



James B. Holland

Born: November 14, 1857, in Gwynedd Township, Pennsylvania.

Died: April 24, 1914, in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania.

**Federal Judicial Service:**

Judge, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

Nominated by Theodore Roosevelt on April 14, 1904, to a new seat authorized by 33 Stat. 155.

Confirmed by the Senate on April 19, 1904, and received commission on April 19, 1904.

Service terminated on April 24, 1914, due to death.

**Education:**

Read law, 1887

**Professional Career:**

Clerk of County Commissioners, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania : 1882-1887

Private Practice, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania: 1887-1904

Solicitor, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania: 1887-1893

District Attorney, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania: 1893-1896

U.S. Navy: 1898-1900

U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania: 1900-1904

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## Judicial Biography

\*In 1901, Congress carved the Middle District of Pennsylvania out of portions of the Eastern and Western Districts. By this time, the population of Philadelphia had grown to almost 1,300,000 and that of Pennsylvania to over 6,300,000. The Eastern District, which had heretofore encompassed the eastern half of the Commonwealth, was now reduced in area to include only ten counties of Southeastern Pennsylvania: Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Lancaster, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton, Philadelphia and Schuylkill. While the geographic size of the Eastern District decreased, its complement of judges was soon to increase. In 1904, Congress added a second judgeship.

Rival candidates vied to fill this new seat. Pennsylvania's two Republican Senators Matthew S. Quay and Boies Penrose supported United States Attorney James Buchanan Holland while several Court of Appeals judges, District Judge John McPherson, and some "influential men" identified with the University of Pennsylvania had endorsed another individual for the position. Quay and Penrose were powerful figures who together controlled the Republican Party in Pennsylvania. Attesting to the leading roles they played on the political stage, a statue of Quay stands in the Rotunda of the State Capitol in Harrisburg, while a statue of Penrose is situated nearby on the capitol grounds. Not unexpectedly, President Theodore Roosevelt nominated Holland as the tenth judge to serve on the court. He was confirmed on April 19, 1904.

Holland was born in Montgomery County in 1857. Starting his work life as a laborer, he later became a school teacher and then a lawyer. Like all his judicial predecessors, he had been active in politics, in his case with the Republican Party, and had engaged in extensive public service. His resume included service as the Clerk of the Montgomery County Commissioners, the County Solicitor, and from 1893 to 1896 the County District Attorney. On one occasion when Senator Quay was in political "peril," it is said that Holland, the Republican party chairman in Montgomery County, "restored his supremacy." He interrupted his political career to become a Naval officer during the Spanish-American War. As a result of the sponsorship of Quay and Penrose, he held the office of United States Attorney for the Eastern District from 1900 until his appointment as a federal judge.

As always, cases involving state law where the parties were of diverse citizenship made up a portion of the court's calendar. Judge Holland tried a public accommodations case in 1910 that had nothing to do with race, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, or disability. A champion light-weight prize fighter, Oscar "Battling Matthew" Nelson, who had won nearly 100 pugilistic contests, had checked into the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia but was refused lodging when it was learned what he did for a living. Boxing at that time was a criminal offense in Pennsylvania and other states although the record is silent as to whether Nelson had engaged in any prize fights here. Although Pennsylvania law required an innkeeper

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\* The following material is excerpted from JUDGE HARVEY BARTLE, III, MORTALS WITH TREMENDOUS RESPONSIBILITIES, A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA, 3-12 (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2011). Reproduced with the permission of the author, Judge Harvey Bartle, III, and the publisher, Saint Joseph's University Press.

to receive all travelers if a room was available, it also authorized the refusal to accommodate a person if the innkeeper had “good reason.” Judge Holland charged the jury that the hotel was under no duty to accommodate Nelson if he was not a reputable person or not a law abiding citizen because of engaging in an unlawful business or occupation. The jury found that the hotel was within its rights not to lodge him.

Holland died in office on April 24, 1914, at the age of fifty-seven. After his death, a newspaper article described his judicial career in laudatory terms. According to a eulogist, one of his praiseworthy traits was his willingness to reverse himself if he thought he had committed error. The eulogist is reported to have said of Judge Holland, perhaps with a touch of hyperbole:

His greatness of mind as a judge . . . was shown in the calmness and frankness with which he would reverse his own decisions upon ground of reason shown with a freedom from vanity and acknowledgment of fallibility equal to George Washington’s.