



## Thomas Hart Benton

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THOMAS HART BENTON, BORN MARCH 14, 1782, in Hillsboro, North Carolina, was one of the most colorful statesmen of the 19th century. His family migrated to Tennessee, where his father died. As a young man, Benton was left in charge of considerable land holdings; he established a law practice and served as a colonel in the War of 1812 under General Andrew Jackson. Moving to St. Louis in 1815, he practiced law and edited the second newspaper west of the Mississippi.

An active supporter of statehood, he was elected in 1820 one of the first two senators from Missouri and served for 30 years. He championed the cause of the yeoman farmer and the interests of the western territories. The demarcation of the United States–Canadian border at the 49° parallel was in accordance with his proposal. His staunch support of hard money (the anti–United States Bank position) earned him the sobriquet “Old Bullion.” He was recognized as a Senate leader for the Jackson and Van Buren administrations and an orator to challenge Clay, Webster, and Calhoun. In 1850 it was Benton’s outspoken anti-slavery views that cost him his Senate seat.

In 1852 he was elected to the House of Representatives and served one term. From 1855 until his death he wrote *Thirty Years* and *Abridgement of Debates of Congress from 1789 to 1856* and lectured. Thomas Hart Benton died of cancer on April 10, 1858.

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Marble by Alexander Doyle  
Given in 1899; located in National Statuary Hall.

