



James Guthrie
(1792-1869)

James Guthrie was born near Bardstown in Nelson County, Kentucky, on December 5, 1792. He was educated at the McAllister Academy in Bardstown, read law with John Rowan, and was admitted to the bar in 1817. He established a practice in Bardstown and moved to Louisville in 1820 after being named commonwealth attorney.

Guthrie was elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1827 and later served in the state Senate from 1831 to 1840. In 1849, he was elected a delegate to Kentucky's third constitutional convention and served as convention president. Guthrie was a founder and president of the University of Louisville, served as secretary of the treasury under President Franklin Pierce (1853-57), was vice president and later president of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, and served as president of the Louisville–Portland Canal Company.

The impending Civil War found Guthrie a delegate to the Washington Peace Conference in February 1861 where he chaired the committee that wrote the convention's proposal for peace. The peace conference failed, but while in the capital, Guthrie and other peace delegates met with President-elect Lincoln. The meeting proved contentious, and at its close, Lincoln voiced concern regarding the language of his guests. Guthrie reportedly told Lincoln: "Mr. President, if General Washington occupied the seat that you will soon fill, and had it been necessary to talk to him as we have to you to save such a Union as this, I, for one, should talk to him as we have to you."

Lincoln later offered a cabinet appointment to Guthrie, who declined on account of infirmity. Guthrie served in the United States Senate from March 4, 1865, to February 7, 1868, when he resigned because of failing health. He died in Louisville on March 13, 1869.

Bust of James Guthrie, artist unknown
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