

= John L. Helm =

John LaRue Helm (July 4 , 1802 ? September 8 , 1867) was the 18th and 24th governor of the U.S. state of Kentucky , although his service in that office totaled less than fourteen months . He also represented Hardin County in both houses of the Kentucky General Assembly and was chosen to be the Speaker of the Kentucky House of Representatives four times . In 1838 his sole bid for federal office ended in defeat when his opponent , Willis Green , was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives .

Helm was first elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1826 ; between 1826 and 1843 he served eleven one @-@ year terms in the state house . In 1844 he was elected to the state senate , where he served continuously until he was chosen as the Whig Party nominee for lieutenant governor on a ticket with John J. Crittenden , famous for the Crittenden Compromise . The Whigs won the general election and Helm was elevated to governor on July 31 , 1850 , when Crittenden resigned to accept an appointment as United States Attorney General in President Millard Fillmore 's cabinet . After his service as governor Helm became president of the struggling Louisville and Nashville Railroad . He invested thousands of dollars of his own money in the project and convinced residents along the line 's main route to buy stock in the company . In 1859 the line was completed , but the next year Helm resigned over of differences with the board of directors regarding a proposed branch that would extend the line to Memphis , Tennessee .

Although he openly opposed secession during the American Civil War , federal military forces labeled Helm a Confederate sympathizer . In September 1862 , he was arrested for this alleged sympathy , but Governor James F. Robinson recognized him as he was being transported to a prison in Louisville and had him released . After the war Helm identified with the Democratic Party , and in 1865 Hardin County voters returned him to the state senate . In 1867 he was the state 's Democratic candidate for governor . Despite his failing health , Helm made a vigorous canvass of the state and won the general election . He was too weak to travel to Frankfort for his inauguration , so state officials administered the oath of office at his home on September 3 , 1867 . He died five days later .

= = Early life = =

In 1780 Helm 's grandfather , Thomas Helm , emigrated to Kentucky from Prince William County , Virginia and founded the settlement of Helm Station near Elizabethtown , Kentucky in Hardin County , where John L. Helm was born on July 4 , 1802 . He was the eldest of nine children born to George B. Helm , a farmer and politician , and Rebecca LaRue Helm , a descendant of a prominent local pioneer family .

Helm attended the area 's public schools and studied with noted educator Duff Green . When Helm was 14 his father fell on hard financial times and Helm returned to work on the family farm . In 1818 he took a better @-@ paying job in the office of Samuel Haycraft , the circuit court clerk of Hardin County . While there he read law with Haycraft , then entered the law office of Ben Tobin in 1821 .

At about this time Helm 's father traveled to Texas to enter into business and rebuild his finances , but he died there in 1822 , leaving Helm responsible for his mother and siblings . He was admitted to the bar in 1823 , the same year Meade County , Kentucky was formed . There were no lawyers in the county yet , so although Helm continued living in Hardin County he was made Meade 's county attorney . His practice grew rapidly and he was soon able to pay off his father 's debts and purchase the Helm homestead . Between 1832 and 1840 he built " Helm Place " on this land and it remained his home for the rest of his life .

In 1823 Helm called on Representative Benjamin Hardin . While Hardin and Helm discussed business , Hardin 's 14 @-@ year @-@ old daughter , Lucinda , entered the room to show her father a map she had drawn . Helm later claimed it was love at first sight , and began to pursue Lucinda 's affections . They courted for seven years , married in 1830 and had six daughters and five sons together . One of his sons , Benjamin Hardin Helm , was a Confederate general in the Civil War and was killed at the Battle of Chickamauga .

= = Political career = =

The major political issue in Kentucky during Helm 's legal training was the Old Court @-@ New Court controversy . Reeling from the panic of 1819 , Kentuckians had demanded debt relief . In response , the Kentucky General Assembly passed an act that granted debtors a grace period of two years in repaying their debts unless their creditors would accept payment in the devalued notes of the Bank of the Commonwealth . The Kentucky Court of Appeals struck down the law , claiming it was in violation of the Contract Clause of the U.S. Constitution . The angered legislature attempted to impeach the justices on the Court of Appeals , but lacked the necessary two @-@ thirds majority . Instead , they abolished the Court of Appeals and replaced it with a new court , which was stocked with more sympathetic justices by pro @-@ relief governor John Adair . Both courts claimed to be Kentucky 's court of last resort .

