

Archibald Yell

Archibald Yell was born sometime between 1797 and 1799 in Tennessee, Kentucky or North Carolina. His exact birth date and birthplace are unknown. A man of limited formal education, Yell joined the military service at a very young age during the War of 1812, and rose to the rank of sergeant in the Second Regiment of Tennessee Mounted Volunteer Gunmen. On his return from service, he became captain of the 47th Tennessee Militia and in 1818, served as first lieutenant in the Seminole War. After his military career ended, he studied law. In 1821, he married Mary Scott, who died six years later while giving birth to twins.

A popular man with a handsome appearance and an easy sense of humor, Yell was elected to the Tennessee legislature in 1827. He remarried that same year to Ann Jordan Moore, with whom he had three daughters and one son. After his second's wife death, he married a widow, Mary Ficklin.

He retired from Tennessee politics in 1830 due to unfavorable publicity stemming from his participation in a brawl. President Andrew Jackson came to his aid and appointed him receiver of public moneys at Little Rock in the Arkansas Territory. Shortly after assuming this position, he became ill with malaria and was forced to return to Tennessee.

He remained interested in Arkansas and in 1835, he was appointed to the territorial bench as a circuit judge. Although Yell did not exhibit extraordinary legal talent, his good looks and engaging manner made him very popular among the common folk of his circuit. In 1836, after Arkansas was admitted to the Union, Yell won its sole congressional seat, which he held for two terms. In 1840, Yell ran for Governor of Arkansas and won virtually unopposed.

His term as governor was fraught with problems, and he resigned in 1844 before his term expired to easily reclaim his congressional seat. Once again his popularity enabled him to persevere over formidable opponents. Without resigning his position as congressman, Yell left Washington, D.C.

when the Mexican War broke out, returned to Arkansas, and enrolled as a private in Capt. Solon Borland's volunteers, where he was elected colonel. When his regiment left to join Gen. Zachary Taylor's army in Mexico, Yell was fighting with other Arkansas Democrats. He wanted to retain his congressional seat, but his opponents in the Arkansas Legislature eventually forced him to resign. Yell remained in the military; however, his position there was fraught with conflict and quarrels. In the Battle of Buena Vista on February 23, 1847, Archibald Yell was killed while leading a countercharge during a desperate attempt to stop the retreat of forces. Arkansas troops were overwhelmed by Mexican lancers. Yell lost control of his horse and lances pierced his face and chest, killing him instantly.

After the battle, he was buried at Saltillo; his body was exhumed and was reentered at a family plot in Fayetteville. His body was exhumed again and finally buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Fayetteville.