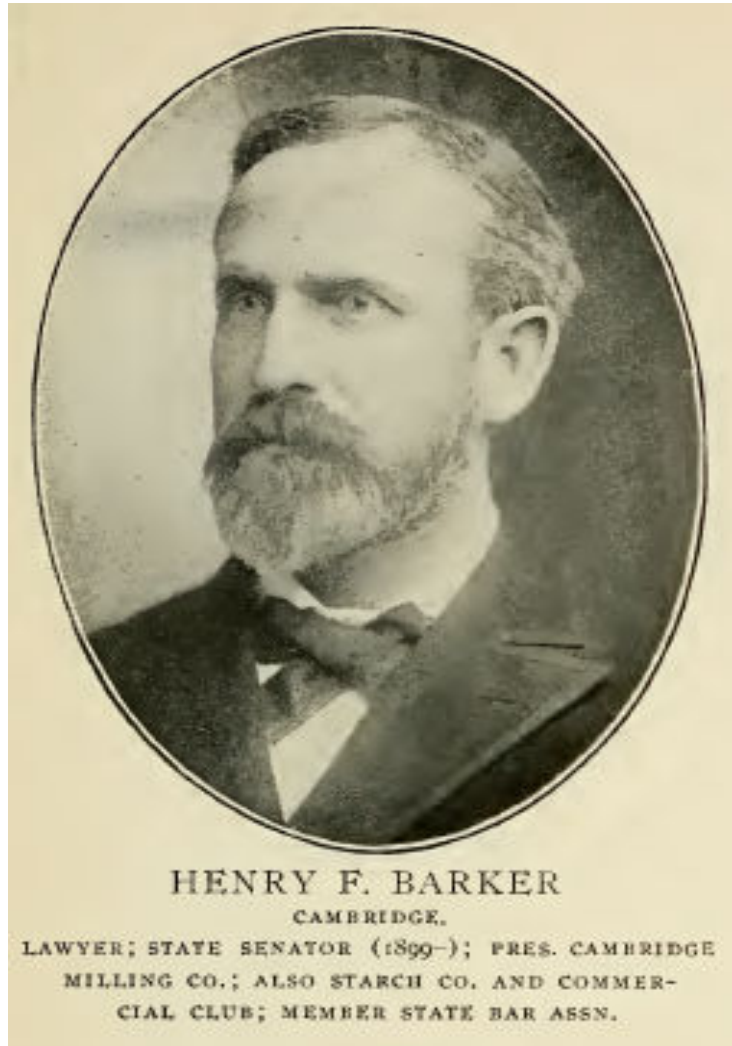


Henry Freeman Barker

(May 8, 1850 – December 12, 1910)



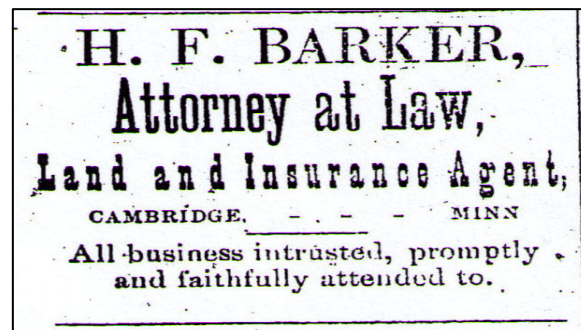
Henry Freeman Barker is the epitome of the lawyer-entrepreneur-civic leader and booster who lived, practiced and served in Minnesota villages and towns in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

He arrived in the "struggling village of Cambridge" in July 1878, three years after being admitted to the

New York bar.¹ A few months later, he was elected Isanti County attorney, a position he held eight terms. He also taught school, did carpentry and practiced law with Almon P. Barker, his older brother, until the latter's death in 1883.² Their firm's business card ran in the local newspaper:³



After his brother's death, he practiced by himself, and began offering additional business services, which were listed on his new business card:⁴



While this was a subtle admission that it was difficult to make a living solely from the practice of law in a rural community, readers of the newspaper at the

¹ In 1880, Cambridge's population was 136, and Isanti County's 5,063. In 1910, the year of Barker's death, Cambridge had 900 residents, and the county 12,615. Source: Wikipedia.

² The entry on Judge Barker in Warren Upham & Rose Barteau Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies, 1655-1912* 32 (14 Collections Minn. Hist. Soc., 1912), provides:

BARKER, ALMON P., lawyer, b. in Naples, Maine, Aug. 11, 1846; came to Minnesota in 1868, and was admitted to the bar the next year; settled in Princeton in 1874; was superintendent of schools of Mille Lacs county, 1874-8, and county attorney, 1879-82.

