

WOLFE, SIMEON K., presidential elector, mechanic, farmer, lawyer, state Senator, editor, and member of Congress, the subject of this biography, while eminently a self-made man, is not less remarkable for his versatility of talent than for his energy in the pursuit of his calling and profession. The use of biography is well exemplified in his case. His life may be regarded as a lesson for encouragement to the American youth, who, in starting in life's race, has none, or but few, of what are called worldly advantages to aid him. While it is not true that his early life was passed in poverty, it is a truth of which he is not ashamed that his boyhood and early manhood were alike free from the stifling influence of wealth and opulence. He was born in a log-cabin – a sample of the rude architecture of the early settler – on a farm about nine miles west of New Albany, Floyd County, Indiana, on the fourteenth day of February, 1824; and there his boyhood was spent at manual labor on his father's farm and in his workshop, and at intervals of three months during the winter attending the common district schools of that period, which were generally poorly conducted, and yet affording the boys or girls of an apt literary bent of mind the opportunity of making themselves practical scholars in after life. And such was the result with the subject of this sketch, who, as in other matters, only required the rudiments to be imparted by a teacher to enable him to master the whole subject. His education, though not classic, became thorough and practical in nearly all the departments of useful knowledge, in which he always regarded the better class of romance and fiction, as well as poetry, as not a non-essential; in all of which, amidst his diversified labors, he took time to embellish his well-garnered store of useful and scientific knowledge. His ancestors were of the robust Pennsylvania German stock. George Wolfe, his grandfather, was a resident of Northumberland County, in that state, and for many years was a lumberman and raftsman on the Susquehanna River. He was a man of splendid physique, about six feet two inches tall, of full proportions, fair, ruddy face, with hair originally of a sandy or auburn color, but which, later in life, became white as wool, giving to the old gentleman a marked appearance. He was a man of great strength, as were also his brothers, who, in the rude period of their younger days, might have been noted prize-fighters. A traditional anecdote is related of one of these brothers, whose reputation as a fighter became noted, illustrating the quality of these old-time men. At one time a stranger called at his house and informed him that he had traveled ninety miles to see him; "and," said the stranger, "I have heard that you are a great fighter, and, if that is so, I came to whip you!" "Very well," said Wolfe, "I am the man you are hunting; come in and get a dram of whisky and I will satisfy you." The stranger accepted the offer, and after passing a few rude compliments the combat commenced, and was not ended until the stranger was badly punished for his pains, receiving, amongst other injuries, a broken jaw. After the combat, Wolfe took him in, and nursed and cared for him until he was able to travel, when he left with many praises for the kindness with which he was entertained. George Wolfe was the father of ten children, all of whom had the marks of the blood of their ancestors pretty strongly in them, being of robust constitutions of body and mind. In 1795 he, with his family, emigrated to Kentucky, settling on the waters of Bear Grass Creek, ten miles above Louisville, where he resided until the year 1811, when he removed to Indiana and settled in the forest, and opened a farm about ten miles west of the present city of New Albany, but which at the time was a village of only a few huts. He died there January 1, 1848, in the eighty-second year of his age, leaving a widow, who died several years after at the age of eighty-nine. George I. Wolfe was the eldest son of the latter, and the father of Simeon K. He was born near the

