



Governor James F. Robinson (1800-1882)

Few of governors of Kentucky faced such difficult times as James F. Robinson.

Born in Scott County on October 4, 1800, Robinson was an attorney, farmer, and state senator. In the early stages of the Civil War, Kentucky's pro-Southern governor, Beriah Magoffin, decided to resign when his leadership of the Unionist legislature became ineffectual. Magoffin would resign, however, only if the Speaker of the Senate, John Fisk, was not in line to succeed him. Therefore, Fisk resigned his post, and Robinson, a conservative Unionist whom Magoffin supported, was elected Speaker. Magoffin then resigned, Robinson became governor, and Fisk was again elected Speaker. Kentucky political machinations during the Civil War were indeed complicated.

Robinson became governor in August 1862, a difficult month for Kentucky. While the state was pro-Union, most Kentuckians disagreed with Lincoln's emancipation policies, which were officially announced that September. In addition, multiple Confederate armies invaded the state just days after Robinson took office, leading to the battles of Richmond, Munfordsville, Perryville, and a multitude of smaller skirmishes. By Robinson's first month in office, most of central Kentucky was occupied by the Confederates.

Although he was governor only until September 1863, the proslavery Robinson tangled with Union authorities over emancipation, military policy toward Kentucky civilians, and the enlistment of African American Union soldiers. With Kentucky in a precarious financial position because of the war, he also worked to be reimbursed by the Federal government "for organizing, arming, transporting & subsisting . . . troops to put down the rebellion."

Following his short term as governor, Robinson farmed and practiced law. He remained on the periphery of politics, throwing his support to George B. McClellan in the 1864 presidential election, rather than Abraham Lincoln.

Robinson died on October 31, 1882, and was buried in Georgetown.

Governor James Fisher Robinson (1800-1882), by Louis M. Morgan, date unknown
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