

MISSISSIPPI

Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events,
Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in
Cyclopedic Form

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Mead, Cowles. Secretary of Mississippi territory, and acting governor from June, 1806 to January, 1807, was a Virginian by birth, reared in Georgia, who was a candidate for congress when barely of required age. His election was certified by the governor of Georgia, on partial returns, but when his opponent made a showing to congress that the missing returns were delayed beyond the legal limit by the effects of a hurricane, Mead was unseated, whereupon President Jefferson appointed him secretary of the Mississippi territory. By virtue of his office he assumed the functions of the Territorial governor, which were rather absolute in governing power, immediately upon his arrival in Mississippi. A state of war, due to the Spanish menaces on the Louisiana boundary and at Mobile, and the Aaron Burr expedition, exalted his powers in a high degree. It would naturally be expected that upon the return of Governor Williams from his visit to North Carolina, Mead would not pass into eclipse and become a mere secretary without some pang, and this was the case. In fact, the governor was compelled to remind him in April, 1807, that he should attend the seat of government and perform his duties, or at least permit the governor to have access to the records. Mead thereupon sent a Mr. Pope as his deputy, to which the governor demurred that he doubted the authority of the secretary to appoint substitutes, though he was delighted with Mr. Pope personally. McCaleb ("Aaron Burr Conspiracy"), suggests that Mead's suspicions of Wilkinson had something to do with his retirement. Because of his distrust of the general and confidence in the people, "he was accused of being in sympathy with the conspirators by Wilkinson and Governor Williams of Mississippi, and dismissed from office. Nevertheless, he was beyond question the most efficient official in the West—and therefore could expect no better reward." Whatever may be the authority for this, it is true that Mead and his friends accused Governor Williams of being in sympathy with Burr, in hope of defeating the governor for re-appointment.

On February 1, 1807, he fought a duel on the Louisiana shore with Capt. Robert Sample, of Wilkinson county, and received a wound in the right thigh which lamed him during the remainder of life. In the following April he was married to Mary, daughter of Abner Green. Upon his retirement as secretary in the summer of 1807, he began the practice of law and was elected to the house of representatives, where he led the fight on the governor. Aaron Burr in later years called him "a vain man, of very small mind," and when told that he never tired of relating the event of his capture, said, "I would have supposed the episode to that affair would have restrained him from its narration." (Sparks, *Memories*.)

In his *History of Texas*, (1841), H. S. Foote wrote, preliminary to quoting Mead's famous war address of 1807: "The gentleman who pronounced it is now eight miles distant from the writer, rejoicing equally in the comforts of an ample fortune, and in the renown of bygone days; and perhaps reciting, at this moment, to

some delighted hearer, the wondrous capture of Aaron Burr, the Conspirator."

J. F. H. Claiborne (p. 276) describes him as a man of such flowery speech that his real ability was obscured. When the regiment of volunteers was organized at Baton Rouge in 1813, he received a commission as colonel, but he gave it up to make a canvass for delegate to Congress; a mistake which caused his defeat by Dr. Lattimore then, and by Christopher Rankin a few years afterward. He was an active member of the constitutional convention of 1817, was a skilled parliamentarian, and speaker in the legislature, 1821-25. His later home, called "Greenwood," was a mile northwest of Clinton in Hinds county, set in a lawn of fifty acres of Bermuda grass, which, it was said, he introduced into the United States. He was an enthusiastic gardener, and often entertained distinguished guests in a favorite seat under a cedar in the midst of flower beds. The sword of Aaron Burr was one of the treasures of this home until carried to Virginia in 1861 and lost at First Manassas. The home was destroyed in 1863, by the ravages of war.

In an old neglected graveyard, near Clinton, a prostrate shaft bears the inscription: "To the memory of Cowles Mead, whose pure life exemplified the spirit of an honest man. Born, October 18, 1776, died May 17, 1844." Beside him was buried his wife, Mary Lilly, born in 1797, died in 1834, and his son, Cowles G., born in Jefferson county in 1818, died in Yazoo county, 1849.

