

WILLIAM RUFUS KING

b. April 7, 1796

d. April 18, 1853

U.S. VICE PRESIDENT

“The law established by the Creator, which has existed from the beginning, extends over the whole globe.”

For most of his adult life, he enjoyed a close relationship with James Buchanan, the 15th president of the United States.

William Rufus King was the 13th vice president of the United States for six weeks before he died of tuberculosis, making him the shortest-serving vice president in American history. He was the third vice president to die in office.

King served in the U.S. Congress for nearly 30 years. He was elected a U.S. representative from North Carolina and a senator from Alabama. He won a record-breaking 11 elections to the position of president pro tempore of the Senate. He also served as minister to France.

A Democrat, King was a Unionist with moderate views on slavery and westward expansion. He helped draft the Compromise of 1850, a series of bills that attempted to diffuse tensions between the North and the South.

A native of North Carolina, King purchased property along the Alabama River. At what came to be known as “King’s Bend,” he operated one of the largest plantations in the state. He and others founded the nearby town of Selma, which King named after a site in a classical legend.

For most of his adult life, King enjoyed a close relationship with James Buchanan, the 15th president of the United States. For 10 years, he and Buchanan (neither of whom ever married) shared a home in Washington, D.C. Nicknamed the “Siamese twins,” they regularly attended social functions together. Andrew Jackson referred to them as “Miss Nancy” and “Miss Fancy.”

In January 1853, vice-president-elect King became gravely ill. He left for Cuba, hoping to regain his health in a warmer climate. When he was unable to return to Washington in time for the inauguration, he took the oath of office in a town near Havana. It is the only time in the nation’s history that an executive official has been sworn in on foreign soil.

King is interred in a mausoleum in Selma. The U.S. Senate displays a bust of him in its collection.



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