

= Simon Bolivar Buckner =

Simon Bolivar Buckner (April 1 , 1823 ? January 8 , 1914) was an American soldier and politician who fought in the United States Army in the Mexican ? American War and in the Confederate States Army during the American Civil War . He later served as the 30th Governor of Kentucky .

After graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point , Buckner became an instructor there . He took a hiatus from teaching to serve in the Mexican ? American War , participating in many of the major battles of that conflict . He resigned from the army in 1855 to manage his father @-@ in @-@ law 's real estate in Chicago , Illinois . He returned to his native state of Kentucky in 1857 and was appointed adjutant general by Governor Beriah Magoffin in 1861 . In this position , he tried to enforce Kentucky 's neutrality policy in the early days of the Civil War . When the state 's neutrality was breached , Buckner accepted a commission in the Confederate Army after declining a similar commission to the Union Army . In 1862 , he accepted Ulysses S. Grant 's demand for an " unconditional surrender " at the Battle of Fort Donelson . He was the first Confederate general to surrender an army in the war . He spent five months as a prisoner of war . After his release , Buckner participated in Braxton Bragg 's failed invasion of Kentucky and near the end of the war became chief of staff to Edmund Kirby Smith in the Trans @-@ Mississippi Department .

In the years following the war , Buckner became active in politics . He was elected governor of Kentucky in 1887 . It was his second campaign for that office . His term was plagued by violent feuds in the eastern part of the state , including the Hatfield ? McCoy feud and the Rowan County War . His administration was rocked by scandal when state treasurer James " Honest Dick " Tate absconded with \$ 250 @,@ 000 from the state 's treasury . As governor , Buckner became known for vetoing special interest legislation . In the 1888 legislative session alone , he issued more vetoes than the previous ten governors combined . In 1895 , he made an unsuccessful bid for a seat in the U.S. Senate . The following year , he joined the National Democratic Party , or " Gold Democrats " , who favored a gold standard policy over the Free Silver position of the mainline Democrats . He was the Gold Democrats ' candidate for Vice President of the United States in the 1896 election , but polled just over one percent of the vote on a ticket with John M. Palmer . He never again sought public office and died January 8 , 1914 .

= = Early life = =

Simon B. Buckner (Sr.) , was born at Glen Lily , his family 's estate near Munfordville , Kentucky . He was the third child and second son of Aylett Hartswell and Elizabeth Ann (Morehead) Buckner . Named after the " South American soldier and statesman , Simón Bolívar , then at the height of his power " , Buckner did not begin school until age nine , when he enrolled at a private school in Munfordville . His closest friend in Munfordville was Thomas J. Wood , who would become a Union Army general opposing Buckner at the Battle of Perryville and the Battle of Chickamauga during the Civil War . Buckner 's father was an iron worker , but found that Hart County did not have sufficient timber to fire his iron furnace . Consequently , in 1838 , he moved the family to southern Muhlenberg County where he organized an iron @-@ making corporation . Buckner attended school in Greenville , and later at Christian County Seminary in Hopkinsville .

On July 1 , 1840 , Buckner enrolled at the United States Military Academy . In 1844 he graduated eleventh in his class of 25 and was commissioned a brevet second lieutenant in the 2nd U.S. Infantry Regiment . He was assigned to garrison duty at Sackett 's Harbor on Lake Ontario until August 28 , 1845 , when he returned to the Academy to serve as an assistant professor of geography , history , and ethics .

= = Service in the Mexican ? American War = =

In May 1846 , Buckner resigned his teaching position to fight in the Mexican ? American War , enlisting with the 6th U.S. Infantry Regiment . His early duties included recruiting soldiers and

bringing them to the Texas border . In November 1846 , he was ordered to join his company in the field ; he met them en route between Monclova and Parras . The company joined John E. Wool at Saltillo . In January 1847 , Buckner was ordered to Vera Cruz with William J. Worth 's division . While Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott besieged Vera Cruz , Buckner 's unit engaged a few thousand Mexican cavalry at a nearby town called Amazoque .

