

Matthew Fielding Locke, one of three Texas speakers who attended the 1861 secession convention in Austin, headed a committee assigned the unpleasant duty of informing unionist Governor Sam Houston that the convention had voted to depose him. A fellow Tennessean whom Houston had once held in his arms as an infant, Locke had been a lifelong friend of the governor, and consequently the task was doubly painful. Houston, however, ever gracious and courteous, did not fail his young colleague even in this trying instance. Confronted with the news, according to Locke's recollections, Houston replied simply and politely, "Gentlemen, I appreciate your position. I have the honor to bid you good morning." Thus, without fanfare, ended the political career of Texas' most famous early patriot.

Locke was born near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, July 20, 1824, but at age 12 he moved to Marshall County, Mississippi. At the outset of the Mexican War, he enlisted in the 1st Mississippi Regiment of Volunteers, where he served as a bodyguard to the regiment's commander, Colonel Jefferson Davis. Following the war, Locke returned briefly to Mississippi, and then in 1850 he moved to Texas, settling in Upshur County. There, in the vicinity of Lafayette, he established a plantation.

A member of the House of Representatives of the 6th and 7th legislatures, Locke was chosen speaker during his second term when William S. Taylor resigned the office because of ill health. Locke's selection, occurring on January 18, 1858, was an elevation from the post of speaker pro tempore that he had held while Taylor was unable to preside. Locke later was elected to the state senate, but he declined to take his seat because of the Civil War and resultant military obligations.

Appointed a colonel of the cavalry by Governor Edward Clark, Locke raised a regiment that was transferred to the Confederate Army as the 10th Texas Cavalry. He served throughout the Civil War, participating in many important engagements. Coincidentally, the hostilities took Locke back to his boyhood home of Murfreesboro, where a major battle of the war was fought in the winter of 1862 to 1863.

Locke resettled in Arkansas at the close of the war and there founded the town of Alma. In the fall of 1887 he was elected as the first commissioner of agriculture of Arkansas, a position that he held for several years. Locke remained in Arkansas until 1909, when because of his wife's ill health he returned to Texas, this time to El Paso. He died in that city, two years later, on June 4, 1911.