

Secretary of Mississippi Territory
June 2, 1806, to August 7, 1807

Acting Governor of Mississippi Territory
June 2, 1806, to January 27, 1807

MISSISSIPPI FILE

From: Rowland, Dunbar. Encyclopedia of Mississippi History.
Biographical. Southern Historical Association, 1916.
Vol. II, pp. 213-14.

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 pangs, and this was the case. In fact, the governor was compelled to remind him in April, 1807, that he should attend the seat of

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government and perform his duties, or at least permit the governor to have access to the records. Head 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 Head'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 Head 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.)

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In his History of Texas, (1814), 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 him 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,

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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.

From: Rowland, Dunbar. History of Mississippi, The Heart of the South. Jackson: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1888. Vol. I, pp. 404, 407, 414, 427, 428, 431, 446, 455, 474, 476, 496, 499, 511-12, 524, 535, 536, 545.

... Cowles Mead, a brilliant young Jeffersonian Republican, who had just lost a congressional contest in Georgia, was appointed secretary of the Mississippi Territory in January, 1806, and in the following April Governor Williams returned to North Carolina to arrange for the removal of his family to the scene of his official duties. In his absence the territorial secretary became acting governor. Governor Williams did not return to Mississippi until January, 1807, and during that period, embracing nine months, events came to a head in connection with the Spanish complications and the Burr conspiracy which was conducted by Mead in the absence of Williams. 407

Until the return of Governor Williams in January, 1807, the acting executive was in the limelight of affairs in the southwestern country. Military movements and intertwined conspiracies completely over-shadowed the civil affairs of the Territory, and included a series of dramatic and exciting events which especially appealed to the high-strung character of Mr. Mead. The Sabine expedition and the Burr conspiracy were the outstanding features of this period. 414

Several chapters could be written on the disputes and bitter animosities engendered by the Burr episodes. Both Governor Claiborne and Governor Williams were supporters of General Wilkinson, and the Orleans executive fought a duel with Daniel Clark, nephew of the famous pioneer Colonel Clark, on account of his charges against himself and General Wilkinson. Mead led the opposition to Williams and Wilkinson in Mississippi Territory, and was deposed in the summer of 1807. Thomas H. Williams succeeded the first named as secretary of the Territory on June 1, 1807. In the ensuing special election for four representatives, Mead was chosen, as Jefferson district was his stronghold. Then he fomented a quarrel between George Poindexter, an Adams County representative, and Governor Williams, who challenged the Governor through Captain Voss, of the militia as well as a justice of the peace.

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The opposition to Governor Williams crystallized around a memorial to President Jefferson voicing the sentiments of the Assembly against the reappointment of the territorial head for a second term commencing March 5, 1805... The memorial was signed by Joshua Baker, president of the council, and Joseph Sessions, another councilman, and by John Ellis, speaker of the house and four other representatives, viz.-Cowles Mead, Alexander Montgomery, Macejah Davis and William Snodgrass.

... The Bank of Mississippi, which was created by an act passed December 25, 1808, was an independent institution, founded to promote

the "agricultural and commercial interests" of the Territory...

Francis X. Martin, Ferdinand L. Claiborne, John Steele, Abner Green, Abijah Hunt, Samuel Postlethwait, Ebenezer Reese, Cowles Mead, ... [and others], were authorized to receive subscriptions in the sum of \$50,000.

In January, 1813, was begun the organization of the First 455
Regiment of Mississippi Territory. Cowles Mead was first com-
missioned as colonel and Joseph Carson as major, but Mead soon
resigned to make a canvass for congressional delegate and Carson
was named colonel.

Secretaries of Mississippi Territory 474
1798-1817

Cowles Mead, of Georgia

Appointed on confirmation, January 21, 1806.

Acting Governor, June 6, 1806, to January 28, 1807.

Speakers of the House of Representatives of Mississippi Territory 476
1800-1817
Cowles Mead, from 1811 to 1813.

Reassembling of the General Assembly 498

As the physicians of Natchez had certified that the yellow
fever had disappeared as early as November, the Assembly reassembled
on the 8th of the following December at the house of Edward Turner
in that city, and Cowles Mead was made speaker of the house. 499

The First Session of the General Assembly
of 1821

512

The Governor renewed his recommendation for a codification of the State laws, and the legislature responded in February by passing an act entrusting the entire task to him instead of to three "distinguished citizens." This combination of executive and legal activities was unusual and did not meet with the approval of such men as Cowles Mead, Charles B. Green, David Dickson and Thomas Torrence, who entered their "solemn protest" which was spread upon the records of the senate.

Jackson the Capital of the State

534

The sixth session of the General Assembly was the first legislature to convene in Jackson... Cowles Mead was speaker of the house.

The Election of 1823

536

The fall election of 1823 resulted in the return of Governor Leake to the gubernatorial chair... Cowles Mead was speaker of the house of representatives.

The election of August, 1825, had resulted in the reelection of David Holmes over Cowles Mead by a vote of 7,846 to 1,499, and the acting Governor had been chosen lieutenant governor.

545

Brandon

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