



John B. Catlin (1837-1917)

Montana pioneer, Civil War veteran, businessman, and highly respected lawmaker.

- **Born.** June 21, 1837 in Cleveland, Ohio. He was the oldest of five children born to Arod and Mary (Babcock) Catlin. His parents moved to Porte County, Indiana when John was two years old.
- **August 4, 1862.** John enlisted in the Civil War under Capt. Sabin of Union Mills in the 87th Indiana Volunteer Infantry. John studied infantry tactics so hard that his first promotion was to 5th Sergeant. In front of Atlanta he was promoted to Captain and commanded his company to the close of the war. He was in the Grand Review at Washington, D.C. at the close of the war, and was mustered out of the service at Indianapolis in the summer of 1865.
- **1866-Wagon train to Montana.** John was hired as a bullwhacker with the Nelson Story wagon train and large herd of cattle as they crossed the Plains to Bozeman, Montana. Near Fort Reno the wagon train was attacked by Indians who drove off some of the cattle. John was in the party of men that followed the Indians into the Badlands and retrieved the cattle. The wagon train was stopped at Fort Phil Kearney by General Carrington who forbade them to go on because of hostile Indians. After waiting two weeks for permission to proceed and not getting it, they left in the night, and by so doing escaped the December massacre at Fort Kearney. The wagon train traveled by night to Fort Smith on the Big Horn before fording the Yellowstone River and successfully arriving in Bozeman, Montana.
- **1868-Bitterroot Valley.** After traveling the Pacific Northwest, John settled in the Bitterroot Valley where other families from Indiana had located. These families built an outside fence around their homesteads which was known far and wide as the “Big Corral.” He sold the ranch in 1880.
- **1870-Marriage.** On December 6, 1870 John married Eliza Taylor in Waterloo, Iowa. They had three children: Fred, Belle, and Wilbur. Fred died from spinal meningitis when he was 11 years old.
- **1877-Battle of the Big Hole.** John led a company of citizens who joined the battle. His family was sent to a hastily constructed fort south of Corvallis.
- **Businessman.** In 1880, John and a partner purchased the Bell Brothers Hotel. He later purchased a livery stable which was burned by a fire spread from the saloon. John filed many placer mining claims in Bitterroot streams and was an incorporator of the Mountain Chief Mining Company. He later would serve as Collector of Internal Revenue.
- **1889-Agent.** John was appointed as Agent to the Blackfeet Indians and moved his family to the reservation north of Great Falls, Montana.
- **1890-Land Office.** John was appointed Receiver of the U.S. Land Office in Missoula.
- **Orchard Homes.** John was associated with Cobban and Dinsmore in their development of the Orchard Homes area.
- **Chief Charlo.** When the Flathead Indians were moved from the Bitterroot Valley to the reservation, John assisted in this operation. Chief Charlo consented to a photo with John because of their friendship and mutual respect.
- **Political.** John was a staunch Republican. He was a member of the Republican Central Committee, a delegate to the Republican conventions, and a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1883. He also served as election judge, school trustee, and ran unsuccessfully for county assessor. He was one of the incorporators of the Interlake Publishing Company which published a Republican Weekly.
- **GAR.** John was the longtime head of the Fred Winthrop post of the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic)
- John raised his children in a very soldierly way always admonishing them to “stand up straight” and to “keep step.” He was highly respected throughout his entire life. His closest friends were Dr. Parsons, Edgar Paxson, and Arthur Stone. John was not above suggestive critiques of Paxson’s paintings. Arthur Stone interviewed and wrote about John’s life in the book “Following Old Trails.”
- **1917-Death.** John died on July 30, 1917 in Missoula, Montana.

Information was provided by great-grandson, John Catlin Coffee, who submitted a biography of John B. Catlin which was written by John B. Catlin’s daughter, Belle C. Hershey, in the year 1943.