

= Ninian Edwards =

Ninian Edwards (March 17 , 1775 ? July 20 , 1833) was a founding political figure of the state of Illinois . He served as the only governor of the Illinois Territory from 1809 to 1818 , as one of the first two United States Senators from Illinois from 1818 to 1824 , and as the third Governor of Illinois from 1826 to 1830 . In a time and place where personal coalitions were more influential than parties , Edwards led one of the two main factions in frontier Illinois politics .

Born in Maryland , Edwards began his political career in Kentucky , where he served as a legislator and judge . He rose to the position of Chief Justice of the Kentucky Court of Appeals in 1808 , at the time Kentucky 's highest court . In 1809 , U.S. President James Madison appointed him to govern the newly created Illinois Territory . He held that post for three terms , overseeing the territory 's transition first to democratic " second grade " government , and then to statehood in 1818 . On its second day in session , the Illinois General Assembly elected Edwards to the U.S. Senate , where conflict with rivals damaged him politically .

Edwards won an unlikely 1826 election to become Governor of Illinois . Conflict with the legislature over state bank regulations marked Edwards ' administration , as did the pursuit of Indian removal . As governor or territorial governor he twice sent Illinois militia against Native Americans , in the War of 1812 and the Winnebago War , and signed treaties for the cession of Native American land . Edwards returned to private life when his term ended in 1830 and died of cholera two years later .

= = Early life = =

Ninian Edwards was born in 1775 to the prominent Edwards family in Montgomery County , Maryland . His mother , Margaret Beall Edwards , was from another prominent local family . His father Benjamin Edwards served in the Maryland House of Delegates , in Maryland 's state ratifying convention for the U.S. Constitution , and in the United States House of Representatives , filling a vacant seat for two months . Ninian was educated by private tutors , one of whom was the future U.S. Attorney General William Wirt . He attended Dickinson College from 1790 to 1792 but did not graduate , leaving college to study law . His son Ninian Wirt Edwards wrote later that Edwards spent some of his time at Dickinson reading medicine , a field to which he devoted considerable time in his later years .

In 1794 , at the age of 19 , Edwards moved to Nelson County , Kentucky to manage some family land . He showed a great aptitude for business and leadership and was soon elected to a seat in the Kentucky House of Representatives , before he was even eligible to vote . In 1802 he was awarded the rank of major in the militia . In 1803 he moved to Russellville , Kentucky , and won a succession of public offices : circuit court judge in 1803 , presidential elector in 1804 (voting for Thomas Jefferson) , and judge and finally chief justice of the Kentucky Court of Appeals , which at the time was Kentucky 's highest court . He joined the high court in 1806 and won the leadership position in 1808 .

A well @-@ educated landowning aristocrat , Edwards deliberately cultivated the image of the natural leader . Thomas Ford writes that he continued to dress like an 18th @-@ century gentleman long after such fashions had gone out of style , and that his public speaking was marked by showy eloquence . Edwards consciously positioned himself in the select class of men who dominated Kentucky and , later , Illinois politics . In 1803 in Russellville , Edwards married Elvira Lane , a relative from Maryland .

= = Territorial governorship = =

The Illinois Territory was created in 1809 . It included all of what today is the state of Wisconsin , as well as parts of Minnesota and Michigan . Its population was almost entirely concentrated in the south , in the region later known as Egypt . President James Madison first appointed Kentucky politician John Boyle as its governor . Boyle collected his salary for the position for 21 days but then resigned to take Edwards ' job as Kentucky Chief Justice , while friends in Washington helped

secure Edwards ' appointment as territorial governor . In the meantime , Territorial Secretary Nathaniel Pope , a cousin of Edwards , had to assume the powers of acting governor , creating Illinois ' first counties and appointing officials to form the new government . Only 34 years old at the time of his appointment , Ninian Edwards is the youngest man ever to govern Illinois as either a state or a territory .

Edwards settled in the American Bottom on land he received as a grant upon his appointment as governor . He named his new farm Elvirade , after his wife . Along with his family , Edwards brought a number of slaves , whom he did not free even though the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had made slavery illegal in the territory . An 1803 " Law Concerning Servants " had been promulgated for the Indiana Territory by then @-@ Governor William Henry Harrison that maintained the status of people brought into the territory " under contract to serve another in any trade or occupation . " The law , which remained in force in the Illinois territory , permitted slavery to persist for decades under the guise of indentured servitude . Most of Illinois ' early governors were slaveowners , and Edwards was no exception . Later , he may have made extra income by renting some of his " indentured servants " out for labor in Missouri .