³ *Isanti County Press*, August 11, 1881, at 10.

⁴ *Isanti County Press*, January 20, 1887, at 1. Below Barker's card were those of two other lawyers: G. W. Nesbitt's stated "Collections and all legal business attended with the greatest care and dispatch"; and Peter Magnus, who listed himself as a "notary public " and "Real Estate, Fire and Life Insurance Agent."

time likely saw it as an advertisement of his interest in buying real estate. In the 1880s he bought tracts of land and later resold them to settlers with the ambition of making the county a farming center. He had other business interests besides: he bought, saved and sold the local newspaper, invested in two local enterprises, the Cambridge Starch Company and the Cambridge Milling Company, and helped organize the Cambridge, Minneapolis & Duluth Railway Company. Like other lawyers of his generation, he once taught school; he served on the school board over twenty years.

He was a staunch Republican, the dominate political party of the era. Beginning in 1876, when Rutherford B. Hayes was nominated, to the early 1900s, he attended every Republican National convention. With Republican endorsements, he won four elections to the Minnesota Legislature. In 1882 he was elected to the state house of representatives, and served 1883-1885; elected again in November 1886, he served 1887-1889. In 1898, he was elected with 54.4% of the vote to represent the Forty-fifth district in the state senate, and served 1899-1903.⁵ In 1902 he was re-elected over token opposition, receiving 95.9% of the vote, and served 1903-1907.⁶

⁵ The results of the election on November 8, 1898 were:

Henry F. Barker (Republican).....3,013
John Coleman (Democrat-Populist).....2,524

1899 Blue Book, at 515. The 45th district covered Isanti, Anoka, Mille Lacs and Sherburne Counties. Barker won a majority of each county except Anoka, which he lost 950 to 828.

⁶ The results of the election on November 4, 1902 were:

Henry F. Barker (Republican).....4,727
G. Wahlund.....203

1903 Blue Book, at 525. Running as a Republican, Gustaf Wahlund served three terms in the state legislature, two in the house and one in the senate. He was probably not a formal candidate in 1902, and simply received write-in votes. After re-districting, the 45th included Isanti, and Mille Lacs Counties, and all of

About this time, he subscribed for the publication of three books in which his personal profile appeared. The longest was in *Compendium of History and Biography of Central and Northern Minnesota*, published in 1904:

Hon. Henry F. Barker was born in the town of Naples, Cumberland county, Maine, in 1850, and now lives in Cambridge, Isanti county, Minnesota, where he is widely known and respected both for his sterling manhood and manifest ability. Maine has sent a host of sturdy and upright men to settle in Minnesota, and Mr. Barker is a worthy representative of the very best. He comes of Yankee stock, and his father, John Barker, was a life-long farmer, and his grandfather, Asa Barker, served in the Revolution, being present on the battle-field of Saratoga. The maternal great grandfather of Henry F. Barker was Isaac Larrabee, who was also a soldier for the American colonists, having served with distinction on many a hard-fought Revolutionary field of

Sherburne except the Seventh Ward of St. Cloud. Wahlund received 202 votes in Isanti County, 1 in Mille Lacs, and no votes in the other two counties.

Barker's biographical sketch in the Legislative Manual provided:

Henry F. Barker (Republican), born at Naples, Maine, in 1850; educated at the common schools, North Bridgeton Academy, Westbrook Seminary and Albany Law School. He came to Minnesota in 1868, returned to Maine in 1870; admitted to practice law in 1875, which profession he now follows. He settled in Cambridge, Minn., in 1878; married in 1879, and has four children. Has held the offices of county superintendent of schools, county attorney for fourteen years, and was a member of the house in 1883 and 1887. Has attended every Republican National Convention since 1876, being a delegate from the Fourth district in 1900. He is now president of the Cambridge Commercial Club, Milling Company and Starch Company, member of the school board, and state senator from the Forty-fifth district.

