

Colonel Preston Smith Brooks Sr.

He was born August 5, 1819 in Roseland, Edgefield County, SC. He was the son of Whitfield and Mary Parsons Carroll Brooks. He attended SC College (now University of SC) but was expelled just before graduation for threatening local police officers with firearms. In 1840, he fought a duel with future Texas Senator Louis T. Wigfall and was shot in the hip, forcing Brooks to use a walking cane for the rest of his life. He was first married to Caroline Harper Means (1820-1843). She and their child died upon the birth of Whitfield D. Brooks (1843-1843). He was a Democratic Representative member of the SC House of Representatives in 1844. He was admitted to the Bar in 1845. He served 1846-1848 as Colonel in the Mexican-American War with the Palmetto Regiment. He was married second time to Martha Caroline Means (April 8, 1826 – March 23, 1901), cousin to his first wife, both from Fairfield County, SC. Children from this marriage were: Caroline Harper Brooks (1849-1924), Rosa Brooks (1850-1933), Preston Smith Brooks Jr. (1854-1928). He served from SC in the U.S. House of Representatives, serving from March 4, 1853 until his death. He was a fervent advocate of slavery. He is primarily remembered for severely beating Senator Charles Sumner (Massachusetts abolitionist), with a cane on the floor of the U.S. Senate, May 22, 1856. This was in retaliation for an anti-slavery speech by Sumner in which Sumner attacked Brooks' uncle, Senator Andrew Butler (Democrat-SC). His action was applauded by many Southerners, and abhorred in the North. Although an attempt to oust him from the House of Representatives, he immediately resigned his seat, he received only token punishment and was re-elected by the people of SC (but died before his next term began). Sumner was seriously injured, and unable to serve in the Senate for three years, though eventually he largely recovered. Brooks' act and the polarizing national reaction to it, are frequently cited as a major factor in the rising tensions leading to the War of Southern Independence. Brooks died January 27, 1857 in Washington, D.C., unexpectedly from croup before the new Congressional term had begun. He was buried in Edgefield, SC. (Most of the above information from Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia) Portrait is copy of Scarborough portrait of Preston Brooks, by Claudine Evans, 1973. Portrait was given to Fairfield County Museum collection by sculptor Maria Kirby Smith. She did the statue of Senator Strom Thurmond of Edgefield, SC. She resides in Camden, SC. (per Ben Hornsby Jr.)