



County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors

SUPERVISOR BENJAMIN D. WILSON

Term: 1853, 1861, 1862-64
District: Not Applicable
Date of Birth: 1811
Death: March 11, 1878

Benjamin D. Wilson served as county supervisor for three terms. He was elected in 1853, and re-elected again 1861 and 1862.

Wilson was born in 1811 in Tennessee, where he grew up and attended public schools. He later made a fortune in the trading and trapping business.

In 1841, when he was 30, Wilson journeyed to Los Angeles with the famous Workman-Rowland Party with the intent of traveling on to China. His plans changed dramatically when he met and married Ramona Yorba, a daughter of the owner of Rancho de Santa Ana, a pioneer Mexican family with extensive landholdings.

In 1843 Wilson became one of the first ranchers in Southern California when he bought the Jurupa Ranch (partial site of present-day Riverside). Wilson became a powerful landowner whose properties later included the present sites of Westwood, UCLA, Pasadena, Alhambra, San Gabriel, San Pedro and San Bernardino.

At the time, California was part of Mexico. He adapted to Hispanic society, learned the language, became a Catholic, and was much respected by both American and Spanish-Mexican residents. He was given the nickname of "Don Benito."

When war broke out with Mexico in 1846, Wilson joined the war effort in the fight against Mexico. In the Battle of Chino, Wilson was defeated and surrendered. He was to be executed, but when the war ended in 1847, he was released from prison.

In 1850, after the admission of California to the Union, Wilson took an active part in local and state politics. At age 39, he was elected the first Los Angeles County clerk. In 1851 he became the second elected mayor of Los Angeles, followed soon thereafter by several terms as a county supervisor. He later became a state senator for three terms, and lobbied for federal subsidies for railroad connections and harbor improvements. After retiring from public life, Wilson raised cattle, sheep, wheat, and grapes on his properties.

Wilson is credited with being an early pioneering force in California. He constructed a burro trail up a Sierra Madre mountain peak that today bears his name and on which Mt. Wilson Observatory is located.

On March 11, 1878, Wilson died. He was 67, and was survived by his second wife, Margaret, and three daughters: Maria, Annie and Ruth. General George S. Patton was one of his

grandchildren. Also of note, the Huntington Library art gallery in Pasadena was the former home of his daughter Maria.

Source: Historical and Biographical Record of Southern California; History of Los Angeles County, Pioneers of California.