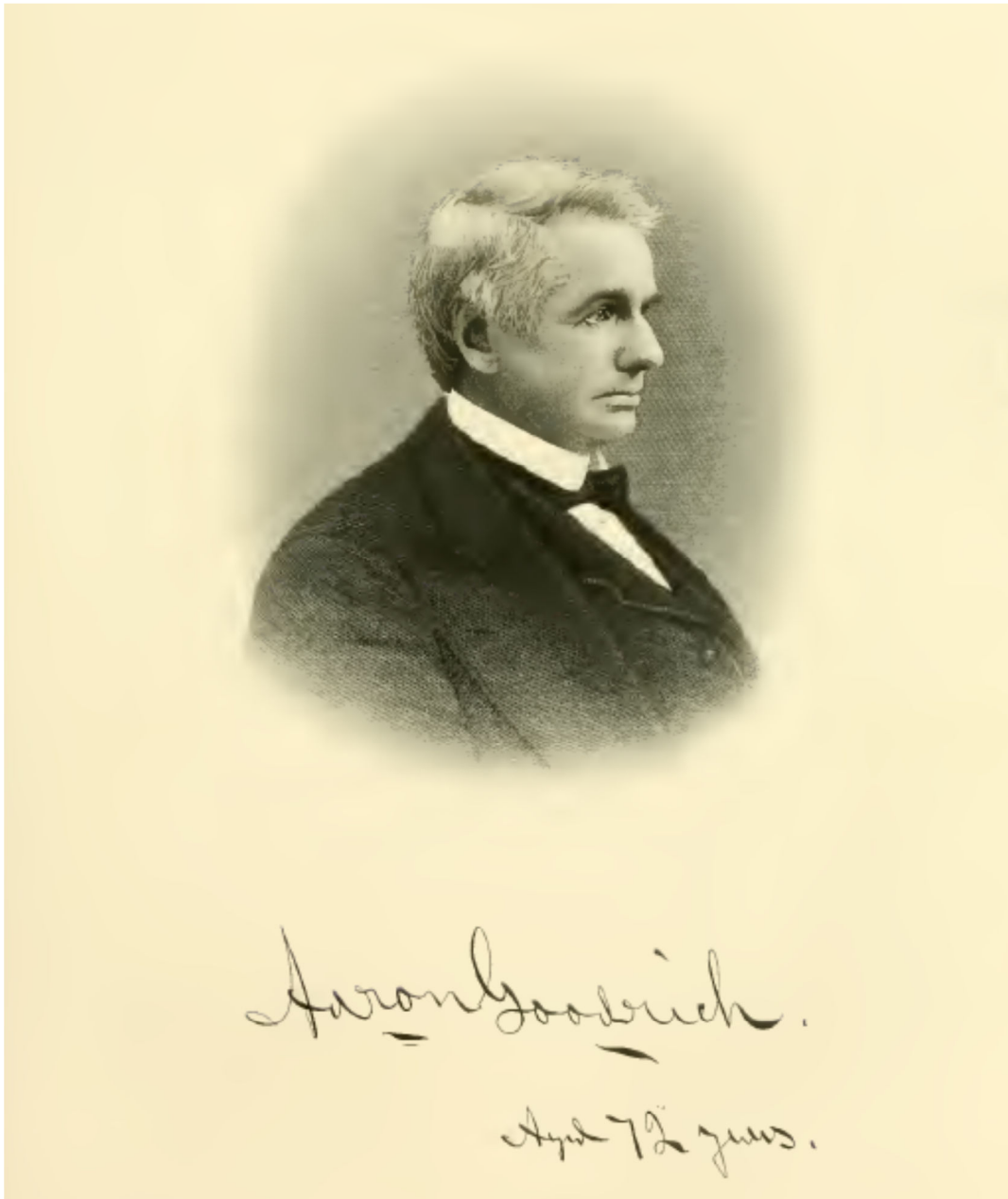


In Memoriam:
Chief Justice Aaron Goodrich

(July 6, 1807 • June 24, 1887)

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Source: United States Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery
of Eminent and Self-Made Men. Minnesota Volume (1879)

Foreword

By

Douglas A. Hedin

Editor, MLHP

Aaron Goodrich arrived in Minnesota Territory in May 1849 to fill the post of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He served until October 21, 1851, when he was dismissed by President Fillmore. He remained in Minnesota, invested in real estate and pursued other business interests. He did not practice much law (he did not place his business card in local newspapers), but he did practice politics. He was one of the founders of the Republican party in Minnesota. In the 1860 contest for the Republican nomination he supported William Seward, and it likely was Seward's influence that led President Lincoln to appoint him secretary of the American Legation in Brussels, a position he held until 1869. He returned to Minnesota and remained active in in the Republican party. He also wrote a critical biography of Christopher Columbus published in 1874.¹

