

AARON E. WAIT

Judge Aaron E. Wait was the first Chief Justice under the organized State of Oregon. He served as Chief Justice from 1859 to 1862.

He was born in Whately, Franklin County, Massachusetts, December 26, 1813. His ancestors were nearly all military men and his father died while in the service of his country, in the "War of 1812", shortly after the birth of the subject of this sketch. Judge Wait was raised partly by his grandfather and later by an uncle, with whom he lived until he was fourteen years of age. He was then apprenticed to a broom maker and worked at the trade for four years, saving his earnings. During the latter part of his apprenticeship he was enabled to attend school. When he was twenty years old he went to the State of New York, and thence to Flatbush, Long Island, and obtained employment as assistant teacher in Erasmus Hall. After a time he returned to Massachusetts and remained until 1837, when he started West, going as far as Centreville, Michigan, which was then considered a long ways west from Massachusetts. Here he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1842, becoming Secretary to Governor John S. Barry of Michigan.

After a resident of ten years in Michigan he started West again in 1847, with a train of forty wagons going to Oregon. On the way he overtook his friend Judge Lancaster and family, and the two then left the train with their wagons and outfits and came the remainder of the journey together, arriving at Oregon City, then the chief centre of population of Oregon. Judge Wait immediately began the practice of law, at the same time assisting in the publication of the first newspaper in Oregon, "The Oregon Spectator", which was published at that place. In 1849, in the midst of the excitement of the "gold fever" in California, Judge Wait went to that state and engaged for some time in placer mining. He returned to Oregon in the early '50's and resumed the practice of his profession. He was a law partner of James K. Kelly at Portland. In 1859 he was elected a Justice of the Supreme Court and became Chief Justice under the State Government in Oregon, serving in that capacity until 1862.

After retiring from the Supreme Bench, for more than thirty years Judge Wait did not actively engage in the practice of law, but devoted his time mostly to the management of his extensive land holdings in the States of Washington and Oregon, owning about six hundred acres of land near Canby, and over three thousand acres elsewhere in Oregon and Washington Territory, and lived the greater portion of the time at Canby, Clackamas County, not far from Portland. In 1891 he removed from his farm to Portland where he resided until the time of his death.

He was first married to Mary N. Springer, and next to Catharine Quivey; his children were Columbia L., Charles N., Mary C., Annie E., Katie C., and Mary L.

Judge Wait was one of the thrifty, hardy pioneers of the state, and although somewhat peculiar in some of his habits and ways, his life work was intimately interwoven with the early history of the state.

Judge Wait died on his farm in Clackamas County in December 1898.