

Bio & Character Sketch of

Judge in
Barkwell Trial

Ernest S. Gantt

January 11, 1867 – March 4, 1946

Age in April, 1923: 55 Age at Death: 79

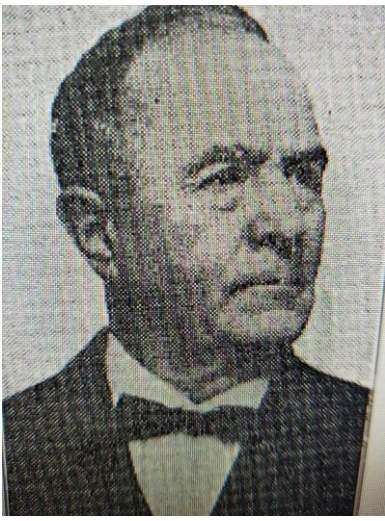
Age when picture was taken: (est) 60

Ernest S. Gantt was born on January 11, 1867, in Centralia, Missouri. He attended the public schools of Martinsburg, Missouri, and studied law at the University of Missouri in Columbia. He attended the University of Missouri from 1883 to 1887. Gantt was admitted to the bar on October 22, 1892, in Mexico, MO.

He began his legal practice in Mexico, MO, in association with Judge George Robertson. After three years with Judge Robertson, Gantt withdrew from this association and pursued private practice. He served as Mexico's City Attorney from 1894 to 1898 and Audrain County's prosecuting attorney from 1909 to 1913. Additionally, Gantt was a member of the Audrain County Bar Association. In March of 1916, Governor Elliot W. Major appointed Gantt to succeed the late Judge James D. Barnett as judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit. He was elected in November of 1916, and re-elected in November 1922.

On November 6, 1926, Gantt was elected as a judge to the Supreme Court of Missouri for a ten-year term. He began serving with the Court on January 1, 1927, and was re-elected on November 3, 1936, for another ten-year term. Gantt served as Chief Justice with the Court from November 1932 to May 1934 and again from December 1940 until May 1942. While a judge with the Court, The University of Missouri conferred to Judge Gantt an honorary Doctor of Laws degree, in 1934. He served with the Court until December 31, 1946.

On March 4, 1947, Gantt died of a heart attack at his home in Jefferson City.



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Character Sketch

In April, 1923 Judge Ernest Gantt was fifty five years old and he had been on the bench for seven years. He was an alumnus of The University of Missouri, and as a native of Boone County he likely has many friends in Columbia.

When a jury reaches a verdict for a first-degree murder trial in just eleven minutes this would lead most people to believe that the trial was a sham and certainly that's what the Barkwell trial appears to have been.

Whether Gantt's decisions at trial contributed to the thoughtless verdict is arguable, but the jury was a huge contributing factor as well.

Did Gantt really do his due diligence during *voire dire*? (Just casually mentioned in the screenplay, but meaningful because it took so long and so many citizens were examined before a jury was seated.)

It certainly seems that the decision by Gantt to allow Barkwell's defense team to sully the reputation of the victim, even though he had not yet been tried or convicted of a crime, gave cause for concern. His repeated overruling of the prosecution team's efforts to make the trial about Barkwell and NOT about Barkwell's victim, James Scott, further underlines the concern.

Did Gantt have a hood hanging in his closet next to his judge's robe? Perhaps not, but the manner in which he conducted his hideously hot courtroom in July of 1923 was exceedingly friendly to the defense – from day one of the trial.

Gantt's rulings during the trial had little if any affect on his progression to the state Supreme Court just three years after the Barkwell trial. His re-election to the job for a second ten-year term and his service as the chief justice for two, two-year terms was further evidence that any perceived wounds from the Barkwell trial were much less than fatal.