¹ It is doubtful that many residents of Minnesota read Goodrich's book. But its theme - that Columbus was a fraud - was well known and puzzled some and amused others. Three weeks after his death the *Globe* carried a squib about the Goodrich family followed by, oddly, an anecdote featuring his caustic wit:

The late Aaron Goodrich was president of the association interested in the publication of the Goodrich Family Memorial. The contents of the memorial will be historical Goodrich memoranda, history of Goodrich Castle (England), history of its occupation as a baronial residence, etc. The American line of Goodriches took root in Wethersfield, Conn., 1648, in the persons of William and Sarah Goodrich. The family on this side of the water is now in its eleventh generation. It is noted for longevity, and its blue blood is unquestioned. The venerable Aaron has now ascertained whether Columbus discovered America or not. The two have probably met ere this and settled their differences— something the State Historical society failed to do.

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The wit of Aaron Goodrich was so stinging at times as to make him a dreaded acquaintance. Passing a drugstore one day he observed a neighbor inside who was hen-pecked. Going on down the street he shortly met the gentleman's wife. She was much distressed in appearance, so he inquired:

"Madame, can I assist you?"

"Oh, Judge Goodrich, I have lost my dog."

"Pardon me, Mrs. S___, but I think that you will find him in the drug store at the corner, good morning."

St. Paul Daily Globe, July 10, 1887, at 4.

Not surprisingly, given his early arrival in Minnesota, Goodrich was interested in recording the history of the state. He was active in the Historical Society and was one of the founders of the Old Settlers Association, whose members were early pioneers of the state. On June 1, 1887, the Association held its annual meeting at the Historical Society in St. Paul. The members re-elected Goodrich secretary and passed a resolution of sympathy because he was too ill to attend.²

Goodrich died in St. Paul on June 24, 1887, aged seventy-nine. The next day, the *Daily Globe* carried his obituary on its front page as well as a warm, appreciative editorial.³

² *St. Paul Daily Globe*, June 2, 1887, at 2 (“Resolutions of sympathy for Judge Aaron Goodrich, who has been secretary so many years, but who is now ill, were passed. They paid him a handsome tribute to his valuable services and his devotedness and zeal, and the thanks of the association were fittingly acknowledged for his disinterested labor and faithfulness.”).

³ Other St. Paul newspapers did not note his passing as prominently as the *Globe*. The *Dispatch* placed the following in a list of items of “General” interest:

Judge Aaron Goodrich died in his residence, 411 East Tenth street, last evening. A complication of diseases, incident to old age, was the cause of death. The deceased had reached his eightieth year. The remains will be taken to Goodrich, Mich., for burial. Judge Goodrich was one of the pioneers of Minnesota. He occupied many positions of honor and trust, and was one of the best known men in St. Paul

St. Paul Dispatch, June 25, 1887, at 2. No memorial by the county bar association has been located. There likely was none as Goodrich had not participated in bar activities for decades.

St. Paul Daily Globe

June 25, 1887

Front Page.

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AARON GOODRICH'S DEMISE

**Judge Aaron Goodrich Passes Away
After an Illness of But a
Few Weeks.**

**A Man of Brilliant Attainments, He
Wears Many Honors During an
Active Life.**

**Kind Hearted and Honorable, He Carries
the Respect of the Community to
His Grave.**

**The Remains to be Embalmed and
Taken to Goodrich, Mich., for
Final Interment.**

Judge Aaron Goodrich died at his home, 411 East Tenth street, at 7 o'clock yesterday evening. He had been confined to his bed with bladder troubles for three weeks, and during the last few days has been gradually sinking, Drs. Murphy and Owens, the attending physicians, having given up hope of his recovery. Judge Goodrich would have celebrated his eightieth birthday on July 6, next. Although latterly he had retired from public life, he will go down in history as one of the foremost and prominent pioneers of Minnesota.

Judge Goodrich's residence in St. Paul dates from the spring of 1849, when he was appointed by President Taylor the first chief justice of the supreme bench of the newly organized territory. He was a native of New York state, and a descendant of the Connecticut branch of the Goodrich family, tracing, his Saxon ancestry direct to a period of English history prior to the advent of William of Normandy. But Judge Goodrich never boasted of his lineage, or built any hope of personal honor upon a family tree. He was original in everything. His father, Levi H. Goodrich moved to the western part of New York in 1815, and the son spent most of his minority on a farm. His education was received partly in the district schools, but mainly under the tutelage of his father, who was a thorough scholar and educator, assisting six sons in that direction.

