



225th Anniversary
1789-2014



William Peter Van Ness

Born:

February 13, 1778
Claverack, NY

Received Commission:

May 27, 1812.

Reassigned April 9, 1814
to new seat on court for
the Southern District of
New York.

Died:

September 6, 1826
New York, NY

William Peter Van Ness was a son of Elbertie Hogeboom and Peter Van Ness, a county judge in Albany County, N.Y. He attended the Kinderhook Academy, graduated from Columbia College in 1797, and then read law in the office of Edward Livingston. He opened a private practice in New York City in 1800 and later had practices in Albany (1801-) and Hudson, New York.

Long before Van Ness was appointed to the bench he was active in state and national politics. As a protégé and admirer of Aaron Burr, he defended Burr in print, often under the pen name Aristides. He was so close to Burr, that he served as Burr's second in the then Vice-President's duel with Alexander Hamilton in 1804. After Hamilton's death in that duel, Van Ness was indicted as an accessory to murder but these charges were apparently dropped with the intervention of Martin Van Buren and Gov. Daniel Tompkins.

Van Ness was the only Judge to serve on both the U.S. District Court for the District of New York, and on the District Court for the Southern District. He was already Judge of the New York District, when it was split into Northern and Southern Districts and he was reassigned to the Southern District. He served on the Court until his death. In addition to his several publications defending Burr, Judge Van Ness and John Woodworth prepared an annotated revision of the laws of New York upon the request of the New York Legislature. Laws of the State of New York was published in 1813.

Sources:

Biographical Directory of Federal Judges, available at <http://www.fjc.gov/>

American National Biography Online

Dictionary of American Biography. Dumas Malone, ed. (New York, N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons) (1936)