

GEORGE WASHINGTON LANE, 1806-1864
FEDERAL DISTRICT JUDGE OF THE CIVIL WAR ERA

George Washington Lane was born in Georgia and moved to Limestone County, Alabama, with his family, in 1821. He read for the law in the private law school of Judge Daniel Coleman in Athens, Alabama, after which he practiced law in Athens. He became a legislator, then a county court judge, and was circuit judge for twelve years. Afterwards, he opened a law office in Hunstville.



At the time of the Civil War, Lane, like many of his fellows in Limestone and Madison Counties, was deeply opposed to secession. After the death of Judge John Gayle in 1859, the office of District Judge had been held by William Giles Jones, who had resigned from the Federal bench when Alabama seceded in 1861. U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, ignoring the fact that Alabama's Federal Judicial District was no longer a part of the United States, appointed Lane to succeed Jones.

Lane could not actively serve a court which did not exist. Though a strong Unionist, his son, Captain Robert W. Lane, was killed in the Confederate service in Forrest's cavalry. The historian Willis Brewer wrote of Judge Lane that, "as a judge he was lenient but sound and reliable, and as a man he was always popular because of his kind and humane nature." He died in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1864. President Lincoln appointed the New Yorker, Richard Busteed, to succeed him.

(Copy of "Oil on Canvas Portrait of George Washington Lane," circa 1850.)