



County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors



SUPERVISOR JAMES R. BARTON

Term: 1855
District:
Date of Birth:
Death: January 23, 1857

James R. Barton was elected county supervisor in 1855. Biographical information on Barton is sketchy.

On January 1, 1852, Barton became the second sheriff of Los Angeles County, and was the first law enforcement officer to be killed in the line of duty.

During the first year of Barton's administration, the Legislature created the office of Board of Supervisors, which superseded the Court of Sessions as the governing body of the County. The Board held its first meeting in July 1852.

Barton was elected to the Board in 1855, while at the same time maintaining his duties as sheriff.

Barton did not run in 1856, apparently experiencing a sense of frustration at his failure to stop a lynching. Two men had been convicted of a murder in Los Angeles. One was hanged while the other received a stay of execution. Enraged citizens, led by Los Angeles Mayor Stephan Foster, proceeded to the jail. Barton and his few deputies attempted to disperse the mob, but were overwhelmed. The vigilantes battered in the jail doors and dragged the prisoner across the street, then hanged him from a cross beam over the gateway to a corral. Voters were so pleased by this act that, at a special election, Foster was re-elected mayor by an almost unanimous vote.

In 1857, just three weeks after his re-election as sheriff, Barton set out towards San Juan Capistrano (then part of Los Angeles County) with a posse to capture a group of bandits. The bandits were encountered on the morning of January 23. In the ensuing gunfight, Barton and all but two of his posse were shot and killed. Three of the bandits were also killed. A second posse later pursued the remaining bandits, capturing 52 of them. Eleven of the bandits were hanged at Fort Hill.

Source: Los Angeles Almanac.