

Information Sheet

R Phelps, John S. (John Smith), 1814-1886.
562 Receipt, 1864.
One folder.

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This is a receipt given by John S. Phelps at Ozark, Christian County, Missouri, to Jesse Jennings, administrator of the estate of George Yocum, deceased. The receipt was for a retainer paid to Phelps for legal services involving the Yocum estate.

A native of Simsbury, Connecticut, John Smith Phelps studied at Trinity College at Hartford, and was admitted to the bar in 1835. After his marriage to Mary Whitney in 1837, he came to Missouri, locating at Springfield. He quickly became one of the leading lawyers in southwest Missouri and was elected to the state legislature in 1840. Four years later he was elected to Congress as a Democrat and served his district for eighteen years. He was a champion of government bounties to soldiers, aid to railroads, and inexpensive postage.

Phelps was popular in Washington and at home. In 1857 Missourians honored him by naming the newly-created county of Phelps after him. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Phelps returned to Springfield and organized home guard forces for the Union. Following the northern defeat at Wilson's Creek, Mary Phelps cared for the body of General Nathaniel Lyon, killed at the battle, while her husband retreated with the Union army to Rolla. By special arrangement with President Lincoln, Phelps organized the infantry regiment which bore his name, Phelps's Regiment, Missouri Volunteer Infantry. The regiment spent most of the winter of 1861-1862 as the garrison of Fort Wyman at Rolla. In March 1862, he led his regiment in the fierce fighting at Pea Ridge, Arkansas. President Lincoln appointed Phelps military governor of Arkansas in July 1862, but he resigned the position due to ill health.

Phelps returned to Springfield in 1864 to resume his law practice. He was an unsuccessful candidate for governor of Missouri in 1868, but in 1876 was elected to the position as the only candidate who could successfully lead Northern and Southern factions in the state. During his tenure as governor, Phelps supported currency reform and increased support for public education. He retired in 1881, praised as one of Missouri's best governors. Phelps died in Springfield in 1886.

The receipt was removed from the Robert S. Wiley collection. It was deacidified and encapsulated by Claudia Powell of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia.

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8 February 1995

Robert S. Wiley

Gift

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