The new territorial governor was sworn in on June 11 , 1809 . At first Edwards tried to avoid partisanship but soon found that faction was an inevitable result of his power to appoint officials and distribute government jobs . Although the First Party System continued to define national politics , the Federalist and Republican Parties never took hold in frontier Illinois . Rather , factional loyalties were created by personality , personal bonds such as kinship and militia service , and especially the distribution of patronage . In the early territorial years , two rival factions grew up around Edwards and Judge Jesse B. Thomas . These two factions formed Illinois ' political landscape during its time as a territory and for its first several years of statehood .

= = = Democratic government = = =

Throughout Edwards ' three terms as governor , he showed a willingness to surrender his own considerable powers in order to expand participatory government in the Illinois Territory . Before 1812 , while Illinois had a first @-@ grade territorial status , Edwards had vast powers to appoint county and local officials ; however , he made it his practice to consider local opinion as much as he could when making appointments , often giving weight to petitions signed by local residents . He attempted to do the same for militia officers for a time , letting the men of a unit elect their leaders , but he soon abandoned this policy as impractical .

In 1812 , Edwards successfully persuaded Congress to modify a provision of the 1787 Ordinance limiting voting rights to freeholders of 50 acres (20 ha) of land . Due to long @-@ running disputes over fraudulently sold lands , very few Illinois frontiersmen could qualify . At Edwards ' urging , Congress granted the Illinois Territory universal white male suffrage , making it the most democratic U.S. territory at the time . In April , Edwards held a referendum on moving to second @-@ grade government , allowing the people of Illinois to elect a legislature and a non @-@ voting delegate to Congress . The referendum passed , and elections were held in October that sent Shadrach Bond to Washington as Illinois ' first congressional delegate .

= = = War of 1812 = = =

Edwards had not been governor long when Illinois became the scene of fighting during the War of 1812 . Relations between Illinois settlers and Native Americans worsened throughout the territory during 1810 and 1811 . By June 1811 , Governor Edwards ordered the construction of a series of blockhouses and called out three companies of militia .

The declaration of war and the Battle of Fort Dearborn in 1812 convinced Edwards that Potawatomi and Kickapoo in the territory were preparing to launch a major attack on the southern settlements . In his capacity as commander in chief , Edwards gathered 350 mounted rangers and volunteers near Edwardsville and personally led an expedition north to Peoria . After burning two Kickapoo villages on the Sangamon River along the way , the militia advanced on Peoria itself . All told , the

short campaign burned several villages and inflicted dozens of casualties before returning . The attack angered both the Peoria villagers and the U.S. government because it had been carried out against Native Americans loyal to Black Partridge and Gomo , two leaders who had not joined Tecumseh 's War and were considered friendly to U.S. interests . A second attack under Captain Thomas Craig killed a large number of French settlers from Peoria as well as Potawatomi . In 1813 , Illinois and Missouri militia joined a force of United States infantry under Benjamin Howard to drive all Native American villagers away from Peoria and establish Fort Clark .

Edwards ' actions alienated those Native Americans friendly to the U.S. in the region . Ninian Edwards , having lost the confidence of the Madison administration , waited out the war in Kentucky . However , he was reappointed to a second and then a third term as territorial governor in 1812 and 1815 , and he was also named one of the three U.S. negotiators of the Treaties of Portage des Sioux in 1815 .

= = = Second and third terms = = =

During his nine years as territorial governor , Edwards made a good deal of money through several profitable ventures , including farming , land speculation , and investment in sawmills , grist mills , and stores .

Edwards ' political rivalry with Jesse B. Thomas continued for the rest of his time as governor . Edwards , along with much of the legislature , criticized the territory 's judges for their inactivity . Among their complaints were that the judges did not hold court often enough and spent too much time absent from the territory . The legislature passed a bill in 1814 to reform the territory 's judicial system . The judges refused to acknowledge the act , claiming that they were outside the jurisdiction of the legislature . In 1815 the issue was resolved by Congress , which passed a law supporting Edwards and the legislature .

