calhoon did not live out the year. During the early autumn an old friend and former fellow attorney, Ben Hardin, made an 84-mile horseback trip to visit John.

On Hardin's return home, he observed to another friend that "death had laid its heavy hand on his old friend Judge Calhoon," and he expected him to die soon.

On Oct. 15, 1852, John Calhoon died in Louisville where he had gone for medical treatment. Two years later his namesake town became the county seat for a new county named for Calhoon's friend Alney McLean.

Lucius Little remembered John Calhoon when the former was a boy in Calhoon. "He was a large, handsome man," Little recalled, "over six feet in height, and of fine presence and address."

John Calhoon was an "orator, a wit, and an able, skillful, and accomplished lawyer," Little wrote. "His social qualities were most fascinating, and his love of fun unbounded," Harrison Taylor reported.

A later biographic note called John Calhoon "a man of marked ability (who) distinguished himself not only as one of the first men in his profession, but also displayed fine traits as a legislator."

The report concluded with the statement that he was "very highly esteemed in his section of the State, as one of its most valuable men."

In his early days Calhoon was "rather too prone to fall into the wild, rollicking customs of the day indulged in by too many citizens."

But his "fine personal appearance, his pleasant address, strong common sense, clear, discriminating intellect," all soon rendered him a popular lawyer."

Long after Calhoon's death, his sense of humor and power of repartee were remembered. One incident took place in Hancock Circuit Court with Judge Alney McLean presiding. Calhoon and his friend John McHenry were on opposite sides.

Calhoon stated that an order had been made at a former day of the term. McHenry denied any such order being made.

The record was examined, the order found to be as Calhoon had said. The "court must have been asleep or bereft of its senses when that order was made," Judge McLean said.

"Possibly your honor is right," Calhoon responded, "but my esteem for the court prevents me taking either side of the question."

Calhoon was accused of being "fickle in his friendships." One writer stated that he "threw off his friends like a huntsman his pack."

In addition, he was called "Ardent and impetuous in his manner and feelings...on the stump and at the bar, (he) gave offense to persons professing to be his friends."

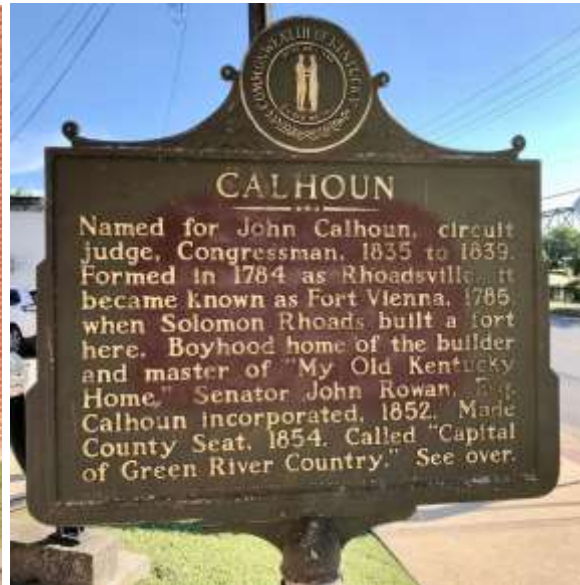
At the same time it was written that "no man surpassed him in the pleasing, winning way in which he could conciliate and win them back again."

John Calhoon married Mary Morton in 1819. She survived her husband by more than 20 years, dying Jan. 7, 1873.

They had seven children: Isaac who married Margaret Stout, Corilla who married Walker Hawes and moved to Texas, William, Mary who married John Johnson, Attila (Atta, Mehettable) who married Benjamin Huston, Irene who married Lloyd Gate, Margaret who married William Griffith first and Frank Shrader second.



John Calhoon (1793-1852) gravestone in John Calhoon cemetery, Calhoun, KY



Historical highway marker erected in 1968 by the Kentucky Historical Society & Kentucky Department of Highways (marker number 1123). Marker is on the McLean County Courthouse lawn in Calhoun, McLean County, Kentucky. It is at the intersection of Main Street (Kentucky Route 81) and 2nd Street, on the right when traveling north on Main Street. Inscription:

County Named

For Judge Alney McLean, lawyer and politician. Established in 1854, from parts of Daviess, Ohio, and Muhlenberg Counties. Solomon Rhoads and James Inman settled in 1788. First county officers were: Sanders Eaves, judge; Alfred Tanner, clerk; Henry Griffith, sheriff; Frank McLean, county attorney; Jacob Davis, surveyor; James Hinton, jailer. See over.

Calhoun

Named for John Calhoun, circuit judge, Congressman, 1835 to 1839. Formed in 1784 as Rhoadsville, it became known as Fort Vienna, 1785, when Solomon Rhoads built a fort here. Boyhood home of the builder and master of "My Old Kentucky Home," Senator John Rowan, Esq. Calhoun incorporated, 1852. Made county seat, 1854. Called "Capital of Green River Country." See over.

