

Richard F. Burges, Pioneer Attorney, Taken by Death

Richard F. Burges, pioneer El Paso attorney, died today at 12:15 a. m. in his home at 603 West Yandell boulevard. He had been ill for a year. He was 72.

Funeral services will be held at 10 a. m. Monday in the Barry Hagedon Chapel, Rev. B. M. G. Williams officiating.

Palbearers will be Louis Scott, J. L. Rasberry, J. F. Hulse, William C. Peticolas, Frank Clayton and Idus T. Gillett.

Burial will be in Evergreen Cemetery.

Survivors are his daughter, Mrs. Jane Burges Perrenot of 603 West Yandell boulevard two brothers, William H. Burges of El Paso and John J. Burges of San Antonio; two sisters, Mrs. R. S. Wilson of Seguin and Mrs. James Riley of San Antonio; three grandchildren, Mary Austin, Richard and Ann Perrenot of El Paso.

Richard Fenner Burges was born in Seguin, Tex., Jan. 7, 1873, the son of William H. and Bettie Ruse Burges. He was educated in the public schools. In 1898 he married Miss Ethel Petrie Shelton, who died in 1912. He studied law privately and was admitted to the Texas bar in 1894.

From the time he came to El Paso in 1892 Mr. Burges played a prominent part in the development of El Paso and the Southwest.

He was city attorney from 1905 to 1907. He was a leader in the reform groups that battled against organized gambling. According to old-timers he helped finally to defeat the reign of the pioneer gamblers in El Paso.

Though an able lawyer in many fields, he was nationally known as an expert in irrigation law.

He was one of a group of El Pasoans and Southwesterners who brought about construction of Elephant Butte dam and development of the great Elephant Butte irrigation project, which was the foundation for the agricultural prosperity of the Valleys.

Mr. Burges attended the national irrigation meetings and obtained a meeting of the International Irrigation Congress for El Paso. Associates have described him as the most outstanding worker in the history of Southwestern irrigation.

President Wilson called him to Washington for conferences on development of the Southwest. At one time he was considered for the cabinet post of Secretary of the Interior. He was asked to run for governor of Texas, but declined.

Except for two terms as a state representative from 1913 to 1917, he held no elective offices.

He was involved in the controversy over the Chamizal Zone in El Paso.

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between Mexico and the United States was submitted to a Canadian jurist for arbitration. Major Burges was counsel for the United States. The controversy, involving title to several hundred acres in South El Paso, has not yet been settled.

Mr. Burges was president of the International Irrigation Congress in 1915-16. He was counsel for Texas interests in negotiations between Texas and New Mexico on division of waters of the Pecos River in 1923. He was special counsel for Texas in the Rio Grande Compact Commission, and in 1929 was appointed the Texas member of the Commission.

For many years he was general counsel for the El Paso County Water Improvement District. From 1935 to 1940 he was special counsel for the Department of Justice in connection with acquisition of lands in the Rio Grande rectification program.

At the outbreak of World War I, Mr. Burges organized an El Paso infantry company which distinguished itself in combat in France. He left El Paso as a captain and returned as a major, with the Croix de Guerre and a citation from Marshal Petain.

One of Major Burges' sergeants was Sam Dreben, noted soldier of fortune. Major Burges often said that Oct. 8, 1918, was the most exciting day of his life. His company was helping to push the German armies back on the western front in a drive that ended the war. His unit went under fire Oct. 8. Two days later it went over the top with orders to dislodge the German forces from St. Etienne, and force them across the Aisne. All battalion officers were killed during the drive, and Captain Burges took command.

Another adventure in his life was exploration of Carlsbad Caverns, with Jim White, the cowboy discoverer. Burges published the first account of the caverns and brought about scientific expeditions whose findings led to establishment of the underground wonderland as a national monument.

Mr. Burges was known throughout Texas as a scholar and expert on Texas history. His library of 5000 volumes has been called the finest state history collection in private hands.

Among original manuscripts in the Burges library is Sam Houston's letter to Colonel Bowl, chief of the Cherokee Indians, about a land grant. There are faded letters written before Houston became president of the Texas Republic. There is a presentation copy of the "Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca." Much of the material concerns the Republic of Texas and Stephen F. Austin, Mirabeau B. Lamar, and Santa Anna.

The library also contains many older books from Europe. One of these is a copy of the famous "Breeches" Bible, a "Septuagint" Bible, and an illuminated Bible which belonged to a partner of Daniel Webster.

Mr. Burges was a member of the El Paso Public Library board, and in 1930 he presented his files of the Galveston-Dallas News for the years 1877 to 1917 to the El Paso Library. The file comprises 230 bound volumes, and is considered one of the most valuable newspaper collections in the state.

Mr. Burges built a fireproof addition to his home to house his library.

As a youth he had an ambition to write a history of Texas, but he never got around to it. He had said that the thrills he enjoyed in his search for documents on the history of Texas repaid him for the time and money expended.

Mr. Burges was author of the El Paso Commission Charter, of the Texas Irrigation Code and of the Forestry Act. He was a member of the American and Texas Bar Assns., the Texas Historical and Library Commission, the Texas Historical Assn., the Virginia Historical Society, and was president of the Texas Forestry Assn. in 1921-23.

He was president of the International Museum of El Paso.

He was special counsel for Texas in a boundary dispute with New Mexico before the Supreme Court. He also represented some private corporations, the El Paso Portland Cement Co. and the Southwestern Portland Cement Co.

Mr. Burges was a member in recent years of the law firm of Burges, Burges, Scott, Rasberry and Hulse.

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