In December 1817 , Edwards , responding to a movement for statehood led by his ally Daniel Pope Cook , recommended to the legislature that Illinois apply for admission to the Union . He also recommended that a census first be taken of the territory , a standard practice , but the legislature rejected this . Legislators , particularly those opposed to slavery , feared that any delay would allow Missouri to apply for statehood before Illinois , and that since Missouri was a slave state , this would cause so much turmoil in Congress that it would delay Illinois ' admission even longer .

In order to emphasize to Congress that Illinois would be a free state , the legislature passed in January 1818 a bill that would both abolish Illinois ' " indentured servant " system of de facto slavery , and prohibit Illinois ' future Constitution from reinstating it . Governor Edwards issued his only veto to send the bill back to the legislature , and it was never revised . He made his objections on constitutional grounds , but he also had a conflict of interest as the owner of several slaves himself .

During Edwards ' terms as territorial governor , Illinois ' population more than tripled , from 12 @, @ 282 in 1810 to 40 @, @ 258 in 1818 (a census was finally conducted later that year) . The population did not meet the 60 @, @ 000 threshold the Northwest Ordinance required for a new state , but both Illinoisans and Congress expected continued growth .

= = Senate career = =

Illinois quickly proceeded along the steps to statehood . Its constitution was finished in August 1818 ; elections were held in September ; and in October , the first General Assembly met in Kaskaskia . On October 6 , Ninian Edwards stepped down , and Shadrach Bond was inaugurated as Illinois ' first governor . The following day the new state legislature voted for Illinois ' two members of the U.S. Senate . Edwards was quickly chosen on the first ballot ; his rival Thomas was only elected after the fourth . Edwards and Thomas then drew straws to determine their respective terms : Thomas was placed in Class II of the Senate and could serve until 1823 , while Edwards was placed in Class III and had to face reelection in February 1819 . Edwards and Thomas still had to wait for Congress to formally ratify Illinois ' constitution and admission to the Union , which it did on November 25 . On December 3 the two Senators were finally seated , leaving Edwards with a mere three months in his

first term .

Edwards ' re @-@ election was more difficult . In four months he had lost the temporary support of Thomas ' allies in the General Assembly who had voted for him in 1818 . He narrowly defeated Thomas partisan Michael Jones by a vote of 23 ? 19 . This may have been due to the influence of the powerful Secretary of State Elias Kane , a Thomas ally .

Like most members of Congress during the Era of Good Feelings , Senator Edwards sat as a member of the Democratic @-@ Republican Party . As his second term drew on , he joined the Adams @-@ Clay faction that would develop into the National Republicans after Edwards left office . Edwards voted for the Missouri Compromise in 1820 , a bill that Thomas sponsored . He voted against a law reducing prices for federal land , which made both Edwards and Representative Daniel Pope Cook targets of criticism at home . On May 6 , 1821 , Cook married Edwards ' daughter Julia .

Ninian Edwards caused trouble for himself when he wrote several articles in the Washington Republican under the pseudonym " A.B. " that attacked U.S. Treasury Secretary William H. Crawford . Edwards alleged that Crawford had known of the impending failure of Illinois ' Bank of Edwardsville in 1821 , but had not withdrawn federal money from it . Edwards found that none of Crawford 's rivals were willing to support his charges , and he was unable to produce corroborating evidence . He resigned his Senate seat on March 4 , 1824 , to take a job he wanted as the first United States Minister to Mexico . While en route to his new position , Edwards was called back to Washington to testify before a special House committee concerning the " A.B. Plot " . Unable to substantiate his claims , Edwards resigned his diplomatic post , to be replaced by Joel Roberts Poinsett .

Back in Illinois , Edwards settled in Belleville , a town whose site he had once owned before selling off its lots at a profit .

= = State governorship = =

= = = Election of 1826 = = =

When he returned to Illinois , Edwards appeared to be a discredited politician . He no longer had a loyal coalition in the General Assembly to re @-@ elect him to the U.S. Senate . His actions in the " A.B. Plot " had made him lose favor with President Adams ; therefore he could not expect another federal appointment . In addition , supporters of Andrew Jackson were becoming a force in Illinois politics . Illinois frontier voters so admired Jackson that soon , for the first time , they would give their support to a national party , the Democrats . Ninian Edwards never criticized Jackson , but as an Adams @-@ Clay Republican Senator he was not part of Jackson 's growing coalition . Jacksonians deeply resented Edwards ' ally Cook , who had voted against Jackson when the presidential election of 1824 was decided in the House of Representatives .

