



**John C. Breckinridge  
(1821-1875)**

In the presidential election of 1860, two of the four candidates were Kentuckians. The first, Abraham Lincoln, won the election. The second, John C. Breckinridge, became a Confederate general and secretary of war.

Breckinridge was born in Fayette County on January 16, 1821. After attending Centre College and Transylvania University, he studied law under William Owsley, who later became governor. Breckinridge practiced law in Lexington and served in the state legislature and the U. S. Congress. At age thirty-six, he became vice president under James Buchanan, making him the youngest vice president in American history.

When Breckinridge and Lincoln ran for president in 1860, Kentucky did not support either native son. Instead, Tennessean John Bell, whose platform advocated the preservation of the Union, received the most support in Kentucky with 66,051 votes. Breckinridge received 25,638 votes, while Lincoln garnered 1,364.

Breckinridge returned to the U. S. Senate and worked to avert civil war. In September 1861, however, Union authorities ordered his arrest, and he fled to Virginia. The former vice president, who was ejected from the U. S. Senate, became a Confederate general.

Breckinridge fought in many major battles, including Shiloh, Baton Rouge, Stones River, Chickamauga, and Missionary Ridge. He later commanded the Department of Southwestern Virginia, and, in February 1865, became the Confederate secretary of war. He tried to end the war honorably, stating, "This has been a magnificent epic. In God's name let it not terminate in a farce."

When the Civil War ended, Breckinridge fled to Cuba, England, and then Canada. He returned to Kentucky in 1869, where he practiced law and was active in the railroad and insurance business. He died on May 17, 1875, and is buried in the Lexington Cemetery.

John Cabell Breckinridge (1821-1875), by M. William Clark, ca. 1860s  
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