On August 8 , 1847 , Buckner was appointed quartermaster of the 6th Infantry . Shortly thereafter , he participated in battles at San Antonio and Churubusco , being slightly wounded in the latter battle . He was appointed a brevet first lieutenant for gallantry at Churubusco and Contreras , but declined the honor in part because reports of his participation at Contreras were in error ? he had been fighting in San Antonio at the time . Later , he was offered and accepted the same rank solely based on his conduct at Churubusco .

Buckner was again cited for gallant conduct at the Battle of Molino del Rey , and was appointed a brevet captain . He participated in the Battle of Chapultepec , the Battle of Belen Gate , and the storming of Mexico City . At the conclusion of the war , American soldiers served as an army of occupation , which left them time for leisure activities . Buckner joined the Aztec Club , and in April 1848 was a part of the successful expedition of Popocatepetl , a volcano southeast of Mexico City . Buckner was accorded the honor of lowering the American flag over Mexico City for the last time during the occupation .

= = Interbellum = =

After the war , Buckner accepted an invitation to return to West Point to teach infantry tactics . Just over a year later , he resigned the post in protest over the academy 's compulsory chapel attendance policy . Following his resignation , he was assigned to a recruiting post at Fort Columbus .

Buckner married Mary Jane Kingsbury on May 2 , 1850 , at her aunt 's home in Old Lyme , Connecticut . Shortly after their wedding , he was assigned to Fort Snelling and later to Fort Atkinson on the Arkansas River in present @-@ day Kansas . On December 31 , 1851 , he was promoted to first lieutenant , and on November 3 , 1852 , he was elevated to captain of the commissary department of the 6th U.S. Infantry in New York City . Previously , he had attained only a brevet to these ranks . Buckner gained such a reputation for fair dealings with the Indians , that the Oglala Lakota tribe called him Young Chief , and their leader , Yellow Bear , refused to treat with anyone but Buckner .

Before leaving the Army , Buckner helped an old friend from West Point and the Mexican ? American War , Captain Ulysses S. Grant , by covering his expenses at a New York hotel until money arrived from Ohio to pay for his passage home . On March 26 , 1855 , Buckner resigned from the Army to work with his father @-@ in @-@ law , who had extensive real estate holdings in Chicago , Illinois . When his father @-@ in @-@ law died in 1856 , Buckner inherited his property and moved to Chicago to manage it .

Still interested in military affairs , Buckner joined the Illinois State Militia of Cook County as a major . On April 3 , 1857 , he was appointed adjutant general of Illinois by Governor William Henry Bissell . He resigned the post in October of the same year . Following the Mountain Meadows massacre , a regiment of Illinois volunteers organized for potential service in a campaign against the Mormons . Buckner was offered command of the unit and a promotion to the rank of colonel . He accepted the position , but predicted that the unit would not see action . His prediction proved correct , as negotiations between the federal government and Mormon leaders eased tensions between the two .

In late 1857 , Buckner and his family returned to his native state and settled in Louisville . Buckner 's daughter , Lily , was born there on March 7 , 1858 . Later that year , a Louisville militia known as the Citizens ' Guard was formed , and Buckner was made its captain . He served in this capacity until 1860 , when the Guard was incorporated into the Kentucky State Guard 's Second Regiment . He was appointed inspector general of Kentucky in 1860 .

= = Civil War = =

In 1861 Kentucky governor Beriah Magoffin appointed Buckner adjutant general , promoted him to major general , and charged him with revising the state 's militia laws . The state was torn between Union and Confederacy , with the legislature supporting the former and the governor the latter . This led the state to declare itself officially neutral . Buckner assembled 61 companies to defend Kentucky 's neutrality .