town of Sunbury, Northumberland County, Pennsylvania, on the 6th day of November, 1787, and died at Georgetown, Floyd County, Indiana, May, 1872, in the eighty-fifth year of his age. George I. was a boy eight or nine years old when he was brought by his father to Kentucky, where he was raised, and had instilled into him to a large degree the traits of independence and manhood and high principles of integrity and honor which distinguished and marked the character of the old-time Kentuckian. He emigrated to Floyd County, to the forest nine miles west of New Albany, where he opened a farm and resided for over half a century. He was a man of fine proportions and build over six feet high, and much above the average in intellect and information, which enabled him always to command a controlling influence in neighborhood and county affairs. By occupation he was a farmer, shoemaker, and tanner, which callings he taught to all of his boys, four of whom now are living, but none of whom continued to follow in the occupations that he taught them. Samuel C. Wolfe, the eldest, born January 15, 1815, resides at Elizabeth, Harrison County, Indiana, and is by occupation a physician. Hamilton, the next eldest, born March 30, 1819, is also a physician, residing at Washington, Daviess County, Indiana. Harvey S., the youngest, also a physician, born June 22, 1832, resides at Corydon, Harrison County, Indiana. These three have all become honored and useful members of society, but have not occupied their time in public affairs and become so well known as the subject of this memoir. George I. Wolfe in politics was a Whig until 1854, when that party became extinct, and from that period to the day of his death he was a Democrat. He was twice elected as a Representative in the Indiana Legislature, serving in that body from 1843 to 1845. In religious faith he was a firm believer in the doctrines of Universalism, and in that faith he died, always averring that the older he became the more firmly he believed in the truth of that doctrine. He was a man of noted neighborly kindness, liberality, and tolerance. The subject of this sketch, Simeon K., was married on the 24th of August, 1843, then in his twentieth year, to Penelope, daughter of John Bence, a well-to-do farmer of Harrison County, by whom he has had eight children, two of whom, Mrs. Addie Stephens, wife of Alanson Stephens, Esq., and James H., are dead. Five sons and a daughter are still living. The names of the surviving children are: Albert G., Charles D., Robert P., Ella, Edward W., and Thomas F. After his marriage he began life as a shoemaker, at Corydon, the county seat of Harrison County, Indiana, with a capital of forty-two dollars. This was in 1844, April 10. Times then were hard for a poor man who had nothing but his hands with which to earn a living; but with industry and economy he succeeded in two years in amassing a fortune of two hundred and fifty dollars. This he invested in a stock of dry-goods and groceries, and carried on that business two years, when he commanded his first thousand dollars, which to him seemed a great fortune. In 1846 he was elected to the office of Justice of the Peace, and while in that position he felt compelled to learn a little law to enable him to discharge its duties. This was the beginning of his career as a lawyer. He soon fell in love with the profession, and in the interims of his labor he became master of Blackstone's Commentaries. Believing in the right which belongs to every working man to change his vocation whenever it suits his inclination or interest, he at this time conceived the idea that he would adopt the law as his profession. He thereupon, in the month of January, 1849, entered the office of Judge William A. Porter, then one of the foremost lawyers in Southern Indiana, as a student, with a determination, not unlike his old fighting great-uncle in Pennsylvania, to fight for victory in that hardly and hotly contested field, where failure is the rule and success the exception. How well he carried his determination into effect, the judicial records of the various courts in which he

