Early Life

Humphreys was the son of Mary West Humphreys and prominent lawyer, House Representative, and Superior and Circuit court judge Parry Wayne Humphreys.

He studied briefly at Transylvania University in Tennessee, and studied law in his father’s offices until he was admitted to practice on his own in 1828.

Humphreys served in the Tennessee Constitutional Convention of 1834, the Tennessee Legislature as a democrat (1835-38), and as Attorney General of Tennessee and reporter of the opinions of the Supreme Court (1839-51).

He returned to private practice in 1851, and was appointed district judge of Tennessee (for three districts) in 1853 by President Franklin Pierce.

Joining the Confederacy

Tennessee seceded in May /June of 1861, and Humphreys was simultaneously recommended, nominated, and confirmed for the Confederate district court of Tennessee.

Humphreys continued to perform all of his Judicial functions – in U.S. facilities – on behalf of the Confederacy.

West Hughes Humphreys
August 26, 1806 - October 16, 1882

Unlike 13 other federal judges who adopted the Confederacy, Humphreys failed to resign from his previous position and denounce his ties to the Union.

If President Lincoln appointed a successor, the Union would essentially be confirming the Confederate view of a war between two distinct nations.

On the other hand, if Congress impeached Humphreys, it would demonstrate jurisdiction in Tennessee and deny that the war had broken the ties of the Union.

On January 8, 1862, Horace Maynard presented a resolution to the House of Representatives stating that Humphreys had not held court for 12 months and had accepted a judicial commission in hostility to the U.S.

The Trial

The House adopted seven articles of Impeachment on May 19, 1862 and the Senate was resolved into a court of impeachment on the 21st.

Humphreys failed to appear for his original trial on June 9th as well as the rescheduled date of June 26th.

The trial only took one afternoon and called four witnesses. Humphreys was convicted on six of the seven charges, successfully removing him from office, and making him the first official prohibited from obtaining future positions.

Humphreys retained his position as a Confederate judge until the end of the Civil War. He was granted amnesty by President Andrew Johnson in 1865, returned to practicing law, and joined the Temperance movement.

Sources & Acknowledgements


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