However , when he ran for governor in 1826 , Edwards had the good fortune to enter a three @-@ way race that split the Jacksonians between state Senator Thomas Sloo and Lieutenant Governor Adolphus Hubbard . As a campaign issue , Edwards focused on Illinois ' dire financial situation , blaming Sloo and Hubbard and other legislators for it . Edwards won 49 @.@ 5 percent of the vote to Sloo 's 46 percent , with the rest going to Hubbard .

= = = Administration = = =

Edwards ' gubernatorial term was another period of rapid growth for Illinois . In the decade from 1820 to 1830 , the population again nearly tripled from 55 @,@ 211 to 157 @,@ 445 . During this era , Illinois was the fastest @-@ growing territory in the world .

Edwards ' administration was hampered by his conflict with the legislature , primarily over the struggling Bank of Illinois . The bank had been established in 1821 , and from the beginning it had been underfunded , its notes had badly depreciated , and it had helped put the state deeply in debt .

In his inaugural address Edwards undiplomatically attacked bank officials and politicians alike , accusing them of fraud and perjury . From that point , Edwards had a poor relationship with the General Assembly . During his term the Assembly did eventually pass a bank regulation bill , but it also passed a measure to relieve debtors despite Edwards ' objections that the state could not afford it .

In 1827 Illinois established its first penitentiary , at Alton . That same year , the state received a federal land grant to build the Illinois and Michigan Canal , though work did not begin for several years .

Also in 1827 , Edwards ordered the Illinois militia to join another war against Native Americans in northern Illinois . The Winnebago War , fought between white settlers and members of the Ho @-@ Chunk tribe , broke out in Wisconsin (then part of the Michigan Territory) but spread to the lead @-@ mining region around Galena . Edwards dispatched the militia and ordered 600 more men to be recruited in Sangamon County . The show of force convinced the Ho @-@ Chunk to surrender .

After the war , Edwards urged the federal government to remove the remaining Native Americans from northern Illinois , claiming that their presence violated " the rights of a sovereign and independent state " , and hinting that he might dispatch the militia again to force them out . The federal government applied diplomatic pressure , and on July 29 , 1829 , the Potawatomi , Ottawa , and Ojibwe ceded 3 @,@ 000 square miles (7 @,@ 800 km2) of northern land to the State of Illinois ; the Winnebago made a cession in August .

= = Later life = =

Under the 1818 constitution , governors were limited to a single term . When Edwards ' ended on December 6 , 1830 , he returned to private life . He ran for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1832 and lost . Edwards devoted himself to charitable medical work in Belleville , giving free care to local residents . A cholera epidemic came through the area in 1833 , carried by Winfield Scott 's troops during the Black Hawk War . Edwards stayed in the town to care for his patients and caught the disease , dying on July 20 . Ninian Edwards was interred in Belleville , but he was later moved to Springfield 's Oak Ridge Cemetery .

= = Family = =

Three of Edwards ' sons and one son @-@ in @-@ law followed him into politics . Ninian Wirt Edwards (1809 ? 1889) , named for his father and his father 's childhood tutor William Wirt , served as Illinois Attorney General , in the General Assembly , and as Illinois ' first Superintendent of Public Instruction . He was married to Elizabeth Porter Todd , a sister of Mary Todd Lincoln . Their daughter Julia Cook Edwards married Edward Lewis Baker , editor of the Illinois State Journal and son of Congressman David Jewett Baker .

Another son , Albert Gallatin Edwards (1812 ? 1892) , was an assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury under President Abraham Lincoln . In 1887 he founded the brokerage firm A. G. Edwards in Saint Louis , Missouri . A third son , Benjamin S. Edwards (1818 ? 1886) , established a successful law practice in Springfield , Illinois and served as a judge in Illinois ' Thirteenth Circuit . Ninian Edwards ' daughter , Julia Edwards Cook , married Congressman Daniel Pope Cook . Their son , John Pope Cook , was a mayor of Springfield and a general in the Union Army during the American Civil War .

= = Legacy = =

Edwards County , Illinois was named for him , as is the St. Louis , Missouri Metro @-@ East area city of Edwardsville , Illinois . Both were named for him during his time as territorial governor . The territorial legislature named Edwards County , while Edwardsville was named by its founder , Thomas Kirkpatrick . The Edwards Trace , pioneer Central Illinois trail , was named for Ninian Edwards and his War of 1812 campaign .