Mead's Administration. Cowles Mead, a Virginian of Georgia, was commissioned as secretary of the Mississippi territory in March, 1806. He arrived at Natchez May 31, and soon after assumed the duties of secretary, and, as Governor Williams was absent, the powers of the governor also. It was a period of great historical interest. On account of the Spanish activity in the Sabine river country, he made an agreement with Governor Claiborne for military operations, in August, and ordered general militia muster. (See Sabine Expedition.) Mead was gratified by the response of the people to his own enthusiastic war spirit.

The troubles with Spanish authorities at Baton Rouge and Mobile were quite as urgent as the Louisiana boundary dispute. (See Florida Acquisition.) Mead wrote to the secretary of war in September, 1806: "It is the general wish and inclination of the people of this Territory to attack the Floridas; should one drop of blood be spilt by the Spaniards on the southern borders of Louisiana it shall be immediately expiated at Baton Rouge; unless I receive counter order from the executive of the United States, with an eye to our predatory neighbors of the north and east, and our internal security. I am disposed to act decisively and promptly; that is, bring all the forces of the Territory into immediate action and circumscribe our enemy in Mobile and Pensacola." "Sir, can't the Floridas be taken and then paid for?" he inquired in another letter to Dearborn. Nothing but the solemn injunction of the general government withheld his arm. "I burn to deal back in blows upon the Floridas the insults of Louisiana." Another muster was

ordered in October. The commander of each militia regiment was ordered to form a mounted company to be ready to move at a moment's notice. This was by the organization of a battalion under Maj. Claiborne, which marched to Natchitoches and back in October. (See Sabine expedition.) The result was great indignation against Gen. Wilkinson, though that wonderful man continued to hold the loyalty of many friends. After this Wilkinson and his confidants were engaged in working up a tremendous excitement regarding the advent of Aaron Burr, in which Mead was effectively employed, though he professed enmity to the general. He had written to the secretary of war September 7: "The people of this Territory are impressed with a conviction in their own minds that General Wilkinson is a Spanish officer. The old inhabitants all know some facts which lead to this opinion and seem astonished when ignorance of his extreme intimacy with several Spanish governors is acknowledged. . . . I do not hesitate to express my fears of the result of a warfare waged by the United States against Spain, and General Wilkinson the commandant. Think not sir, that I am the humble follower of John Randolph. No, I believe the one as much a Julius Caesar as the other a Cataline." When he had sent the battalion into Louisiana for the Sabine campaign, partly unarmed, because Wilkinson gave strict orders that no arms should be issued from Fort Adams, Mead vowed the people would never go into a war with Spain under the command of Wilkinson. In November Mead was asked by Wilkinson to send a battalion of 300 men to New Orleans, which he refused to do.

December 2, 1806, Secretary Mead addressed the legislature, at its regular session, and beginning with the words, "Called by fortuitous circumstances to the performance of the executive functions of the Territory," he bestowed upon them such an oratorical effusion as no general assembly of the Mississippi Territory had yet been permitted to enjoy. At the same time in a confidential message he asked assistance in thwarting a plot for the separation of Mississippi from the United States. This was his first official recognition of the Burr expedition, which agitated the Territory for several months afterward, and during December kept the militia in expectancy of a call to arms against the filibusters from the North. Mead adjourned the legislature from December 12 to the 19, and gave all his attention to hostile preparations. In his message he said: "I now, gentlemen, bid adieu to my civil character. Tomorrow I assume the military prerogatives of my office and shall leave you at this time with the fullest assurance of your patriotism, and in my revolutions through the Territory I shall expect to find you at your respective posts performing the duties which you may be required to execute in the general defence of our country." Col. Burr was in the hands of the court and released on bail when Governor Williams returned, late in January, 1807, and resumed the duties of his office.

Meadville, the county seat of Franklin county, is situated at the geographical center of the county on Morgan's Fork, an affluent

of the Homochitto river, and 10 miles east of Roxie, the nearest railroad station. Gloster is the nearest banking town. The town became the seat of justice about 1830, the original county seat having been located at Franklin, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the west. It was named for Cowles Mead, second Secretary of the Territory. It ships cotton and molasses. The Franklin Advocate, a Democratic weekly, was established here in 1891, and is edited and published by Butler & Co. Population in 1900, 250.