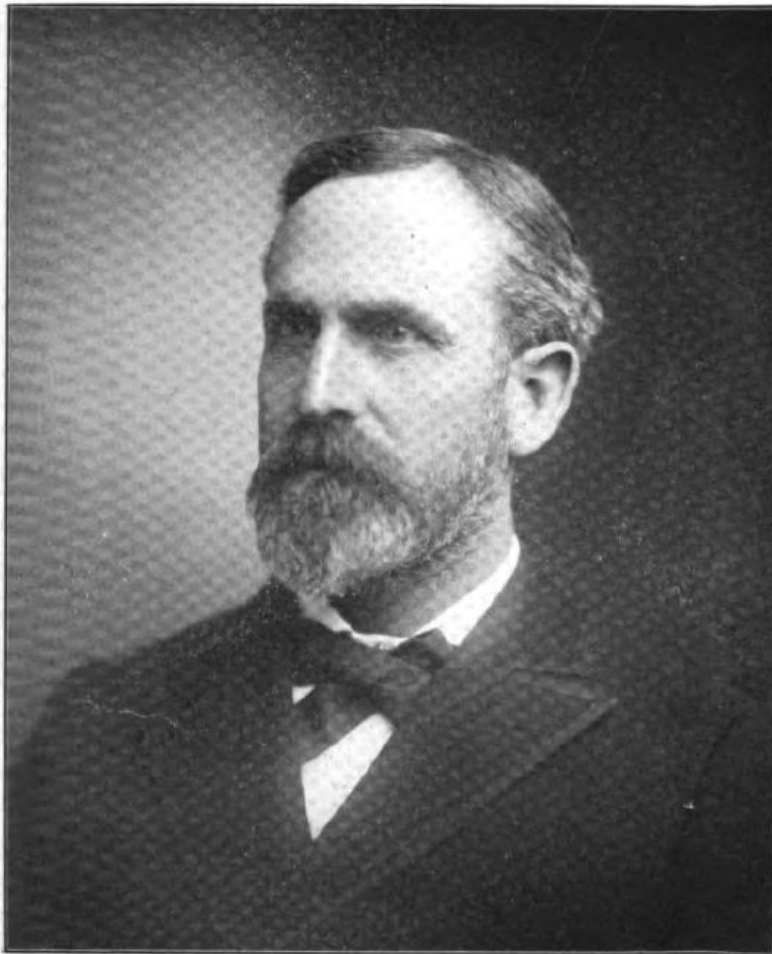
1901 Blue Book, at 677. This is nearly the same as the one published in *The Book of Minnesota* in 1903, posted in the Appendix below, at 15.

strife. He was at Bunker Hill, in the very beginning of the war, and bore his part throughout that momentous struggle.

Henry F. Barker is the third member of his father's family of children, and was reared and educated in Maine, where he attended the locals schools and Bridgeton and Westbrook Academies. There was much hard farm work to be done, and the youth of Mr. Barker was a busy and industrious one. Selecting the law for his vocation, he read and studied at Albany, New York, where in 1874 and in 1875 he took a law course, and where he was admitted to the New York bar in 1875. After securing his admission to the profession, he came back to his native state to enter upon the practice of his profession. In company with A. F. Burnham, he opened an office at Ellsworth, where he remained until the month of December, 1876, when he broke up and came west to Minnesota, whither so many of his state's people had already gone and had done so well. For a time after his arrival in the state he taught school at Princeton, and also engaged in the practice of his profession with his brother, Judge A. P. Barker, who had first come to the state in 1868. Judge A. P. Barker died in 1883, and our subject and his brother, Dr. G. A. Barker, of Menominee, Wisconsin, are the only surviving members of the family.

Mr. Barker located at Cambridge in the summer of 1878, the county being sparsely settled at that time. In July, 1878, he opened an office in the new and struggling

village of Cambridge, and has been continuously engaged in the practice of his profession in this county for the last twenty-three years. In that time he has built up a large and extensive business, not only in the law, but quite as largely in real estate. He has handled Isanti county wild lands, farms and town lots, and is still doing much work in that line.



HON. HENRY F. BARKER.

Mr. Barker was married in 1879 to Miss Margaret C. Byers. She was born at Princeton, where her father, Samuel Byers, is a general merchant and an extensive farmer. In his early days he was a teacher and a carpenter. To this union has come a family of children as follows: Minerva, who is in the junior year at Carlton College; Ethel and Ruth, who are in the Academy at Carlton College; Blaine and Henry, at home.

