

A Little About Probate Judges of Coshocton County as they are Recalled to Mind.

By Rev. Wm E. Hunt

Since the office was established by the state constitution adopted in 1851, there have been twelve probate judges.

One held the place for a short time, filling a vacancy caused by death.

Three had only one term of three years. The present judge has just fairly entered upon his first term. The other eight each served six years or two terms.

Three of them were not residents of the town when elected. Two of them were farmers, one was a physician, one was a druggist, one a school teacher and deputy county clerk when nominated: six of them were lawyers. Seven of the twelve are dead.

With all of them I had personal acquaintance with at least eight of them was quite intimate.

The families of eight of them were in my pastoral charge and I officiated at the funerals of five of the seven that are dead.

Thomas Campbell was the first probate judge, taking the place on the second Monday of February, 1852. I gave a week or two ago an extended sketch of him and his life and will not here repeat. He had good judgement, was cool and quiet in manner and acquitted himself creditably in the position. He was nominated for a second term but was not elected, going down with his party ticket in the "know-nothing" tidal wave.

His successor was Charles S Barnes, who was a farmer and justice of the peace in Bedford township, a very kind hearted man who made a fair judge but was not a brilliant success and after one term he was relegated to private life.

John T. Simmons was the next probate judge, taking the place at the constitutionally fixed time, the second Monday in February, 1858. He served two terms. A native of Maryland, resided for a time in Belmont county: came to Bedford township in 1842: taught school and farmed: studied law with Wm. Sample: had been prosecuting attorney two terms. He was the champion tobacco raiser and chewer, too of the county: a genuine Marylander. His knowledge of practical affairs and of men as well as law, his simple methodical habits and

satisfaction with moderate fees along with much real kindness of heart made him a popular judge.

In 1864 M. C. McFarland became probate judge. He was born in Bedford township: taught school and became deputy clerk of the courts under Lemuel Kinsey. He was a very pleasant fellow – too good a fellow for his own good. He was a good penman, with fair knowledge of probate law, with a wide acquaintance with the people, generally, and was satisfied for the most part of the work and he was re-elected. But his health and his habits stood in the way of making such a record in the office as he ought to have done. He was married to Miss Jacintha Sample, a daughter of common pleas judge Sample, and there was one son – a bright young man – who lived to attain his majority and then died of consumption, as the father had died before him.

McFarland's successor was Joseph Burns – an old and prominent citizen – a druggist and ex-member of congress, etc., etc. He served one term and was re-elected but died May 18th, 1875 when the second term was about half expired. His son George, now a division superintendent on Wabash Ry. System, living in Detroit, was his deputy clerk, and with his aid the work of the office was well done.

Upon Burns' decease the governor appointed, to fill the vacancy, the veteran business man and politician. French W. Thornhill, and at the ensuing fall election he was chosen to fill out the term, which he did very creditably.

In 1876, Alexander Hanlon took his seat on the probate bench. A man of many years – sedate, careful – a farmer living in Mill Creek township and with his bright daughter, Laura, as his deputy clerk, he commanded the position for two terms.

In 1881, Thomas Campbell, the first judge already spoken of, got the nomination but died before entering upon the campaign. Dr. Holder Blackman had been his chief competitor and was given the place on the ticket by the county committee. He was a native of England, came with the family when a child to Gambier, in Knox county. Studied medicine and was practicing in Warsaw when elected. With the help of his daughter as deputy clerk and his son, there a student and at present practicing law in Chicago, he filled the office for two terms.

In 1888, Wm. R Gault a native of Pike township,

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A graduate of Wittenberg college, having studied and practiced law in Coshocton for several years took the place and held it for six years. He was very assiduous and correct in his work doing nearly everything himself with only occasional office help. He left the office with a good competence. A fitful effort for some subsequent investigation of some movements and methods of the office did not receive the approval of the judge of the court of common pleas. Judge Gault resumed his position as an attorney but has largest interest in some manufacturing concerns of the town.

In 1894, Charles B. Hunt, Coshocton born and educated, became Probate Judge, serving two terms. His sister Mary was the deputy clerk and still holds that position today. I think the work of the office was at least fairly well done by Judge Hunt and his deputy clerk, but my intimate relations with them might make it improper for me to say much on that point. C. B. upon leaving the office at once took up legal work and has a very satisfactory practice.

Thomas C. Roche was the next Probate Judge, taking the place in 1900. He was a native of Harrison county – came to Coshocton from Columbiana county where he was superintendent of a public school. His law studies, were pursued in Cadiz, O. The business of a Probate Judge was very carefully attended to but was somewhat irksome and some clouds in social and domestic life having gathered about him declined to stand as a candidate for a second term and has quite vigorously taken up practice again.

Russell Lee Donley, a native of Bedford township – a lawyer of only three years' experience – has been the probate judge since Feb. 9th, 1903. He vigorously addresses himself to the work of the office and his friends hope for a good measure of success in filling it. He has the distinction of being the youngest man ever elected to the position.

From The Democrat & Standard June 19, 1903

Murphy's Law of Genealogy

You finally find your ancestor's obituary in an old newspaper and all it says is "Died last week."