practiced can well attest. After remaining in Judge Porter's law office ten months, he entered the Law Department of the University of Indiana, then under the joint professorship of Judges David McDonald, afterwards Judge of the United States District Court of Indiana, and William T. Otto, since Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and now reporter of the United States Supreme Court decisions. Entering both junior and senior classes of that institution at the same time (November, 1849), he succeeded in graduating, contrary to the general practice, at the end of the first session, in March, 1850, and had conferred on him the degree of Bachelor of Laws. After that he entered with vigor into the practice, and almost from the beginning has commanded a large and remunerative business. He remained at Corydon until September 10, 1870, when he removed to New Albany, his present residence. The public events in Mr. Wolfe's life began in 1851, when he became a candidate for the office of state Senator for Harrison County. In politics he began life as a Whig, and then still adhered nominally to the Whig party; but, having given the question of the Mexican War his warm support, he did not stand well with all the members of that party, who said he had Democratic proclivities; and being opposed by the eccentric William M. Saffer, a Democrat, who was a farmer, and a man of great popularity with that class, the young Whig lawyer, with such proclivities, was defeated by a majority of seventeen votes. At the election of 1852 Mr. Wolfe supported General Franklin Pierce for President. In 1854 he was the first in his county to take the stump against Know-Nothingism, which he did with so much vigor, and so acceptably to the Democratic party, that the Democratic State Convention in 1856 placed him on the ticket as a candidate for district elector for Buchanan; and in that capacity he canvassed the entire Second Indiana District, in discussion with David T. Laird, the Fillmore elector – the Fremont elector declining to accompany them. In December following, Mr. Wolfe was a member of the Electoral College which cast the vote of Indiana for James Buchanan and John C. Breckinridge. On the tenth day of February, 1857, Mr. Wolfe began the publication of the Corydon weekly *Democrat*, of which he was sole owner and editor, and which, with great labor and by the burning of much midnight oil, he succeeded in attending to, in connection with his large legal practice, for nearly nine years, and until August 29, 1865, when he sold the paper to A. W. Brewster, the present proprietor. Mr. Wolfe made his paper a rare exception of success, as he has, in fact, every thing he has ever undertaken, which, if nothing else, would be sufficient to mark him as an exceptional personage. The Indiana State Democratic Convention which met on the 8th of January, 1860, showed its confidence in Mr. Wolfe by appointing him as one of the delegates for the Second District to the Charleston National Convention. The other delegate, his colleague, was the lamented John B. Norman, at that time chief editor of the New Albany *Ledger* newspaper. Mr. Norman was one of the ablest of the editorial corps of Indiana, and one of the purest and best men of his times. To be associated with such a man was itself a great honor. While attending that convention, Mr. Wolfe became fully impressed with the fearful condition of the country. It was perfectly apparent that the desire of the controlling element in that body was for disunion, and not for Democratic success; and when Mr. Wolfe returned home and reported that as a fact, his friends could not doubt the correctness of the statement. At the adjourned meeting of the convention at Baltimore, Mr. Wolfe, in connection with his friend, Mr. Norman, conceived and set on foot a scheme which, if it had succeeded, would most probably have prevented the final disruption of that body, and averted all the terrible consequences which followed that result in 1861. The scheme was to get the Indiana delegation to sign a paper requesting the Illinois

delegation to withdraw the name of Judge Douglas. When the extreme men of the South ascertained that such a move was on foot, they, to avoid its success, withdrew from the convention, which left the scheme wholly impracticable. While he was absent at Baltimore, in 1860, the Democratic parties of Harrison and Washington Counties gave Mr. Wolfe a unanimous nomination for state Senator, to which office he was elected the following October, by a majority of nearly six hundred. As state Senator Mr. Wolfe served with ability and distinction four years, covering the stormy and important period of the war. In that body he gave the war policy his support, but endeavored to have measures adopted that in his judgment would lead to a speedy and honorable conclusion of bloodshed and to the preservation of the Union; but always contended that while the war lasted it should be vigorously prosecuted and supported. In 1864 Mr. Wolfe was selected as a candidate for presidential elector for the state at large, on the McClellan ticket. In 1872 Mr. Wolfe received the nomination of his party for a seat in the Forty-third Congress. He was elected by a majority of nearly six thousand over his Republican opponent. In May, 1873, he was a member of the Commercial Congress, which assembled at St. Louis, in the interest of improvements in inter-state commerce. He took great interest in that subject when in Congress; and, being a member of the Committee on Railroads and Canals, had the opportunity of making himself familiar with the subject of inter-state commerce, as well as the facilities that were needed to open up the avenues and outlets to foreign commerce. And in that connection he took an active and prominent part in maturing, perfecting, and passing the bill known as the "Eads Jetty Bill," for the improvement of the south pass of the mouth of the Mississippi River. And since that time he has watched with great interest the evidences of triumph of that great scheme. He is satisfied that the success of that work will add many millions annually to the productive industry of the West, whose natural and cheapest outlet to foreign ports is through the mouth of that great highway. Another subject to which Mr. Wolfe gave his untiring attention while a member of Congress was that of the finances and currency. In the controversies, both in Congress and since his retirement, in regard to the hard and soft money theories, he has always been an open and bold advocate of the policy of maintaining the volume of the currency in the same condition as to quantity that it was when the debts of the country were contracted. On the 28th of February, 1874, he made an elaborate speech in the House of Representatives, in which occurs the following extract, and which is here given as a sample of his style of argument on that subject:

