

WILLIAM MARION RAMSEY

Judge William Marion Ramsey, an attorney at law of McMinnville, who was recognized as a leader in public thought and action in the various localities in which he lived, especially in the field of politics and of his profession, was born in Monroe county, Iowa, December 25, 1846. His parents, David and Susan (Shuck) Ramsey, were both natives of Harrison county, Indiana, and in their childhood days accompanied their respective parents to Iowa, where they were reared and married. In 1847, after having lived in Monroe county for a few years, they crossed the plains to Oregon, being among the first who made the long journey in a prairie schooner drawn by ox teams, to settle in the northwest. They were more than six months upon the way and experienced many hardships and difficulties en route, but at length arrived safely in Yamhill county, in the late fall of 1847, and first located at what is now Newberg. At that time the country was claimed by both England and the United States and there was no law under which David Ramsey could acquire land, but he took up his abode upon a section which later he obtained as a donation claim after the passage of the law regarding government land, in September 1850. Both he and his wife spent their remaining days in this county, his death occurring in 1891, while Mrs. Ramsey survived for about seven years. He had been a lifelong democrat but never sought nor desired office.

Judge Ramsey was reared at home and always lived in Oregon since his arrival in this state when less than a year old. His education was acquired in the public schools and in the old McMinnville College, which he attended for three years. He then took up the profession of teaching but regarded it merely as an initial step to other professional labor. It afforded him, however, the capital with which to meet his expenses while he was acquiring a knowledge of Blackstone, Kent and other commentaries and preparing for the practice of law. It was in April, 1866, that he began reading law with the purpose of one day becoming a member of the bar, and in 1868 he was licensed to practice. He then located in La Fayette, at that time the county seat of Yamhill county, where he continued in successful practice until November, 1876. In that year he removed to Salem, remaining a member of the bar of the capital city for twelve years. In 1888 he became a resident of Pendleton, in eastern Oregon, but the illness of his wife while there residing decided him to return with her to Yamhill county after three years. He located in McMinnville in 1891 and here remained until 1900, when he again became a resident of Salem. In May, 1902, he established his home in La Grande, where he continued for nine years, but in May, 1911, again came to McMinnville. Throughout all these years he has continued actively in the practice of law and has been accorded a good clientage which has indicated clearly his position as an able advocate and counselor. In 1870, when but twenty-three years of age, he was elected to the office of county judge of Yamhill county and served on the bench for one term.

Judge Ramsey has from time to time filled other offices, the duties of which have been discharged with promptness, capability and fidelity. He was mayor of Salem from 1886 to 1888 and has twice served as mayor of McMinnville, in which connections he has given a business-like and practical administration that has wrought for the benefit of the cities which he has governed. In 1898 he was a candidate for supreme court judge against Chief Justice Frank A. Moore, and, while he was defeated, he led his ticket by three thousand votes. In 1900 he was renominated for the office without his knowledge or consent but declined the nomination. In politics he has always been a staunch democrat and is recognized as one of the leaders in his part of the state. He has always been a close student of the vital and significant problems of government, possesses a statesman's grasp of affairs and at all times keeps abreast with the best thinking men of the age.

In his fraternal relations Judge Ramsey is known as a member of the Occidental Lodge, No. 30, I. O. O. F., and of the Encampment. He has been married twice, having in 1870 wedded Miss Mahala Harris, of La Fayette, Yamhill county, and unto them were born four children. Nellie, the eldest, had charge of a ward in the asylum at Salem. Frederick E. was a captain of the United States Navy, in the Marine Corps, in which he enlisted prior to attaining his majority. He rose from the ranks through merit alone and the honors which are his were well deserved. He was on the battleship Oregon when she made her record-breaking trip around the Horn. Rev. Horace M. Ramsey, the second son, was vicar of St. Stephen's pro-cathedral, at Portland. Mary E., the youngest, was the wife of S. D. Crowe, of LaGrande, Oregon. The mother of this family died in 1892 and in 1896 Judge Ramsey was married to Mrs. Julia L. Snyder, nee Johnson, of McMinnville. They had one child, Margaret. Judge and Mrs. Ramsey were members of the Episcopal church and were well known socially, having many friends throughout the state. Judge Ramsey has ever wisely and conscientiously used the talents with which nature endowed him and in his profession he soon demonstrated his ability to cope with the intricate problems of the law. He was accorded a large and distinctively representative clientage and accounted one of the foremost members of the bar of McMinnville and that part of the state.

A legislative Act of 1913, having authorized an increase in the personnel of the Oregon Supreme Court by the appointment of two additional judges, making a total of seven, Governor West appointed Judge Ramsey and Charles L. McNary on June 3, 1913, to fill these positions. Judge Ramsey, held office until December 31, 1914. He was unsuccessful as the democratic candidate in the election of 1914. Before retiring from the bench he left a farewell message, which was entered in the court journal December 29, 1914. (Vol. 21 p. 367). Returning to McMinnville he practiced law for a number of years, and in 1925 was appointed circuit judge for Polk and Yamhill counties. At the expiration of his term of office he resumed private practice until a short time prior to his death September 15, 1937.