THE JUDGE READ LAW

awhile in New York, and moved to Tennessee, where he finished his law and was admitted to practice in Stewart county. He was elected to the Tennessee legislature in 1847-'48, the only Whig who ever represented his district in the state body. He always took an active interest in politics. He was one of the presidential electors in 1848 casting his vote for Taylor and Fillmore, the ticket which he had stumped the state for. His service was rewarded by President Taylor in the appointment to the supreme bench Minnesota, where he sat for three years, demonstrating great ability as a jurist and constitutional lawyer. On retiring from the bench the judge resumed the practice of his profession in St. Paul, and was regarded as pre-eminently the foremost legal light of the time. In the organization of the state of Minnesota, Judge Goodrich took a prominent part. When the state was admitted into the Union in 1858 he, with a majority of the legislature opposed to him politics, was appointed a member of the commission to revise the laws and prepare a system of pleadings and practice for the state courts. He had always opposed what is known as the code practice and gave his views on the subjects fully and clearly in a minority report. Two years later he was made chairman of the commission which prepared a system of pleadings and practice.

On the demise of the whig party Judge Goodrich joined the Republican ranks and was a delegate in 1860 to the presidential convention which nominated Abraham Lincoln, the judge casting his vote throughout for William H. Seward. His speech at that convention was a master effort. In March, 1861, he was honored by President Lincoln with the office of secretary of the United States legation to Belgium. For eight years he remained abroad, visiting every part of the Eastern continents and finding abundant opportunity to gratify his literary and antiquarian tastes. It was during those years that he gathered material for

A LITERARY WORK,

which produced a great sensation when published in 1874, entitled "A History of the Character and Achievements of the So-called Christopher Columbus." The book showed that the real name of Columbus was Griego, a pirate of forty years' standing, who got possession of the logbook of a dead mariner and set himself up as the discoverer of the new continents. In Brussels he married the widow who survives him, then Miss Alice Paris, of Bogota, New Grenada, descendants of an ancient Castilian family, ennobled in the time of Charles the First of Spain, and a lady of many accomplishments. He also leaves two daughters, one aged thirteen and another aged eight years.

On his return from Europe Judge Goodrich was drawn again into the political vortex and was sent to Cincinnati in 1872 as a delegate to the Liberal Republican convention which nominated Horace Greeley for president, the judge supporting the late David Davis, ex-senator from Illinois.

Judge Goodrich was a life-long admirer and personal friend of Hon. William H. Seward and was the prime mover in the organization of the Republican party in Minnesota. The resolutions and platform adopted by the first Republican convention in 1857 were drawn up by him, and in the campaign which followed, though not a candidate for office, he

took a most active part, stumping the state with Gov. Ramsey and Ignatius Donnelly.

He was a firey stump speaker, and it was in this class of oratory which he most excelled. When Mr. Seward visited St. Paul on the 17th of September, 1860, he was introduced to nearly the entire population of the city and surrounding community by Judge Goodrich from the balcony of the old International hotel, and that address of welcome and introduction has become historical.

Personally, the judge was an agreeable companion, but a man who never hesitated to express his opinions. He was a free thinker, embracing no religion. During the last ten years he has led a retired life, enjoying himself in the seclusion of his home, where he has one of the finest libraries in the country, and a rare collection of old and obsolete books gathered in eastern countries. He achieved fame as scholar, statesman, orator, jurist and author, and leaves to his family a comfortable income, the fruit of early investments in St. Paul realty. The judge was dignified and chivalrous in his manner, adhering to the old style of dress, and was

A REMARKABLE FIGURE

as he often sat in the rotunda of the Merchants enjoying a discussion with the old pioneers. He wore always a priestly collar, buttoning at the back, through which was drawn a plain silk tie, an old-fashioned straight-rimmed hat, tilted far enough back to show the outline of intellectual head and shining broadcloth coat buttoned high around the neck. Judge Goodrich was a Mason of high standing, and funeral services will be conducted at his late residence at noon, Sunday, by the Master Masons. The body has been embalmed and will be shipped in a metallic casket to Goodrich, Mich., for interment, in compliance with the request of the deceased.

ALL PRAISE HIM?

Several prominent citizens of St. Paul, who were intimately acquainted with the deceased, were interviewed last night, and their expressions regarding him are given below:

City Attorney Murray — I have known Judge Goodrich for more than thirty-five years. He was a remarkable man, thoroughly Western in his ways. He was the first chief justice of the territory of Minnesota and held the first court ever held in the City of St. Paul, and from 1849 until the day he passed from earth he has been considered one of the most prominent citizens. From the organization of the Old Settlers' association in 1858 he has always been the secretary, and he did more perhaps than any other one man to keep alive the interests of the association, and there is no old settler but will regret to hear of his death.

