

Alfred Landon Rives, born in Paris, France, March 25, 1830, son of William Cabell and Judith (Walker) Rives; at the time of his birth his father, who was among the most distinguished citizens of the Old Dominion, minister to France, same position in Virginia, was taught by private of age, then entered the Concord Academy, entered the University of Virginia, was graduated in class of twenty engineering, he as a profession, University of Virginia, remained one



was the United States Senator he also filled the position in 1848; Alfred L. Rives was a tutor until fourteen years became a student of the University of Virginia and at the age of sixteen entered the Virginia Military Institute, two years, being sixth in a class of four; being proficient in mathematics he determined to adopt that profession and in 1848 entered the University of Virginia, where he remained one session, then

accompanied his father to France; after a year devoted to the study of mathematics and French, he successfully passed an examination for entrance in the Government Engineering School of France, "Ecole des ponts et Chaussees;" after graduation in 1854 he was offered a position upon the great French railroad, "Du Nord," but instead returned to the United States, where he served in the engineering corps of the Virginia Midland railway; later accepted a position in Washington under Captain M. V. Meigs, of the United States Engineering Corps, where he served for one year as assistant engineer of the United States Capitol and Post Office buildings; was appointed secretary of the interior under President Pierce, to report upon the best location for a bridge across the Potomac, and directed to present details and estimates therefor; this report was published in the "Congressional Records," in 1857, and attracted favorable comment; was selected to make calculations and estimates for the Cabin John bridge, which was built under his personal supervision; upon the secession of Virginia he returned to his native state, and three days later received the commission of captain of engineers from the state of Virginia, and was directed to report to Colonel Talcott, at that time chief engineer of the state; was assigned to duty on the lower Virginia peninsula, and upon the resignation of Colonel Talcott he was soon made acting chief engineer of the state of Virginia; later he was appointed acting chief of the Engineer Bureau of the Confederate States, which position he held until the close of the war; he was promoted successively to be major, lieutenant colonel and colonel of engineers; after the war he was offered a professorship in several institutions of learning, and also a good architectural position under the United States government, all of which he declined, preferring to try to recover his fortunes in Richmond as an engineer

and architect; in 1868 was division engineer of the Chesapeake & Ohio railroad; in 1870 was appointed chief engineer of the Mobile & Birmingham railroad; engineer in charge of the South & North Alabama railroad and part of the Louisville & Nashville system, which he completed in 1873; he was offered by Gen. Sherman, for the Khedive of Egypt. The position of chief engineer of the civil works of Egypt, which position he declined to accept; that of chief engineer and general superintendent of the Mobile & Ohio railroad; in 1883 became vice president and general manager of the Richmond & Danville railroad, now a part of the Southern Railway System; in 1886 was appointed a member of the United States commission to inspect and receive on the part of the government forty miles of the Northern Pacific railroad in the state of Washington, and the following year became general superintendent of the Panama railroad, and while with that railroad went to Paris, and concluded a traffic agreement with the Canal Company; he presented to the canal commission a plan for the completion of the Panama Canal, in which he had always taken a great interest; in 1894 he communicated to the director of the canal a plan for the construction of a port at La Boca, in the vicinity of Panama, which if constructed would tend greatly to facilitate and increase the traffic across the isthmus; after resigning his position with the Panama railroad, he was made chief engineer of the Cape Cod canal; was also elected vice president, and was specially charged with the construction of the Vera Cruz & Pacific railroad in Mexico; these positions he held at the time of his death at Castle Hill, February 27, 1903; his wife, who survived him, was the well-known Virginia belle, Miss Sadie MacMurdo; children: Amelia, the well-known authoress, who became the wife of Prince Trubetskoy; Gertrude, who became the wife of Allen Potts, Esq.; Miss Landon Rives.

FROM:

Encyclopedia of Virginia Biography

Volume III

By: Lyon Gardiner Tyler, LL. D.

Lewis Historical Publishing Company

New York 1915