

JOHN BURNETT

John Burnett was born in Pike County, Missouri, on the 4th day of July, 1831. He lost his father at the age of fifteen and was turned out in the world to fight his way as best he might. He first engaged as an errand boy in a store, but becoming tired of the confinement, at the end of the year he hired out to work on a flat-boat on the Mississippi, boating wood to St. Louis. His early education was obtained in the common schools of the country; and, though his opportunities were limited, he laid the foundation upon which he, in after life, built a sound, practical education.

In the spring of 1849, there being a great excitement about the gold discoveries in California and a general rush to the mines, he accepted an outfit from a relative, and though under eighteen years old started "the plains across" to seek his fortune in the new El Dorado. He arrived in Sacramento on the 10th day of September with just one five-franc piece in his pocket. During the greater part of the time from that date on he was engaged in mining and dealing in cattle, until the spring of 1858, when he came to Oregon and settled in Benton County.

The year after his arrival in Oregon he was married to Miss Martha Hinton, daughter of Honorable R. B. Hinton of Monroe. This happy union was blessed with a family of seven children. Soon after his marriage he commenced reading law with Colonel Kelsey of Corvallis, and in 1861 obtained a license from Judge Stratton to practice law in the second judicial district. He was later admitted as an attorney by the supreme court of Oregon on Sept. 16, 1869.

In 1862 he ran for state senator but was defeated, though by only twenty-five votes. In 1864 he took an active part in raising the first company in the regiment called for in Oregon during the Rebellion. In 1868 he was elected presidential elector on the Democratic ticket with James H. Slater and S. F. Chadwick, having canvassed Western Oregon against Doctor W. Bowlby of Washington County. In 1870 he was elected county judge of Benton County, and administered the affairs of the county to the satisfaction of the people for four years. In 1872 he ran for Congress against the late Joseph G. Wilson, and was defeated by a small majority.

In 1874 he was chosen associate justice of the supreme court of the state as an Independent Democrat, contesting with his former tutor, Colonel Kelsey, on the Republican ticket, and Honorable L. F. Mosher of Roseburg as the regular Democratic nominee. His term as judge expired in September 1876. Two years later he was elected state senator from Benton County, and was appointed chairman of the judiciary committee of the senate, the arduous duties of which office he filled to the entire satisfaction of his colleagues.

In 1882 he was appointed by Governor Thayer judge of the second judicial district, to serve the unexpired term of Judge James Watson, who had resigned. After expiration of his term of office he devoted his time to the practice of law. In 1891 he was elected Mayor of Corvallis.

As an advocate he was considered very effective and he participated in many notable criminal trials. He was regarded by his fellow townsmen as a liberal, enterprising, public spirited, contributing liberally to every laudable public enterprise. He helped build up the State Agriculture College and was senior counsel for the state in its litigation with the Methodist-Episcopal Church South for the control of the college board.

He died

(Material taken from History of Pacific Northwest vol.II p.235)