Col. Allen — He was an old forty-niner. I've known the judge all these years as a very social and very genial man. He was very positive in all his ideas and whenever he took a position he stayed by it. He was a scholar and a great historian and his favorite topic of conversation was ancient history. His record has been that of a very square, honorable man in all of his dealings. He was a fluent conversationalist and a very good public speaker. On all public occasions and at dinners he was the life of the party and he always made a happy after-dinner speech, full of humor, and pathos.

Dr. J. H. Murphy, his physician for years — He was a regular book-worm; he ransacked all the libraries of Europe, in which he spent a great deal of his time, sometimes devoting as much as a week at one time in one library, searching for old works, and I believe he has old volumes in his own library, which is the most valuable collection of works of any one man in the city. He was a very intelligent, intellectual man and devoted his whole time to study. I always thought a great deal of him. He was a great admirer of the French, and down on England. He was a great friend of William H. Seward. He paid everything as he

went along, a man who abhorred debts, a very honorable man about that.

L. E. Reed, His Friend for Thirty Years — He was one of the best men in his way that I ever knew, and his integrity was never questioned for a moment. Full of chancy, there are many who will miss him on account of it. No man, woman or child can say that Judge Goodrich ever wronged any one.

This editorial followed:

DEATH OF JUDGE GOODRICH.

Another old settler has dropped by the wayside. As the weeks go by one and another of the pioneers who laid the foundation of Minnesota's grandeur are passing away from us. Scarcely has the grave closed over one, until it is reopened to receive another. This time it is one of the most distinguished of that little band of early pioneers whose death we are called upon to lament. His most eminent public services are recorded in the judicial records of the state, for Judge Goodrich was the first chief justice of the supreme court of Minnesota and was a member of the first commission to revise and codify the laws and to prepare a system of pleadings and practice in the state courts. During a subsequent public career in the diplomatic service of the nation, Judge Goodrich maintained that high standard of ability and probity of character for which he was noted in his discharge of the various public trusts with which he had been honored at home.

Of all the old settlers there was no one who had a more extensive acquaintance among the new comers than Judge Goodrich. A man possessed of the most extraordinary genial qualities and kindness of speech and manner he attracted people toward him. He had a good word for everybody and always extended a helping hand toward those who needed assistance. He knew everybody and everybody knew him. He was nature's nobleman to whom homage was instinctively paid.

In politics he was one of the most independent of men. He was always guided by his convictions, and like most men of his type, usually found himself identified with the minority party. He was a man of the intensest patriotism and cared nothing for popularity, so long as he thought he was doing what was best for his country. He was in the highest and purest sense a patriot. The love of country was to him an absorbing passion and he lost no occasion, on the bench or elsewhere, to inspire his countrymen with a devotion to the government of the fathers, and to look upon the constitution as a sacred covenant not to be broken.

As a jurist Judge Goodrich was in a very marked and eminent degree an original thinker, and was controlled in his official capacity by general principles, growing out of the reason and nature of law. He was a devout believer in the plain and familiar maxims of common sense, and always brought them to bear in the discharge of his public duties. Nothing obscured his moral perceptions. His devotion to the demands of justice was unmeasured, and his vision, when he surveyed the equities of a case, was unclouded.

But it was as the courteous and accomplished gentleman in the walks of private life, the sincere and disinterested friend, the exemplary citizen, that Judge Goodrich's memory will be held in tenderest esteem. His social virtues shone so brilliantly under all circumstances that his personal friends will always recall his memory first and most tenderly in connection with their display. How often have we heard him paint the dawn of civilization in this region, and delineate the characters of the pioneers of Minnesota. But the musical tongue is still, the beaming eye is closed and a long, useful and instructive life is closed forever. ▀

Related Articles

Douglas A. Hedin: "Documents Regarding the Terms of the Justices of the Territorial Supreme Court: Part Two-A: Chief Justice Aaron Goodrich and Associate Justice David Cooper." (MLHP, 2009-2010).

Aaron Goodrich: "'Early Courts in Minnesota' with Recollections of Goodrich by William P. Murray, Edward Sullivan, Charles Francis Adams Jr., Carl Schurz and Thomas McLean Newson, Concluding with Goodrich's Self Portrait." (MLHP, 2010-2015).

"United States ex rel. Aaron Goodrich v. James Guthrie, Secretary of the Treasury, 58 U. S. 284 (1855)." (MLHP, 2015).

Aaron Goodrich: "A History of the Character and Achievements of the So-called Christopher Columbus." (MLHP, 2015) (published first, 1874).

"The Goodrich Library." (MLHP, 2016) (published first, 1887).

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