The state board that controlled the militia considered it to be pro @-@ secessionist and ordered it to store its arms . On July 20 , 1861 , Buckner resigned from the state militia , declaring that he could no longer perform his duties due to the board 's actions . That August he was twice offered a commission as a brigadier general in the Union Army ? the first from general in chief Winfield Scott , and the second from Secretary of War Simon Cameron following the personal order of President Abraham Lincoln ? but he declined . After Confederate Maj. Gen. Leonidas Polk occupied Columbus , Kentucky , violating the state 's neutrality , Buckner accepted a commission as a brigadier general in the Confederate States Army on September 14 , 1861 , and was followed by many of the men he formerly commanded in the state militia . When his Confederate commission was approved , Union officials in Louisville indicted him for treason and seized his property . (Concerned that a similar action might be taken against his wife 's property in Chicago , he had previously deeded it to his brother @-@ in @-@ law .) He became a division commander in the Army of Central Kentucky under Brig. Gen. William J. Hardee and was stationed in Bowling Green , Kentucky .

= = = Fort Donelson = = =

After Union Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant captured Fort Henry on the Tennessee River in February 1862 , he turned his sights on nearby Fort Donelson on the Cumberland . Western Theater commander Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston sent Buckner to be one of four brigadier generals defending the fort . In overall command was the influential politician and military novice John B. Floyd ; Buckner 's peers were Gideon J. Pillow and Bushrod Johnson .

Buckner 's division defended the right flank of the Confederate line of entrenchments that surrounded the fort and the small town of Dover , Tennessee . On February 14 , the Confederate generals decided they could not hold the fort and planned a breakout , hoping to join with Johnston 's army , now in Nashville . At dawn the following morning , Pillow launched a strong assault against the right flank of Grant 's army , pushing it back 1 to 2 miles (2 to 3 km) . Buckner , not confident of his army 's chances and not on good terms with Pillow , held back his supporting attack for over two hours , which gave Grant 's men time to bring up reinforcements and reform their line . Buckner 's delay did not prevent the Confederate attack from opening a corridor for an escape from the besieged fort . However , Floyd and Pillow combined to undo the day 's work by ordering the troops back to their trench positions .

Late that night the generals held a council of war in which Floyd and Pillow expressed satisfaction with the events of the day , but Buckner convinced them that they had little realistic chance to hold the fort or escape from Grant 's army , which was receiving steady reinforcements . General Floyd , concerned he would be tried for treason if captured by the North , sought Buckner 's assurance that he would be given time to escape with some of his Virginia regiments before the army surrendered . Buckner agreed and Floyd offered to turn over command to his subordinate , Pillow . Pillow immediately declined and passed command to Buckner , who agreed to stay behind and surrender . Both Generals Floyd and Pillow left to leave General Buckner to surrender to the Union Forces . Pillow and Floyd were able to escape , as did cavalry commander Col. Nathan Bedford Forrest .

That morning , Buckner sent a messenger to the Union Army requesting an armistice and a meeting of commissioners to work out surrender terms . He may have been hoping Grant would offer generous terms , remembering the assistance he gave Grant when he was destitute , but Grant 's reply was curt , with the famous quotation , " No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted . I propose to move immediately upon your works . " To this , Buckner responded :

SIR : ? The distribution of the forces under my command , incident to an unexpected change of commanders , and the overwhelming force under your command , compel me , notwithstanding the brilliant success of the Confederate arms yesterday , to accept the ungenerous and unchivalrous terms which you propose .

The asperity of these notes was only superficial ; Buckner greeted his old friend warmly when Grant arrived to accept the surrender . They joked about their time in Mexico and the incompetence of General Pillow [35] . Grant offered to loan Buckner money to see him through his impending imprisonment , but Buckner declined . As an additional note Buckner paid for then Captain Grant 's lodging in New York City after the Mexican War when Grant was destitute . Also Buckner acted as a pall bearer and paid for Grant 's funeral and provided Grant 's widow a financial monthly payment so she could live out her years . The surrender was a humiliation for Buckner personally , but also a strategic defeat for the Confederacy , which lost more than 12 @,@ 000 men and much equipment , as well as control of the Cumberland River , which led to the evacuation of Nashville .

