

= Cabell Breckinridge =

Joseph " Cabell " Breckinridge (July 14 , 1788 ? September 1 , 1823) was a lawyer and politician in the U.S. state of Kentucky . From 1816 to 1819 , he was a member of the Kentucky House of Representatives , serving as speaker from 1817 to 1819 . In 1820 , he was appointed Kentucky Secretary of State by Governor John Adair . A member of the Breckinridge political family , he was the son of U.S. Attorney General John Breckinridge and the father of U.S. Vice President John C. Breckinridge .

Born in Albemarle County , Virginia to John Breckinridge (1760 @-@ 1806) and Mary Hopkins Cabell Breckinridge (1769 @-@ 1858) , Breckinridge moved to Kentucky with his parents in 1793 . When John Breckinridge was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1801 , Cabell traveled with him to Washington , D.C. , and completed preparatory studies at New London Academy (now Colby ? Sawyer College) . In 1806 , he enrolled in the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) . His studies were interrupted in 1807 when he participated in a student protest against the strict rules and rigorous curriculum at the institution , but after a year @-@ long break , he returned and completed his bachelor 's degree in 1810 . After graduation , he married Mary Clay Smith , daughter of Samuel Stanhope Smith , the university 's president .

Breckinridge intended to begin practicing law in Lexington , Kentucky , but he enlisted for service in the War of 1812 instead . After the war , he opened his practice and was elected to the Kentucky House , where he led an unsuccessful attempt to oust Gabriel Slaughter after he ascended to the governorship upon the death of George Madison . He served as Speaker of the House from 1817 to 1819 , and was appointed as Adair 's Secretary of State in 1820 . He moved to Frankfort , the state capital , so that he could attend to the duties of his office , but fell ill with a fever in August 1823 and died in office on September 1 .

= = Early life and family = =

Joseph Cabell Breckinridge was born in Albemarle County , Virginia , on July 14 , 1788 . He was the second child and first son of John and Mary Hopkins " Polly " (née Cabell) Breckinridge . He was named for his maternal grandfather , Joseph Cabell , of Virginia 's Cabell political family but was known as " Cabell " throughout his life .

In 1793 , the family moved to Lexington , Kentucky . Late in the year , a smallpox epidemic struck the city . Inoculations came too late , and Breckinridge , his mother , and three of his siblings were infected . Breckinridge , his mother , and his sister Letitia survived , but his sister Mary and brother Robert died . Other than this , historian Lowell H. Harrison wrote that " little is known of his boyhood " , although he speculates that he probably attended some local schools and read from his father 's extensive library .

In 1801 , when Breckinridge was 12 years old , his father was elected to the U.S. Senate . The family moved to Bedford County , Virginia , where they lived with relatives in order to be closer to the elder Breckinridge during the congressional session at Washington , D.C. . While there , Cabell Breckinridge attended New London Academy (now Colby ? Sawyer College) . A case of measles prevented him from attending William and Mary College (now College of William & Mary) , his father 's alma mater , where his cousin , future Congressman James Breckinridge , was enrolled . In 1803 , he accompanied his father to the capital where he witnessed the debates over the Louisiana Purchase before returning to college in October . After Congress adjourned in March , John Breckinridge met his son in Virginia , and they arrived back at Cabell 's Dale , the family estate near Lexington , on April 18 , 1804 . He did not return to Virginia with his father in late 1804 , instead pursuing preparatory studies under Colonel Samuel Wilson in advance of his enrollment at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) .

= = Studies at Princeton University = =

Breckinridge arrived in Princeton , New Jersey , in late December 1805 . He had completed his final

exams by April 5 , but he declined his father 's offer to come to Washington because he needed to catch up on his studies in arithmetic . When the next term began in May , he joined the American Whig ? Cliosophic Society , a debating society founded by James Madison , Philip Freneau , Aaron Burr , and Henry Lee in 1769 .

In mid @-@ 1806 , Cabell learned that his father was sick . Not long after , however , he received word that his father was improving and expected to meet him in Virginia en route to the capital . Although a rendezvous location had not been set , he assumed it would be in Lynchburg , where the Breckinridges had relatives . In October , he traveled to his uncle Lewis Breckinridge 's home to wait for his father , but he never came . Disappointed , he returned to Princeton for the beginning of the new term , unaware that his father 's recovery had been short @-@ lived . Later he learned that his father had attempted to leave Cabell 's Dale on October 22 but collapsed off his horse and returned to his sick bed ; he died December 14 , 1806 .

In January 1807 , travelers from Kentucky finally brought news of John Breckinridge 's death . Despite Cabell 's declaration to a relative that , " I consider my life dedicated to my mother 's ease " , Breckinridge continued his studies . John Breckinridge died intestate , complicating the settlement of his estate and creating financial difficulties for Cabell , who had been receiving support from his father . Desperate , he appealed to Alfred Grayson , his sister Letitia 's husband and son of Senator William Grayson , for assistance .

In March 1807 , about 125 students organized a protest against the college 's strict conduct policies and rigorous study requirements . The protest included signing a formal petition of protest ; college administrators subsequently suspended everyone who refused to withdraw his name from the petition . Breckinridge was required to apologize for his part in the protest in order to return to school , but he refused to do so . In May , he left Princeton for Cabell 's Dale , but in Philadelphia he found that there were no available stages heading west for two weeks . Unable to afford room and board for that long , he went to Fincastle , Virginia , to stay with relatives . He considered enrolling at the College of William and Mary for the fall term in 1807 , believing he could complete his studies in nine months but ultimately decided against it . Harrison surmises that the lack of correspondence between Breckinridge and his family in Kentucky between July 1807 to July 1808 indicated that he was at Cabell 's Dale during most or all of that period .

