

## Kentucky's Civil War: Joseph Holt



*Historical Marker #522 in Breckinridge County commemorates Joseph Holt, the Unionist judge advocate general who prosecuted the Lincoln assassination conspirators.*

Born in Breckinridge County in 1807, Holt practiced law in Kentucky and Missouri. A highly-successful attorney, he retired at age 35 and returned to the commonwealth. Well-connected and politically active, during James Buchanan's presidency Holt was U. S. commissioner of patents, postmaster general, and, briefly, secretary of war.

During the Civil War, Holt worked to keep Kentucky in the Union, giving speeches and writing pamphlets. Because of Holt's legal acumen and his work for the Union, Lincoln appointed him judge advocate general. By 1864, Holt was a brigadier general in charge of the Bureau of Military Justice.

After Lincoln's assassination, Holt convicted the conspirators, but accusations of his tampering with evidence marred his reputation. He again retired in 1875 and lived in Washington, DC, until his death in 1894. He was buried at his home in Breckinridge County.

Photo: Breckinridge County native Joseph Holt prosecuted the Lincoln assassination conspirators. Photo courtesy the Library of Congress.