= = = Invasion of Kentucky = = =

While Buckner was a Union prisoner of war at Fort Warren in Boston , Kentucky Senator Garrett Davis unsuccessfully sought to have him tried for treason . On August 15 , 1862 , after five months of writing poetry in solitary confinement , Buckner was exchanged for Union Brig. Gen. George A. McCall . The following day he was promoted to major general and ordered to Chattanooga , Tennessee , to join Gen. Braxton Bragg 's Army of Mississippi .

Days after Buckner joined Bragg , both Bragg and Maj. Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith began an invasion of Kentucky . As Bragg pushed north , his first encounter was in Buckner 's home town of Munfordville . The small town was important for Union forces to hold if they wanted to maintain communication with Louisville while pressing southward to Bowling Green and Nashville . A small force under the command of Col. John T. Wilder guarded the town . Though vastly outnumbered , Wilder refused requests to surrender on September 12 and September 14 . By September 17 , however , Wilder recognized his difficult position and asked Bragg for proof of the superior numbers he claimed . In an unusual move , Wilder agreed to be blindfolded and brought to Buckner . When he arrived , he told Buckner that he (Wilder) was not a military man and had come to ask him what he should do . Flattered , Buckner showed Wilder the strength and position of the Confederate forces , which outnumbered Wilder 's men almost 5 @-@ to @-@ 1 . Seeing the hopeless situation he was in , Wilder informed Buckner that he wanted to surrender . Any other course , he later explained , would be " no less than willful murder . "

Bragg 's men continued northward to Bardstown where they rested and sought supplies and recruits . Meanwhile , Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell 's Army of the Ohio , the main Union force in the state , was pressing toward Louisville . Bragg left his army and met Kirby Smith in Frankfort , where he was able to attend the inauguration of Confederate Governor Richard Hawes on October 4 . Buckner , although protesting this distraction from the military mission , attended as well and gave stirring speeches to the local crowds about the Confederacy 's commitment to the state of Kentucky . The inauguration ceremony was disrupted by the sound of cannon fire from an approaching Union division and the inaugural ball scheduled for that evening was canceled .

Based on intelligence acquired by a spy in Buell 's army , Buckner advised Bragg that Buell was still ten miles from Louisville in the town of Mackville . He urged Bragg to engage Buell there before he reached Louisville , but Bragg declined . Buckner then asked Leonidas Polk to request that Bragg concentrate his forces and attack the Union army at Perryville , but again , Bragg refused . Finally , on October 8 , 1862 , Bragg 's army ? not yet concentrated with Kirby Smith 's ? engaged Maj. Gen. Alexander McCook 's corps of Buell 's army and began the Battle of Perryville . Buckner 's division fought under General Hardee during this battle , achieving a significant breakthrough in the Confederate center , and reports from Hardee , Polk , and Bragg all praised Buckner 's efforts . His gallantry was for naught , however , as Perryville ended in a tactical draw that was costly for both sides , causing Bragg to withdraw and abandon his invasion of Kentucky . Buckner joined many of his fellow generals in publicly denouncing Bragg 's performance during the campaign .

= = = Later Civil War service = = =

Following the Battle of Perryville , Buckner was reassigned to command the District of the Gulf , fortifying the defenses of Mobile , Alabama . He remained there until late April 1863 , when he was ordered to take command of the Army of East Tennessee . He arrived in Knoxville on May 11 , 1863 , and assumed command the following day . Shortly thereafter , his department was converted into a district of the Department of Tennessee under Gen. Bragg and was designated the Third Corps of the Army of Tennessee .

In late August , Union Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside approached Buckner 's position at Knoxville . Buckner called for reinforcements from Bragg at Chattanooga , but Bragg was being threatened by forces under Maj. Gen. William Rosecrans and could not spare any of his men . Bragg ordered Buckner to fall back to the Hiwassee River . From there , Buckner 's unit traveled to Bragg 's supply base at Ringgold , Georgia , then on to Lafayette and Chickamauga . Bragg was also forced from Chattanooga and joined Buckner at Chickamauga . On September 19 and 20 , the Confederate forces attacked and emerged victorious at the Battle of Chickamauga . Buckner 's Corps fought on the Confederate left both days , the second under the " wing " command of Lt. Gen. James Longstreet , participating in the great breakthrough of the Union line .