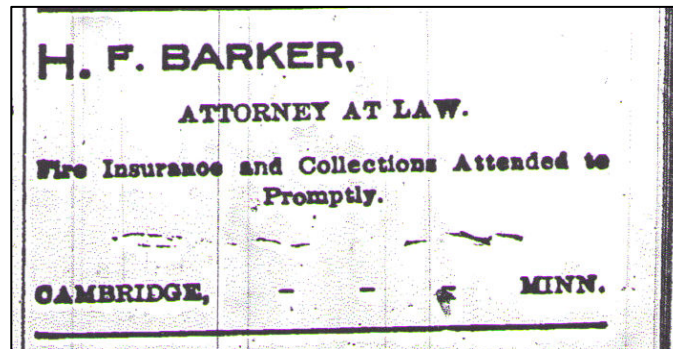
Mr. Barker is a Republican, and was elected as county attorney in 1878, a position which he held for fourteen years, being elected seven times. In 1882 he was sent to the state legislature, and again in 1886. In 1898 he was elected as a member of the senate of the state. He is the first senator from Isanti county. For twenty-one years he served as treasurer of the school board of Cambridge, and at different times has been a member of the village board, in which he has acted several times as president of the board.

Mr. Barker is president of the Cambridge Milling Company, and also of the Cambridge Starch Company. He is president of the Cambridge Commercial Club, and was one of the strongest supporters of the Cambridge Milling Company and the starch plant, watching the slow growth of these two important enterprises with an anxious eye. In 1893 there was organized the Cambridge, Minneapolis & Duluth Railway Company, to promote the building of a railroad between these two important points that should touch at Cambridge. Surveys

were made in its behalf. A second railway company was also projected, running from Minneapolis into Isanti county, of which W. D. Washburn was president and Mr. Barker a director. Mr. Barker was indefatigable in his efforts to secure railway connection for Cambridge with the outward world, and success finally crowned his efforts.

Mr. Barker is a Republican, and has attended every national convention of his party since 1876. In 1900 he was a delegate to the Philadelphia convention.⁷

After leaving office, he continued to practice law, pursue multiple business interests and serve the community. His business card appeared in the local newspaper in 1910, the year of his death:⁸



On December 12, 1910, he died at age sixty. The weekly *Independent Press* carried the story on its front page three days later:

**HON. H. F. BARKER
CALLED BY DEATH.**

⁷ *Compendium of History and Biography of Central and Northern Minnesota* 158-161 (1904).

⁸ *The Independent Press* (Cambridge), September 15, 1910, at 4.

**Distinguished Citizens Succumbs
To Heart Trouble After
Brief Illness.**

**Had Been Prominent in Affairs
Of Isanti County for Over
Thirty Years.**

It is with a feeling of profound and sincere sorrow that we have forced upon us the sad news of the death of one of Isanti county's most honored and distinguished pioneer settlers. Hon. H. F. Barker died at his home in this village at one o'clock a. m. on last Monday. His entire family, consisting of a devoted wife, three daughters and two sons and an only brother, Dr. George A. Barker of Menomonie, Wis., were at his bedside. Although Mr. Barker had been seriously ill for several weeks it was the deep hope of his family and friends that he would be spared to them for a long period yet and the final summons came as a severe shock to the grief stricken family, and the entire community is in mourning. Up to a few moments before the end came Mr. Barker was conversing with his wife, and had been more than usually talkative through Sunday evening and night and at midnight not even his brother, a skilled physician, saw any change that would indicate that death was near, and Mr. Barker departed this life without so much as a struggle. The kind and loving wife is nearly prostrated with grief and the children are mourning most deeply the loss of a devoted and indulgent father. Kind friends are doing all that willing hands

and hearts can do to make the burden lighter but at such times very little can be done at best to allay the sufferings of those left behind to take up life's burdens where the loved one but so lately held the guiding hand. Not only is the death of our distinguished citizen mourned by his family and friends in Cambridge where he has spent the greater part of his life, but throughout Isanti county and the State, as few men were better and more favorably known throughout the length and breadth of Minnesota than was Mr. Barker.

Henry Freeman Barker was born in Naples, Maine, May 8th, 1850. He was educated in the public schools and graduated from the North Bridgeton Academy and West Brook Seminary. He came to Minnesota in 1868, locating in East Minneapolis. Two years later he returned to Maine and engaged in the vocations of clerk and teaching school, at which occupations he labored until 1873 when he entered upon the study of law, and graduated from the Albany Law School in 1875. In the year 1876, Mr. Barker again returned to Minnesota and took up his residence in Princeton where he remained until 1878 when he located in Cambridge and began the practice of the legal profession. In the fall of that year he was elected county attorney of Isanti county. Mr. Barker served as the county's prosecutor for eight terms of sixteen years in all. He served two terms in the lower branch of the Minnesota legislature during the sessions of 1883 and 1887 and from 1898 to 1906 served as state senator from this

district, retiring at the end of his second term.

