

## David Rice Atchison



David Rice Atchison (August 11, 1807 - January 26, 1886) was a mid-19th century pro-slavery Democratic Senator from Missouri. He is best known as the subject of an urban legend that he was President of the United States for one day.

Born in Frogtown (now named Kirkelevington), Fayette County, Kentucky, Atchison was appointed to the United States Senate to replace a Missouri Senator who had just died. He held this office from 1843 to 1855. He became the first senator from western Missouri and at age 36 the youngest Missourian at that time to enter the U. S. Senate. Some biographers claim he was U. S. Vice President from April 18, 1853, until December 4, 1854, by right of succession upon the death of President Franklin Pierce's vice president, William R. King, but he never took a Vice Presidential oath of office.

Some people believe or perhaps jokingly claim that he was President on Sunday, March 4, 1849, between the expiration of James Polk's term at noon on Sunday and the official oath of office taken by Zachary Taylor on Monday.

The law at that time specified that the President was to be sworn in on March 4th, but President-elect Taylor refused to be sworn in on the Sabbath (Sunday). Atchison had been elected President Pro Tempore of the Senate a couple of days previously and would therefore technically be third in line of succession behind the President and Vice President. Since neither office was held by a person on that day, he was later considered by some the President of the United States for that period. However, none of the legal requirements for replacing the President with the President pro tempore were fulfilled and on March 4, Atchison's Senate term expired at noon, so he was not even technically president pro tempore. Most people familiar with the claim that Atchison was President for a day are able to cite several additional reasons why the claim is silly, not the least of which is that Atchison never took the oath of office as required by the US Constitution.

The case against the claim is well-summarized by the Urban Legends Reference Pages which went so far as to say, "The plain truth is, it's difficult to find one valid reason why David Rice Atchison should be considered to have served as President for a Day, but it's not hard to find several valid reasons why he shouldn't."

When asked what he did on this day, he commented "I went to bed. There had been two or three busy nights finishing up the work of the Senate, and I slept most of that Sunday." He boasted that his "presidency" as "the honestest administration this country ever had."

He is buried in his home of Plattsburg, Missouri, where a statue honors him in front of the Clinton County Courthouse. His grave marker reads "David Rice Atchison -- President of the United States for One Day."

Atchison, Kansas is named for him. The town subsequently gave its name to the famous Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad company.

Information resource: [http://www.public-domain-content.com/President\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States/David\\_Rice\\_Atchison.shtml](http://www.public-domain-content.com/President_of_the_United_States/David_Rice_Atchison.shtml)

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