After Chickamauga , Rosecrans and his Army of the Cumberland retreated to fortified Chattanooga . Bragg held an ineffective siege against Chattanooga , but refused to take any further action as the Union forces there were reinforced by Ulysses S. Grant and reopened a tenuous supply line . Many of Bragg 's subordinates , including Buckner , advocated that Bragg be relieved of command . Thomas L. Connelly , historian of the Army of Tennessee , believes that Buckner was the author of the anti @-@ Bragg letter sent by the generals to President Jefferson Davis . Bragg retaliated by reducing Buckner to division command and abolishing the Department of East Tennessee .

Buckner was given a medical leave of absence following Chickamauga , returning to Virginia , where he engaged in routine work while recovering his strength . His division was sent without him to support Longstreet in the Knoxville Campaign , while the remainder of Bragg 's army was defeated in the Chattanooga Campaign . Buckner served on the court martial of Maj. Gen. Lafayette McLaws after that subordinate of Longstreet 's was charged with poor performance at Knoxville . Buckner was briefly given command of Maj. Gen. John Bell Hood 's division in February 1864 , and on March 8 , he was given command of the reestablished Department of East Tennessee . The department was a shell of its former self ? less than one @-@ third its original size , badly equipped , and in no position to mount an offensive . Buckner was virtually useless to the Confederacy here , and on April 28 , he was ordered to join Edmund Kirby Smith in the Trans @-@ Mississippi Department of the Confederacy .

Buckner had difficulty traveling to the West , and it was early summer before he arrived . He assumed command of the District of West Louisiana on August 4 . Shortly after Buckner arrived at Smith 's headquarters in Shreveport , Louisiana , Smith began requesting a promotion for him . The promotion to lieutenant general came on September 20 . Smith placed Buckner in charge of the critical but difficult task of selling the department 's cotton through enemy lines .

As news of Gen. Robert E. Lee 's surrender on April 9 , 1865 , reached the department , soldiers deserted the Confederacy in droves . On April 19 , Smith consolidated the District of Arkansas with the District of West Louisiana ; the combined district was put under Buckner 's command . On May 9 , Smith made Buckner his chief of staff . Rumors began to swirl in both Union and Confederate camps that Smith and Buckner would not surrender , but would fall back to Mexico with soldiers who remained loyal to the Confederacy . Though Smith did cross the Rio Grande , he learned on his arrival that Buckner had traveled to New Orleans on May 26 and arranged terms of surrender . Smith had instead instructed Buckner to move all the troops to Houston , Texas .

At Fort Donelson , Tennessee , Buckner had become the first Confederate general of the war to surrender an army ; at New Orleans , he became the last . The surrender became official when Smith endorsed it on June 2 , (Only Brigadier General Stand Watie held out longer ; he surrendered the last Confederate land forces on June 23 , 1865) .

Conditions set forth in Buckner 's surrender were the following :

" All acts of hostility on the part of both armies are to cease from this date . "

The officers and men are to be " paroled until duly exchanged . "

All Confederate property was to be turned over to the Union .

All officers and men could return home .

" The surrender of property will not include the side arms or private horses or baggage of officers " and enlisted men .

" All ' self @-@ disposed persons ' who return to ' peaceful pursuits ' are assured that may resume their usual avocations . . . " . "

= = Postbellum life = =

The terms of Buckner 's parole in Shreveport , Louisiana , on June 9 , 1865 , prevented his return to Kentucky for three years . He remained in New Orleans , worked on the staff of the Daily Crescent newspaper , engaged in a business venture , and served of the board of directors of a fire insurance company , of which he became president in 1867 . His wife and daughter joined him in the winter months of 1866 and 1867 , but he sent them back to Kentucky in the summers because of the frequent outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever .

Buckner returned to Kentucky when he was eligible in 1868 and became editor of the Louisville Courier . Like most former Confederate officers , he petitioned the United States Congress for the restoration of his civil rights as stipulated by the 14th Amendment . He recovered most of his property through lawsuits and regained much of his wealth through shrewd business deals .