Throughout 1825 Helm made speeches and distributed pamphlets in Hardin and surrounding counties , espousing the Old Court position . In 1826 he campaigned as a Whig for a seat in the Kentucky House of Representatives . Helm won the election , and at the age of twenty @-@ four became one of the youngest members to serve in the Kentucky General Assembly . An Old Court majority was elected to both houses of the General Assembly in 1826 , which then passed legislation abolishing the New Court .

Helm was re @-@ elected to the state House in 1827 and 1830 , and was re @-@ elected every year from 1833 to 1837 . He served as Speaker of the House in 1835 and 1836 . In 1837 there was a three @-@ way race for speaker between Helm , James Turner Morehead and Robert P. Letcher . After nine ballots Helm withdrew , and Letcher was elected speaker .

Helm made his only run for federal office in 1838 and was defeated by Willis Green for a seat in the United States House of Representatives . He returned to the Kentucky House in 1839 and was re @-@ elected in 1842 and 1843 , serving as Speaker of the House both years . In 1843 , the Kentucky General Assembly proposed to create a new county from part of Hardin County and name it Helm County in honor of John L. Helm . Because of the few dissenting votes on this question , Helm declined the honor and proposed instead that the county be called LaRue County after his mother 's family , many of whom still lived in the proposed county . Helm 's suggestion was unanimously adopted .

= = = Lieutenant governor and governor = = =

In 1844 Helm was elected to the Kentucky Senate , where he served until 1848 . That year he was the Whig candidate for lieutenant governor on a ticket with John J. Crittenden . Helm defeated Democrat John Preston Martin in the general election . The major political question in the state during Helm 's time as lieutenant governor was whether to adopt a new state constitution . As a state senator in 1848 , Helm had voted to allow the state 's citizens to decide the matter in a referendum , but after seeing the document produced by the constitutional convention , he opposed its ratification . In an address to the state senate in 1850 he declared , " I was for reform , and not for revolution . I was for amending the Constitution , and not for obliterating every vital principle in contained . " He especially opposed creating an elective judiciary . His antagonism to the constitution put him at odds with his father @-@ in @-@ law , Benjamin Hardin . The two did not reconcile until 1852 , as Hardin lay on his deathbed . The new constitution was adopted in 1850 , and in June of that year Helm encouraged the people to accept it .

Governor Crittenden resigned on July 31 , 1850 to accept President Millard Fillmore 's appointment as attorney general , and Helm ascended to the governorship . As governor , Helm vetoed a legislative plan to cover deficits in the public school fund by drawing money from the state 's sinking fund , but the General Assembly overrode the veto . He urged the legislature to fund a survey of the state 's mineral reserves and a census of the state 's agricultural and manufacturing resources . He called for spending on internal improvements and for raising judges ' salaries to attract more qualified jurists to the bench . He also sought a ban on the carrying of concealed deadly weapons .

The legislature did not act on any of these proposed reforms . The only part of Helm 's agenda that did progress through the General Assembly was election reform .

= = President of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad = =

Helm was a presidential elector for Winfield Scott in the 1852 presidential election . After this he took twelve years off from politics . As early as 1836 , Helm had advocated the construction of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad . On October 2 , 1854 , he became the railroad 's second president . The previous president had been forced out of that position after a disagreement with Louisville 's board of aldermen , and construction of the line had almost been abandoned .

Helm worked diligently to convince residents along the line 's main route of the economic benefits it would bring . He persuaded many of them to help clear and grade land for the line and accept company stock as payment , and succeeded in selling stock subscriptions to people in the same area . Rising labor costs and troubles transporting materials raised expenses far above the projected budget , and at one point Helm personally redeemed \$ 20 @, @ 000 (\$ 530 thousand as of 2016) of the company 's bonds . Meanwhile , some observers accused Helm of mismanaging the company . The company 's fortunes improved in 1857 when the city of Louisville provided \$ 300 @, @ 000 (\$ 7 @. @ 62 million as of 2016) in financial aid and the line was completed on October 18 , 1859 . Due to Helm 's influence , the railroad 's charter required all trains traveling through Elizabethtown to stop there .

