JOHN ALEXANDER MARTIN

Atchison (Republican), 12 January 1885–14 January 1889

Born 10 March 1839, Brownsville (Fayette County), Pennsylvania; son of James Martin, a boardinghouse keeper, justice of peace, and postmaster, and Jane Montgomery Crawford Martin, 2 sisters and 2 brothers; educated at common school and apprenticed to a printer at age 15; military experience in Civil War, colonel (breveted brigadier general) of Eighth Kansas Infantry; married Ida Challis, 1 June 1871, 8 children, 1 dying in infancy; religious preference Baptist but a member of no church; died 2 October 1889, of pleuro-pneumonia, in Atchison; buried in Mount Vernon Cemetery, Atchison.

After narrowly missing the Republican nomination for governor in 1878, John A. Martin's time came in 1884 when the rules of the Republican state convention were suspended and he was nominated by acclamation. In a race against the incumbent governor George Washington Glick, he was elected by 146,777 votes to 108,284, with H. P. Phillips, Greenback-Labor candidate receiving 9,998. Two years later he was unanimously renominated for a second term and reelected, receiving 149,615 votes against 115,667 for Democrat Thomas Moonlight and 8,094 for the Prohibition candidate C. H. Branscombe.

Martin's career had always been tied up in Kansas. He moved to
the Kansas Territory in 1857, at age nineteen, and settled in Atchison. In 1858 he purchased the *Squatter Sovereign*, a proslavery newspaper, and changed its name to *Freedom's Champion* (later the *Daily Champion*). After the Civil War, he served as commander in chief of a state encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic, a veterans' organization; as an incorporator and a president of the state Historical Society; as an incorporator of the *Kansas Magazine*; and as a Kansas representative on the United States Centennial Commission. An ardent Republican, Martin was chairman of the Atchison County Republican Central Committee during most years from 1859 to 1884. He attended the Republican National Conventions of 1860, 1868, 1872, and 1880 and was a member of the Republican National Committee from 1864 to 1884, with a term as its secretary (1880–84). Before he was old enough to vote, he was secretary of the Wyandotte constitutional convention, and he was elected to the first session of the state senate, serving until 27 October 1861 when he became an officer in the Eighth Kansas Infantry. He was also mayor of Atchison in 1865 and from 1878 to 1880.

In the first three years of his tenure, Martin was governor during boom times: Land put into cultivation exceeded two million acres, railroads added two thousand miles of track, taxable property expanded, and many new towns were created. However, during his last year in office, the boom conditions of the mid-1880s collapsed, and drouth and recession affected general economic conditions in Kansas. As governor, Martin’s dominant interests were the well-being of old soldiers from the Union army and their families, the state of Kansas, and the Republican party. New in this administration were the State Board of Health, a school for feebleminded persons, and a soldiers’ orphans home. Women won the right to vote in city elections. The state militia became the Kansas National Guard, and a Bureau of Labor Statistics was created. In 1886 Martin helped negotiate a settlement in the Missouri Pacific strike. Real estate speculation was rampant during this time, and Martin became alarmed by community rivalries for a county seat. In these so-called county seat wars, when disputes turned violent the governor was forced several times to send in state troops to restore order. Although there had been some question about his stance toward pro-
habitation at the time of his election, his support for the movement strengthened during his governorship. Martin resided at the Cope­
land Hotel, located at Ninth and Kansas Avenue, during his four
years as governor, while his large family stayed at the home in Atchi­
son.

Martin did not seek a third term but went back to the Daily
Champion in Atchison, worn out by his efforts to restore the eco­
nomic optimism that Kansans had enjoyed when he first became
governor. He died less than a year later, and more than five thou­
sand people attended his funeral. Shortly after his death, his fourth
child and eldest son, Evan Challis, was renamed John Alexander
Martin, Jr.

REFERENCES: Carlin and Richmond, 1982; Liebengood, 1936; Malin,
1931; Walker, 1936.