On January 5 , 1874 , after five years of suffering with tuberculosis , Buckner 's wife died . Now a widower , Buckner continued to live in Louisville until 1877 when he and his daughter Lily returned to the family estate , Glen Lily , in Munfordville . His sister , a recent widow , also returned to the estate in 1877 . For six years , these three inhabited and repaired the house and grounds which had been neglected during the war and its aftermath . On June 14 , 1883 , Lily Buckner married Morris B. Belknap of Louisville , and the couple made their residence in Louisville . On October 10 of the same year , Buckner 's sister died , and he was left alone .

On June 10 , 1885 , Buckner married Delia Claiborne of Richmond , Virginia . Buckner was 62 ; Claiborne was 28 . Their son , Simon Bolivar Buckner , Jr . , was born on July 18 , 1886 .

= = Political career = =

Buckner had a keen interest in politics and friends had been urging him to run for governor since 1867 , even while terms of his surrender confined him to Louisiana . Unwilling to violate these terms , he instructed a friend to withdraw his name from consideration if it was presented . In 1868 , he was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention that nominated Horatio Seymour for president . Though Buckner had favored George H. Pendleton , he loyally supported the party 's nominee throughout the campaign .

In 1883 , Buckner was a candidate for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination . Other prominent candidates included Congressman Thomas Laurens Jones , former congressman J. Proctor Knott , and Louisville mayor Charles Donald Jacob . Buckner consistently ran third in the first six ballots , but withdrew his name from consideration before the seventh ballot . The delegation from Owsley County switched their support to Knott , starting a wave of defections that resulted in Jones ' withdrawal and Knott 's unanimous nomination . Knott went on to win the general election and appointed Buckner to the board of trustees for the Kentucky Agricultural and Mechanical College (later the University of Kentucky) in 1884 . At that year 's state Democratic convention , he served on the committee on credentials .

= = = Governor of Kentucky = = =

Delegates to the 1887 state Democratic convention nominated Buckner unanimously for the office

of governor . A week later , the Republicans chose William O. Bradley as their candidate . The Prohibition Party and the Union Labor Party also nominated candidates for governor . The official results of the election gave Buckner a plurality of 16 @,@ 797 over Bradley .

Buckner proposed a number of progressive ideas , most of which were rejected by the legislature . Among his successful proposals were the creation of a state board of tax equalization , creation of a parole system for convicts , and codification of school laws . His failed proposals included creation of a department of justice , greater local support for education and better protection for forests .

Much of Buckner 's time was spent trying to curb violence in the eastern part of the state . Shortly after his inauguration , the Rowan County War escalated to vigilantism , when residents of the county organized a posse and killed several of the leaders of the feud . Though this essentially ended the feud , the violence had been so bad that Buckner 's adjutant general recommended that the Kentucky General Assembly dissolve Rowan County , though this suggestion was not acted upon . In 1888 , a posse from Kentucky entered West Virginia and killed a leader of the Hatfield @-@ McCoy feud . This caused a political conflict between Buckner and Governor Emanuel Willis Wilson of West Virginia , who complained that the raid was illegal . The matter was adjudicated in federal court , and Buckner was cleared of any connection to the raid . Later in Buckner 's term , feuds broke out in Harlan , Letcher , Perry , Knott , and Breathitt counties .

A major financial scandal erupted in 1888 when Buckner ordered a routine audit of the state 's finances which had been neglected for years . The audit showed that the state 's longtime treasurer , James " Honest Dick " Tate , had been mismanaging and embezzling the state 's money since 1872 . Faced with the prospect that his malfeasance would be discovered , Tate absconded with nearly \$ 250 @,@ 000 of state funds . He was never found . The General Assembly immediately began impeachment hearings against Tate , convicted him in absentia , and removed him from office . State auditor Fayette Hewitt was censured for neglecting the duty of his office , but was not implicated in Tate 's theft or disappearance .