"The value of money is measured by its purchasing power, and, assuming that the supply and demand for labor and the productions of labor remain the same, then the value of a given sum of money as a medium of exchange is regulated by its proportion to the whole amount in circulation. This rule is demonstrated by a simple illustration. Suppose the whole amount of money in circulation, of all kinds, is \$800,000,000 – and that is not far from the amount with which this country is now carrying on business, though a part of that is not actually employed. Then suppose that any one individual is the owner of \$1,000,000 in cash. In such case he would be the owner of one eight-hundredth of all the money in the country. But then, again, suppose the amount of the circulating medium should be reduced to \$400,000,000. Now, the individual with his million would own one four-hundredth part of the whole, which would be practically doubling the value of each one of his dollars. So, if the amount of the circulating medium should be increased to \$1,600,000,000, the man with his million would own only one sixteen-hundredth part of the whole, and by the same rule his wealth would be depreciated one-half in value. The result follows clearly, that as you

diminish the amount of money in circulation, you in the same ration increase the relative value of the money owned by the capitalists; and, on the other hand, as you increase the amount of money in circulation, you practically diminish the value of that which is owned by them. If these deductions are true – and I think they can not be successfully overthrown – we ought to be at no loss in understanding why the capitalists are opposed to what they are pleased to term ‘inflation.’ But it must be remembered that a proper increase is not inflation, any more than to eat a sufficient quantity to satisfy the demands of the body is gluttony, or any more than zwei lager, to a German, is drunkenness. And from the same deductions it will appear equally clear why the capital classes – those who have their coffers filled, or have stiff bank accounts standing to their credit – are in favor of a reduction in the amount in circulation, or at least to be let alone under the present decreased condition of the currency. In each case it is simply a question of self-interest.”

The writer of this sketch inquired of Mr. Wolfe why it was that he was not elected for a second term to Congress, and he received the following answer: “Well, I had no special desire to be elected, for the reason that I had plenty of business of my own to attend to; besides, I knew I could not get a nomination without much labor and large expenditures of money. So corrupt has politics become, that I had no inclination to engage in such a contest. The thing wasn’t, in my estimation, worth what it would cost.” Since his retirement from Congress he has devoted his time to his private affairs. Having by close attention to business amassed a competence of this world’s goods to make him comfortable, he has been dividing his time between the practice of the law and horticultural and agricultural pursuits. He has lately erected a fine residence on a high eminence in the suburbs of New Albany, which has a commanding view of as fine scenery as can be found anywhere on the American continent, taking in the three cities, Louisville, New Albany, and Jeffersonville, the falls of the Ohio River, and the great bridge, which is the longest on the continent, except only the Victoria Bridge, over the St. Lawrence, at Montreal. At this beautiful country seat he intends to spend a part of his time, as he expresses it, in “industrious idleness.” In personal appearance and temperament, Mr. Wolfe has many of the marked peculiarities of his ancestors. Nearly six feet in height; neither heavily nor slightly built; in weight about one hundred and sixty pounds; eyes bright yellowish brown; nose very slightly aquiline; hair and beard a silvery gray; complexion fair, in which the ruddy hues of health and active life are plainly marked; of a sociable disposition, and in conversation impressing the hearer with the fact that he has read and traveled much, and is thoroughly versed in all the practical affairs of life. From his youth up, he has been a student and lover of books, and especially the great book of nature, which he worships with a poetic devotion. In fact, he is one of those rare individuals who have a keen relish for the good and the beautiful things of this world, and seem to know how to obtain and enjoy them.