

George Robertson, A Widely Quoted Kentucky Jurist

By Jeannette Holland Austin



*Jan 11
G. Robertson*

George Robertson

George Robertson was born near Harrodsburg, Kentucky on November 18, 1790. He was educated in the arts and in law at Transylvania University and entered upon the practice of his profession at Lancaster, Kentucky, in 1809. "In 1816 Robertson was elected to Congress, where he remained for two terms. He drew up the bill for the establishment of Arkansas territory; and he projected the system of cutting public lands into small lots, selling them to actual settlers for one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. He declined another term in the House, as well as the attorney-generalship of Kentucky, in order to devote his whole attention to the law.

Robertson was elected against his desire to the Kentucky legislature, in 1822, and he was a member of that body for the next five years. This was the time of the struggle between the Old-Court and New-Court parties, which was one of the most bitter political fights ever seen in Kentucky.

Robertson consistently and vigorously championed the cause of the Old-Court party, which finally won. That this disgusted him with political life in any dress, is shown by his subsequent declination of the governorship of Arkansas, and the Columbian and Peruvian missions.

In 1828 he was elected an associate justice of the Kentucky Court of Appeals, and, in the following year, chief justice." This position was the desire of his heart.

He hated politics with a never-dying hatred, the law and the bench being his earthly paradise."

He was chief justice of Kentucky for fourteen years, when he resigned to return to the active practice of law. From 1834 to 1857 Judge Robertson was professor of law in Transylvania University at Lexington.

He died at Lexington, May 16, 1874, generally regarded as the ablest jurist

Kentucky has produced.

He was also the author of four books: Introductory Lecture to the Transylvania Law Class (Lexington); Biographical Sketch of John Boyle (Frankfort, 1838); Scrap-Book on Law and Politics, Men and Times (Lexington, 1855), his best known book; and his very interesting and well-written autobiography, entitled An Outline of the Life of George Robertson, written by Himself (Lexington, 1876).

Source: Kentucky in American Letters, v. 1 of 2 (1784-1912) by John Wilson Townsend.