



Oregon State Archives

800 Summer Street NE

Salem, OR 97310

503-373-0701 ext. 1

sos.oregon.gov/archives

GOVERNOR FRANK W. BENSON ADMINISTRATION

March 9, 1909 to June 17, 1910

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

SOURCE: TEXT COURTESY OF THE OREGON STATE LIBRARY.

Born on March 20, 1858 in San Jose, California, son of Henry Clarke Benson, a minister sent to California in 1852 by the Methodist Episcopal Church with his wife, Matilda M. (Williamson) Benson and his three children. Married to Harriet Ruth Benjamin on November 4, 1883; father of two sons, Clifford and Wallace. Moved to Portland in 1864 when his father became editor of the Pacific Christian Accord; attended the Portland Academy, then returned to California to study at the College of the Pacific, receiving his A.B. degree in 1877 and later his A.M. degree.



In 1880 assumed charge of the Umpqua Academy, a Methodist school in Wilbur, Oregon. Elected County Superintendent of Schools in 1882, serving in that capacity until 1886, when he became President of a Normal School in Drain, Oregon. In 1892 Benson was elected Douglas County Clerk; reelected to that office in 1896, and admitted to the Oregon Bar in the same year. From 1898 until assuming the office of Secretary of State, Benson practiced law in Roseburg. He conducted a vigorous campaign for the Republican nomination for Secretary of State in the 1906 primary election, winning both the primary and general elections.

He became Governor after the resignation of George Earle Chamberlain, who had been elected to the United States Senate. Benson was sworn in as governor on March 1, 1909, and retained the office of Secretary of State as well, receiving salaries for both positions. Shortly after becoming Secretary of State, Benson became ill; however by the time he took on the governor's office, he had almost regained his normal vigor. As Secretary of State and Governor, Benson held considerable appointive power, but he did not effect a wholesale removal of Chamberlain appointees. One of his first official acts was to call a special session of the State Legislature to remedy defects in laws passed by the previous session of that body. A two-day special session provided funding for building improvements and for some new facilities at state institutions, including the penitentiary, insane asylum, reform school, and retired soldiers' home. He cooperated with the governor of the State of Washington in an effort to solve a boundary dispute between Oregon and Washington, but was forced to relinquish his office before the issue was settled.

Having gone to California for extended treatment of a recurring illness, Benson telephoned C. N. McArthur, his private secretary, on June 15, 1910, directing that Jay Bowerman, President of the Senate, should "assume the duties of the governorship." Bowerman came to Salem and was sworn in on Thursday, June 16, as Acting Governor. Benson soon reported improving health and indicated his intention to return about July 20, 1910, to resume the duties of the office of governor. He did not do so, and did not run for reelection as governor, although he successfully ran for reelection as Secretary of State in 1910. Benson's health continued to fail and he died in Redlands, California on April 14, 1911.

Bibliography:

1. Statesman [Salem] (April 15, 1911);
2. Oregonian [Portland] (April 19, 1911);
3. History of the Bench and Bar of Oregon (Portland. 1910).
4. The Papers of Frank W. Benson are in the library of the Oregon Historical Society, Portland.