During the 1888 session , the General Assembly passed 1 @,@ 571 bills , exceeding the total passed by any other session in the state 's history . Only about 150 of these bills were of a general nature ; the rest were special interest bills passed for the private gain of legislators and those in their constituencies . Buckner vetoed 60 of these special interest bills , more than had been vetoed by the previous ten governors combined . Only one of these vetoes was overridden by the legislature . Ignoring Buckner 's clear intent to veto special interest bills , the 1890 legislature passed 300 more special interest bills than had its predecessor . Buckner vetoed 50 of these . His reputation for rejecting special interest bills led the Kelley Axe Factory , the largest axe factory in the country at the time , to present him with a ceremonial " Veto Hatchet " .

When a tax cut passed over Buckner 's veto in 1890 drained the state treasury , the governor loaned the state enough money to remain solvent until tax revenue came in . Later that year , he was chosen as a delegate to the state 's constitutional convention . In this capacity , he unsuccessfully sought to extend the governor 's appointment powers and levy taxes on churches , clubs , and schools that made a profit .

= = = Later career = = =

After his term as governor , Buckner returned to Glen Lily . In 1895 , he was one of four candidates nominated for a seat in the U.S. Senate ? the others being the incumbent , J. C. S. Blackburn ; outgoing governor John Y. Brown ; and congressman James B. McCreary . The Democratic party split over the issue of bimetalism . Buckner advocated for a gold standard , but the majority of Kentuckians advocated " Free Silver " . Seeing that he would not be able to win the seat in light of this opposition , he withdrew from the race in July 1895 . In spite of his withdrawal , he still received 9 of the 134 votes cast in the General Assembly .

At the 1896 Democratic National Convention in Chicago , the Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan for president and adopted a platform calling for the free coinage of silver . Gold standard Democrats opposed Bryan and the free silver platform . They formed a new party ? the National Democratic Party , or Gold Democrats ? which Buckner joined . At the new party 's state

convention in Louisville , Buckner 's name was proposed as a candidate for vice president . He was given the nomination without opposition at the party 's national convention in Indianapolis . Former Union general John Palmer was chosen as the party 's nominee for president .

Palmer and Buckner both had developed reputations as independent executives while serving as governors of their respective states . Because they had served on opposite sides during the Civil War , their presence on the same ticket emphasized national unity . The ticket was endorsed by several major newspapers including the Chicago Chronicle , Louisville Courier @-@ Journal , Detroit Free Press , Richmond Times , and New Orleans Picayune . Despite these advantages , the ticket was hurt by the candidates ' ages , Palmer being 79 and Buckner 73 . Further , some supporters feared that voting for the National Democrat ticket would be a wasted vote and might even throw the election to Bryan . Ultimately , Palmer and Buckner received just over one percent of the vote in the election .

Following this defeat , Buckner retired to Glen Lily but remained active in politics . Though he always claimed membership in the Democratic party , he opposed the machine politics of William Goebel , his party 's gubernatorial nominee in 1899 . In 1903 , he supported his son @-@ in @-@ law , Morris Belknap , for governor against Goebel 's lieutenant governor , J. C. W. Beckham . When the Democrats again nominated William Jennings Bryan in the 1908 presidential election , Buckner openly supported Bryan 's opponent , Republican William Howard Taft .

At 80 years of age , Buckner memorized five of Shakespeare 's plays because cataracts threatened to blind him , but an operation saved his sight . On a visit to the White House in 1904 , Buckner asked President Theodore Roosevelt to appoint his only son as a cadet at West Point , and Roosevelt quickly agreed . His son would later serve in the U.S. Army and be killed at the Battle of Okinawa , making him the highest @-@ ranking American to have been killed by enemy fire during World War II .

Following the deaths of Stephen D. Lee and Alexander P. Stewart in 1908 , Buckner became the last surviving Confederate soldier with the rank of lieutenant general . The following year , he visited his son , who was stationed in Texas , and toured old Mexican ? American War battlefields where he had served . In 1912 , his health began to fail . He died on January 8 , 1914 , after a week @-@ long bout with uremic poisoning . He was buried in Frankfort Cemetery in Frankfort , Kentucky .