

James Conway

James Sevier Conway was born December 4, 1796, in Greene County, Tennessee. His family was very wealthy; they had a plantation, grew cotton and raised livestock. One of seven children, he was educated by private tutors. In 1818, the family moved to St. Louis, Missouri. Conway studied land surveying with his uncle, who in turn helped him get an appointment as a federal land surveyor in 1820. In 1826, James Conway married Mary Jane Bradley. They had 10 children, five of whom died in infancy or early childhood. He was appointed Surveyor General of the Arkansas Territory.

In 1832, the couple settled in Lafayette County, where Conway began to purchase land, acquire slaves and grow cotton and corn. Before long his holdings amounted to over 2,000 acres and 80 slaves. At his first attempt to enter politics, he was defeated during a run for a seat in the Territorial House of Representatives. However, three years later he campaigned successfully to fill an unexpired term. President Andrew Jackson furthered his career by appointing him commissioner, and later surveyor general, of the Arkansas Territory. While serving in this capacity, the Democratic Party nominated him to run for governor. He won the support of over 66% of the voters, but his term as governor was marred by a series of controversies involving personal access to land, use of the state militia, the state banking system and a boundary dispute with Texas.

In 1838, Conway became ill and considered resigning. Forced to take leave for a while, he adamantly refused to seek a second term. Instead, he returned to his plantation in Lafayette County. Although he maintained his ties with the Democratic Party and remained active in civic and educational affairs, he never entered public service again. He became ill with pneumonia in 1855, died on March 3, and was buried in his family cemetery at Walnut Hill.