



Mississippi Territory. Published by Lucas, ca. 1816

*“To the memory
of Cowles Mead
whose pure life
exemplified the spirit
of an honest man.
Born October 18, 1776
Died May 17, 1844
And this is the
promise he hath
promised us,
even eternal life”*



COWLES MEAD 1776-1844

PIONEER STATESMAN.
SPELLBINDING ORATOR.
BELOVED CLINTONIAN.

Directions to Clinton's Visitor Center

From I-20 in Clinton: Take Springridge Road Exit (#36) and go north. Cross Hwy 80 and Northside Drive. Springridge then becomes Pinehaven Road. Go approximately 1/2 north of Northside Drive to 1300 Pinehaven Road.

From the Natchez Trace: Take The Historic District/Clinton Visitor Center Exit Turn left and go to 1300 Pinehaven Road.

To learn more about Cowles Mead visit:
http://www.vaiden.net/cowles_mead.html



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Beloved Clintonian.

Cowles Mead, the first acting governor of the Mississippi Territory from 1807 to 1809, had an unusual and fascinating career.

Born in Bedford County, Virginia on October 18, 1776, Mead began his journey to Clinton, Mississippi, because of unrequited love. When his cousin Sarah (Sallie) Cowles rebuffed his ardent wooing and repeated proposals of marriage, he moved to Georgia where he practiced law and became active in state politics. Sarah Cowles later married Joseph Vaiden. The town of Vaiden, Mississippi was named for their son, Cowles Mead Vaiden (named after her first love).

In 1805, Cowles Mead ran for the office of United States Congressman from Georgia and was elected over his influential opposition, Thomas Spalding. When Mead went to Washington D.C. to receive his seat in the U.S. House, Spalding followed to contest the election. Spalding successfully petitioned to have Mead's seat vacated by showing that the voting results from three counties were delayed because of a hurricane. A Presidential appointment took him on the next step in his journey southward.

Cowles Mead and Aaron Burr

“The Mountain has surely brought forth a Mouse”
Judge Thomas Rodney

After his January 20, 1806 appointment by President Thomas Jefferson, Cowles Mead assumed the duties of Territorial Secretary of the Mississippi Territory. In the absence of Territorial Governor Robert Williams, Mead served a brief tenure as acting Territorial Governor. It was during this tenure that Aaron Burr, who had been involved in the now-famous duel in which he killed Alexander Hamilton, fled prosecution and landed at Bruinsburg on the Mississippi River on January 10, 1807. Learning that Burr and his followers were in the territory and fearing that they might try to overthrow the government, Mead set about to have Burr arrested for treason. Rather than face extradition, Burr voluntarily surrendered to Mississippi officials in exchange for a guaranteed trial in the territory.

Burr was bound under a bond of \$10,000, and Mead ordered anyone arrested that appeared hostile toward the government's views or favorable to Aaron Burr.

Burr was tried on the campus of historic Jefferson College (Mississippi's first institution of higher learning) in Washington, Mississippi, in February 1807. Burr was found not guilty of any crime or misdemeanor by a grand jury. Later arrested north of Mobile, Burr was taken to Richmond, Virginia, where he was acquitted of treason.

The arrest of Aaron Burr, which brought Mead his greatest fame, was actually a debacle. Mead was chastised for making arrests without warrants. Perhaps Judge Thomas Rodney made the sagest remark about the affair: “The Mountain has surely brought forth a Mouse.” Mead later said he considered this one act as overshadowing every other act of his career.

A Colorful and Often Compelling Orator

Later elected to the Territorial Assembly, Mead served in the 1817 Constitutional Convention, but subsequently lost in quests for Congress, Lt. Governor, and Governor. Mead had vast land holdings, including his home Meadvilla which still stands behind the Methodist Church in Washington, Mississippi, the town that became the state's first capitol. Meadville in nearby Franklin County was named for him.

Mead, a spellbinding orator, was often called upon when a flowery speech was desired. He spoke long and beautifully in territorial and later state meetings. But as fascinating as his oratory was, he seldom convinced his audience. They would applaud his orations with genuine glee, then vote as if he had not spoken.



Meadvilla in Washington, MS

J. F. H. Claiborne in his “Mississippi as a Province Territory and State” says of Mead's ability: “His conversational and declamatory powers were captivating, but exuberant. He was too rhetorical to appear logical and practical. His speeches were a succession of beautiful flights, exhortations and appeals. Although unquestionably a man of genius, he was classed as a visionary.”

Still, he was a great parliamentarian and years later after he left public office and retired, he was called upon by the legislature to chair a particularly hot debate and preside over the settling of an issue.



Provine Chapel ca. 1850

The Commercial Railroad Bank of Vicksburg had a strong branch at Clinton, and Cowles Mead was president of the Real Estate Banking Company in Clinton that issued notes “payable at their banking house” as late as 1839. It is said that when General Mead's bank failed, some depositors approached him with reference to a settlement. The old General, who was plowing at the time, said with an indignant wave of the hand, “See the cashier about that matter for my mind is on things spiritual now, not on things temporal.”

Cowles Mead and Mississippi College

An ardent Republican and devout Presbyterian, Mead served with distinction as a member and as president of the board of directors of Mississippi College in Clinton.

In the early 1830s, the Presbyterians were the oldest and largest denominational group in Clinton. Within its membership were many of the most prominent citizens of Clinton. Among them were Cowles Mead, Daniel Comfort, G. P. Strong, and Ulysses W. Moffett.

In February 1843, Cowles Mead called the board into session. He invited them to meet in his beautiful home, Greenwood, located on the outskirts of Clinton. Here in this magnificent antebellum mansion, Mead and the board met to review the recent developments in the history of the college and to plan for the future.

Greenwood Plantation: Mead's Beloved Home in Clinton

Mead married his first wife, Mary Green, in 1807. She later died in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1833 he married Mary Mills who died in 1834. In September of 1835, he married Mary Magruder of Clinton. There he built Greenwood, one of six homes in the area burned in one afternoon by Yankee soldiers in connection with the 1863 siege of Vicksburg.

Clinton historian Charles Hillman Brough describes Greenwood as follows: “Greenwood stood in a lawn of fifty acres; its broad carriage way was frescoed with rows of magnolias, pines and liveoaks; its lawn was carpeted with a rich sward of Bermuda grass, which General Mead is said to have introduced into the United States; hothouse plants, roses, and crepe myrtles bloomed in rich profusion; and hospitality abounded. In his garden beneath an aged cedar tree was the wide garden seat where General Mead drank his after dinner coffee and discussed affairs of State with distinguished visitors, and in this selfsame garden, beneath a large pecan tree, whose seed they planted, are the neglected graves of Cowles Mead, his wife and son. Here in Greenwood, in this spot of almost forgotten greatness, the pilgrim of history may read his epitaph.”

Cowles Mead died near Clinton on Friday, May 7, 1844, having lived 67 years, 6 months and 29 days, and he was interred at a private family graveyard. The Mead family's final resting place is located between Pinehaven Road and I-20 exits, north of downtown Clinton at mile post 88 on the Natchez Trace Parkway.



Mead family's private gravesite