By the time the line was finished there were public calls from inside and outside the company for Helm to resign , mostly because of his support for a proposed Memphis branch of the railroad . To complete the branch , the Louisville and Nashville would have to complete a line from Bowling Green to Guthrie , Kentucky . There it would join a line owned by the Memphis and Ohio Railroad that began across the state line at Clarksville , Tennessee and extended to Memphis . Supporters believed the branch would economically help both Louisville and Memphis and would lessen their dependence on trade along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers . Opponents argued that the project was simply a ploy to whip up new support for the struggling railroad . Helm endorsed the Memphis branch in his annual report in 1857 .

On February 4 , 1860 , two members of the company 's board of directors wrote a letter requesting Helm 's resignation ; they claimed they had voted for his re @-@ election as president of the company with the understanding that he would resign when the main line between Louisville and Nashville was finished . Helm maintained that he felt an obligation to the citizens of Logan County ? many of whom he had personally sold stock to ? to remain president until the Memphis branch through their county was built . The rift between Helm and the directors continued to widen , however . Helm resigned on February 21 , 1860 , and was replaced by James Guthrie . The Memphis branch was completed on September 24 , 1860 .

= = Civil War and second term as governor = =

On January 8 , 1861 Helm chaired a meeting in Louisville that advocated for Kentucky 's neutrality in the Civil War . Helm was an outspoken opponent of secession , but also denounced the election of Abraham Lincoln and his use of military force to subdue the southern states . Because Helm did not condemn his son , Benjamin , for joining the Confederate Army , federal authorities classified him as a southern sympathizer .

After learning of the arrest of former governor Charles S. Morehead by federal authorities , Helm fled to Bowling Green , fearing his own arrest . Through the intervention of Warner Underwood he was able to return home on the condition that he swear an oath of allegiance to the Constitution . Nevertheless , federal soldiers repeatedly entered his home , encouraging his slaves to abandon him , and consuming or destroying his crops . Because the state 's courts were closed on account of the war , he was unable to earn a living by practicing law . In short order his once @-@ substantial fortune was expended , and he resorted to borrowing money to support his family .

In September 1862 Helm and several other citizens from Hardin County were arrested by Colonel

Knox . After several days of confinement in Elizabethtown the prisoners were conducted to Louisville . By chance , Kentucky governor James F. Robinson recognized Helm in the group and negotiated with General Jeremiah Boyle to get him released . Shortly after returning home Helm learned of Benjamin 's death at the Battle of Chickamauga .

After the war Helm identified with the Democratic Party , and he returned to the state senate in 1865 . During his tenure he chaired the Committee on Federal Relations and fought against punitive and restrictive laws against ex @-@ Confederates . On January 22 , 1866 he presented to the state senate a protest against the actions of the United States Congress during the Civil War . It denounced the Reconstruction Amendments on the grounds that they granted powers to the federal government that were reserved for the states , and that they were passed while many southern states were not represented in Congress . He also decried the creation and operation of the Freedmen 's Bureau . On January 29 , 1867 , Helm introduced legislation to organize a meeting in Louisville to rally support for President Andrew Johnson and his efforts to restore the Union .

The state Democratic Convention met on February 22 , 1867 in Frankfort and chose Helm and John W. Stevenson as the party 's candidates for governor and lieutenant governor , respectively . Helm resigned his seat in the state senate to accept the nomination . Though his health was frail , he determined to canvass the entire state . He continued his call for an end to Civil War bitterness and proscriptions against those who had sided with the Confederacy . He won the general election over Republican Sidney Barnes and a third party candidate , Judge William B. Kinhead .

The strenuous campaign took a decisive toll on Helm 's already weakened body . He was too weak to travel to Frankfort for his inauguration , so the oath of office was administered at his home on September 3 , 1867 . Helm 's secretary of state read the governor 's inaugural address at the Hardin County Courthouse . In it Helm repeated his intent to remove political disabilities from ex @-@ Confederates . He also charged that Congress was meddling in the affairs of the states . Though he promised protections for blacks , he opposed the idea of black suffrage .

Helm died on September 8 , 1867 , just five days after his inauguration . He was buried in a family graveyard at Helm Place . Helm Place was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on November 9 , 1976 .