

BACKUS, HENRY T.

001

BACKUS, HENRY T., born in Norwich, New London County, Connecticut, April 4, 1809; son of James and Dorothy Church (Chandler) Backus; married, Juliana Trumbull Woodbridge, at Detroit, Michigan, December 7, 1835, who was a daughter of William Woodbridge, Governor of Michigan, 1840-41 and U. S. Senator, 1841-47; children; William Woodbridge and James H.

Attended the public and private schools in Norwich and the Plainsfield, Connecticut Academy; worked as a Clerk in a large crockery store in Norwich; studied law in the office of Judge Calvin Goddard at Norwich and later attended lectures at the Yale Law School; admitted to the New London County bar in February, 1833; moved to Detroit the next year where he practiced law in partnership with Governor Woodbridge; he later became the senior partner in the law firm of Backus and Harbough.

Served as Representative from Wayne County in the Michigan Legislature, 1840; member of the Michigan Constitutional Convention, 1850; Alderman from the 9th Ward, City of Detroit, 1860-61; State Senator from Wayne County, 1861-62, and became President, Pro Tempore of that body; was Lieutenant Governor of Michigan, 1862-63; he was also high in Free Masonry and served as Grand Master of Masons in Michigan from 1851 to 1853.

On March 10, 1865 he was nominated by President Lincoln to be Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Territory of Arizona in place of William T. Howell, who had resigned, and was confirmed by the Senate on the following day; he took the oath of office on April 20, 1865, and probably left Michigan for Arizona in the fall

of that year; according to the Farish History of Arizona he held a term of Court at Tucson in January, 1866.

He rendered a decision on _____, 18__ that the Governor of Arizona was without authority under the Organic Act to apportion the members of the Territorial Legislature and consequently all the laws enacted by the 3d, 4th and 5th Legislatures were void; to legalize what had been done Congress passed an Act, approved March 25, 1870, which validated all of the Acts of the Legislative Assemblies in 1866, 1867 and 1868, and all appointments made in accordance with such Acts.

He resigned in 1869 and returned to Detroit to practice law but came back to Arizona in the spring of 1877 to look after some property that he had acquired in the Territory; the following report of his death was printed in the Prescott Arizona Miner on July 20, 1877:

Judge Backus occupied the Bench in this Territory during the years 1866-68. During his recent visit to Arizona he has been the guest of Judge C. T. Hayden, of Tempe, in Maricopa County, and has, as a general thing, accompanied Mr. Hayden on his visits to different parts of the Territory. It was while traveling with Mr. H. on a trip to Greenwood that he was taken suddenly ill, on the 12th, with what was thought to be sun stroke, which terminated so seriously and quickly, only lasting about 24 hours.

The Judge was taken ill some fifteen miles from Greenwood and three miles from water. It was with difficulty that Judge Hayden succeeded in getting him into the town before death clasped him to her bosom, on account of the extreme heat of the day, the unparalleled roughness of the road and the very low condition of Judge Backus, who rather desired to die beside the water, 12 miles from Greenwood, as he seemed to realize

that death was fast approaching, and told Judge Hayden that he was confident his hours were numbered, and that he was soon to pass away.

Judge Backus was considered a good lawyer and judge, and has always taken an active interest in the State of Michigan and her politics; was a good scholar and conversationalist, and had many excellent qualities. In his death Michigan loses a bright citizen and Arizona a good friend; Mrs. Backus a devoted husband and his two sons a kind parent. Judge Backus' family reside during the heated season at their Summer residence near Detroit, and in the winter they have a magnificent residence in that city.

Died at Greenwood, on the Big Sandy River, in southern Mohave County, A.T., July 13, 1877, aged 68; buried at Greenwood but on August 7, 1885, his remains were reinterred in the Yantic Cemetery near Norwich, Connecticut, where the following tribute to him by John Turner Wait, a Representative in Congress from Connecticut, is engraven on the Backus family monument:

"Judge Backus was a man of marked ability, and rare scholarly acquirements. His accomplishments as a jurist, and eloquence as an advocate, commanded public confidence and respect, and placed him among the leaders in his profession; while his genial disposition and courteous reamer won for him the strongest attachment on the part of a large circle of personal friends."

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Farish, T.E., History of Arizona, Vol. 3, p. 246; Vol. 4, p. 213; Vol. 5, p. 98.
 U.S. Law Register, 1868, p. 532.
 Backus, W.W. - A Genealogical Memoir of the Backus Family, Norwich, 1889, pp. 116-118, (Portrait).
 Michigan Historical Commission - Michigan Biographies, 1924, Vol. 1, p. 36.
 Perkins, M.E. - Old Families of Norwich, Connecticut, 1660-1800, Vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 20.
 Executive Journal, U.S. Senate, 1864-66, Vol. 14, pt. 1, pp. 273, 297.
 The Arizona Miner, Prescott, July 20, 1877, 2:2 (obituary)

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Arizona Miner, Prescott, January 10, 2:4 and 3:1, January 24, 3:1, April 11, 1:2-4-5 and 3:2, July 11, 3:1, September 26, 3:1, October 23, 2:1, October 25, 1:2 and October 27, 1866, 3:1-2; September 21, 1867, 3:1; April 18, 2:1, August 22, 3:3 and November 14, 2:3; November 28, 2:1-4 and December 12, 1868; January 16, 2:1-2-3-4, February 13, February 20, 2:4; April 10, 2:4, August 7, 1869; May 21, 1870, 2:2; March 16, 3:3, March 30, 3:2, and July 20, 1877, 2:2 (obituary)

The Arizona Sentinel, Yuma, July 28, 1877, 1:5 (death notice)