By July 1808 , Breckinridge had decided to return to Princeton in October to finish his studies . His roommate , James G. Birney , and the university president , Samuel Stanhope Smith , were both ardent abolitionists , and through their influence , he became convinced that slavery must be ended , but only by voluntary emancipation , not by government interference . He completed his bachelor 's degree in 1810 .

= = Marriage and law practice = =

While completing his degree , Breckinridge began courting Mary Clay Smith , the daughter the university president and granddaughter of John Witherspoon , a signer of the Declaration of Independence . After graduation , he journeyed home , but returned to Princeton where he and Smith were married on May 11 , 1811 . The couple had five children ? Frances (b . 1812) , Caroline (b . 1813) , Mary Cabell (b . 1815) , John Cabell (b . 1821) , and Laetitia (b . 1822) . John Cabell Breckinridge went on to represent Kentucky in both houses of Congress , was elected Vice President of the United States in 1856 , and was the fifth and final Confederate States Secretary of War .

After attending wedding celebrations with friends and relatives in Princeton , Philadelphia , and New York City , the couple moved in with Breckinridge 's widowed mother at Cabell 's Dale . Before Breckinridge could commence practice , the U.S. entered the War of 1812 . He was commissioned a major and served as aide @-@ de @-@ camp under Samuel Hopkins . He would later refer to the war as " a foolish and ineffectual brace of campaigns on the Illinois and Wabash " . After the war , Breckinridge returned to Kentucky , was admitted to the bar in 1814 , and opened a practice in Lexington . Concurrent with his practice , he served as a professor of religion . He also helped found the Second Presbyterian Church in Lexington and became one of its ruling elders . In 1815 , he

purchased Thorn Hill , a home in Lexington , from John W. Hunt .

= = Political career = =

In 1816 , Breckinridge was elected as a Democratic @-@ Republican to represent Fayette County in the Kentucky House of Representatives , gaining the largest majority given to a candidate for office in that county to that point . Historian Lewis Collins notes that Breckinridge 's legislative career began during the national " Era of Good Feelings " , largely congruent with the presidency of James Monroe , when political disagreements were relatively few . Nevertheless , dissension erupted in Kentucky in October 1816 after the death of Governor George Madison just three weeks into his term . Lieutenant Governor Gabriel Slaughter , as acting governor , rescinded Madison 's appointment of Charles Stewart Todd as Secretary of State , replacing him with former Senator John Pope , who was unpopular because of his vote against declaring the War of 1812 . Slaughter followed this up by appointing Martin D. Hardin , widely regarded as a Federalist despite his nominal identification with the Democratic @-@ Republicans , to fill the Senate vacancy caused by the resignation of William T. Barry .

Both appointments were unpopular in the state , and on January 27 , 1817 , Breckinridge formed a coalition of legislators in the House that sponsored a bill to elect " a governor to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of " Madison , essentially an attempt to oust Slaughter from the governorship . The bill passed the House by a vote of 56 ? 30 , but the Senate refused to concur . Madison 's death was the first time the lieutenant governor succeeded permanently to the governorship , establishing the precedent for future instances . Nevertheless , several anti @-@ Slaughter candidates were elected in the 1817 legislative elections . Breckinridge was re @-@ elected in both 1817 and 1818 and was chosen Speaker of the House both years .

In 1820 , Breckinridge 's friend , newly elected Governor John Adair , appointed him as Kentucky Secretary of State . Of this appointment , historian William C. Davis wrote , " It was a prestigious , albeit not too influential , position and would require his full @-@ time presence at the capital . " He remained in Lexington until the birth of his son in January 1821 ; in February , the family moved to the Governor 's Mansion in Frankfort to live with Adair . Although his mother opposed the move to Frankfort , he intended for it to be permanent ; an acquaintance wrote that " his plans were extensive and his hopes high " for his family 's life in the state capital . In addition to his duties as secretary of state , he continued to practice law .

= = Death = =

Throughout his term , Breckinridge 's health became increasingly fragile . When an illness described in contemporary accounts as " the prevailing fever " struck Lexington in 1823 , he took the children to Cabell 's Dale to prevent them from becoming ill . When he returned in late August , he contracted the fever . Despite the care of his brother , John , and the local doctors , he died on September 1 , 1823 , just over a week after falling ill . Originally buried on the grounds at Cabell 's Dale , he and several family members were re @-@ interred at Lexington Cemetery near the grave of his brother Robert Jefferson Breckinridge .

Breckinridge left behind \$ 15 @, @ 000 in debts , and with the nation still in the throes of the Panic of 1819 , his assets were not enough to pay off the obligations . His wife , who also fell ill and was pregnant with the couple 's sixth child , was so depressed because of his death and her subsequent financial straits that she suffered a miscarriage . She and the children moved in with Cabell 's widowed mother at Cabell 's Dale . For several years , she was dependent upon her in @-@ laws for survival ; Breckinridge 's brother , Robert , assumed Cabell 's debts , which he paid in full in 1832 .