

James Sevier Conway

Born: December 4 1796, in Greene County, Tennessee

Died: March 3 1855, at Walnut Hill Plantation, Lafayette County, Arkansas

Served: 1836-1840

James Sevier Conway arrived in Arkansas in 1820 as a surveyor. In 1825, he was appointed to survey the western boundary of Arkansas from the Red River to the Arkansas River and over the next decade held other public commissions related to boundaries and surveying. In 1832, Conway was named the first Arkansas Surveyor and in 1836 he was elected Governor of Arkansas. As governor, Conway called for internal improvements and public education, supported legislative efforts to create a state banking system and worked to obtain federal protection against Native American raiding on the state's western marches. Numerous controversies, combined with a deteriorating state economy and Conway's ill-health, probably contributed to his decision to not stand for re-election. After serving his one term, he retired to Walnut Hill, his cotton plantation along the Red River.

Archibald Yell

Born: ?1799, in Jefferson County, Tennessee

Died: February 23 1847, at Buena Vista, Mexico

Served: 1840-1844

Archibald Yell, Arkansas's second state governor, served with Andrew Jackson in campaigns against the Cherokees in 1813-14 and against the British in 1814-15. He returned in 1818 to Jackson's army for service against the Seminoles in Florida, where his courage won the admiration of "Old Hickory." Yell served a term in the Tennessee legislature and then received several federal appointments from Jackson, beginning in December 21, 1831, with the directorship of the federal land office in Little Rock. Yell was elected to the House of Representatives when Arkansas was admitted to statehood in 1836 and served until 1839. Yell ran for, and won, the Arkansas governor's seat in 1840. In office, he demanded stronger control of banks but also recommended a board of internal improvements and supported public education. In 1844 Yell resigned in order to run again for Congress. He served until July 1846, when he resigned to join the army in Mexico. He served as colonel of the 1st Arkansas Volunteer Cavalry, and died while rallying his demoralized troops at the battle of Buena Vista.

Thomas Stevenson Drew

Born: August 22(?) 1802, in Wilson County, Tennessee

Died: January (n.d.) 1879, at Lapin, Texas

Served: 1844-1849

Thomas S. Drew arrived in Arkansas in 1817, supporting himself by working as a traveling peddler and sometime schoolteacher, gradually turning to farming, law and politics. In 1844, Drew was the consensus candidate of a badly divided Democratic party. Elected by a plurality, Drew supported a safe platform of internal improvements, modest aid to education and fiscal conservatism made necessary by the state's failing finances. Drew was re-elected in 1848 without any serious opposition but resigned in January 1849, complaining of the office's low salary. During the 1850s, Drew served briefly as Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Fort Smith, before returning to law. He suffered financial reverses during and immediately after the Civil War, but returned to law in the late 1860s in Pocahontas, moving to Texas after his wife's death in 1872.

John Selden Roane

Born: January 8 1817, in Wilson County, Tennessee

Died: April 7 1867, at Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Served: 1849-1852

Native Tennessean John S. Roane migrated to Arkansas in 1837. He served as prosecuting attorney and was a member of the Arkansas House of Representatives from 1842 to 1846. In that year, Roane organized and led a company of volunteers from the Van Buren area for the Mexican-American War. Roane's lack of any military experience made him an ineffective commander; after the war's end, criticism of Arkansas's regiment and its performance under fire followed Roane. Accusations of incompetence leveled by Albert Pike led to a non-fatal duel between the two political rivals in July of 1847. Governor Thomas S. Drew's resignation in January 1849 made necessary a special election; on April 19, Roane was elected Arkansas's fourth governor. During his term, Roane advocated programs for internal improvements and increased funding for education. After a frustrating administration, Roane left office on November 15, 1852, returning to his law practice. During the Civil War, he served as brigadier general in the Confederate army.