Mr. Barker has been one of the foremost of Cambridge citizens in the upbuilding of Isanti county, and Cambridge in particular. In the early eighties Mr. Barker acquired a considerable portion of real estate in this county from railroad companies and other corporate holders and he sold the lands in small tracts to actual settlers and in this way did a great deal toward the development of the county as a farming center. Before the Great Northern Cut-off was built a company was formed known as the Cambridge, Minneapolis and Duluth Railway Co., to have a railroad constructed through this territory and Mr. Barker was president of the company and spent considerable of his time and money furthering the project and but for the panic of 1893-4 the company might have seen its desires carried to a satisfactory conclusion. Mr. Barker was interested in and was one of the promoters of the Cambridge Starch Company, two of the most valuable business concerns in this section, and he also advanced the interests of building up some of the substantial business blocks that now grace Cambridge.

During Mr. Barker's early career in this county he was engaged off and on in newspaper work, having taken control of the Isanti County Press on several occasions in the early days in order to keep the paper alive and give this rural community a local news and advertising medium. He also

assumed control of the same newspaper a few years ago when Mr. George A. Iselin decided to retire from the newspaper field and continued as proprietor of the Isanti County Press until the fall of 1906 when he disposed of the paper to Alex Young and retired from active newspaper work.

Mr. Barker was married to Margaret Byers of Princeton 1879 and to this union three daughters and two sons were born and all are living at home. They are: Mrs. Minerva C. Hixson, Ethel, Ruth, Blaine and Henry. The girls have all graduated from the Carleton College at Northfield. Blaine and Henry are in the grade in the Cambridge school.

Mr. Barker was always particularly interested in the educational advancement of the community and its people and was a member of the local school board twenty years. He was one of the first of our citizens to advocate a high school for Cambridge and was ever ready to further the cause.

. . . .

The Independent-Press joins with the thousands of friends of the bereaved family in extending sympathy in their hour of deep sorrow.

About forty people from Princeton attended the funeral among them the Messrs. S. S. Petterson, Chas. Keith, W. H. Ferrell, E. L. McMillan, T. H. Caley, R. C. Dunn and about thirty of the members of the order of Odd

Fellows of which lodge Mr. Barker was a member.⁹

The day after his death the Isanti County bar passed the following memorial:

IN MEMORIAM

The bar of Isanti County as a testimonial of its high regard for the ability, learning and integrity exhibited during the life of the late Henry F. Barker feel it incumbent to voice in a memorial to his memory the great respect which his life has inspired. Senator Barker was born in Naples, Maine, May 8th, 1850, and twenty-eight years later located in Cambridge and engaged in the practice of law and from the beginning took a prominent part in the litigation of this portion of the state.

It is as a lawyer that we knew him best and we feel that in this line of his effort we learned to know him intimately. There are some characteristics that more than others make the individual and the qualifications which made Senator Barker conspicuous in the field of legal endeavor was his uncompromising fidelity to the interests of his client, his fairness toward opposing attorneys, his great ability, legal learning and respect for the courts. His professional career was signally successful and as his death is a serious loss from a professional point of view so the memory of his life will be an inspiration which his fellow members

⁹ *The Independent Press* (Cambridge), December 15, 1910, at 1 (funeral arrangements and photograph omitted).

of this bar and succeeding lawyers will do well to emulate.

And his qualifications at the bar made him a most useful citizen in other fields. As a man of business and affairs he was careful, prudent, sagacious and provident but ever ready and willing to help along any enterprise that gave even remote prospects of being of benefit to this community. Always loyal to the best interest of this county he spared neither effort, means nor time in serving it and serving it unselfishly and loyally.

He served the state in various occasions as a member of its legislature and served in the House sessions of 1883 and 1887 and in the senate from 1898 to 1906 and during that time assisted greatly in shaping laws that served the needs of the state.

That the people of this county had great faith in his ability was evidenced by the fact that he served the county as its attorney for a period of sixteen years and served it without criticism upon his official acts.

In 1879 Mr. Barker married to Margaret C. Byres of our neighboring village of Princeton and in his domestic life our departed brother was most fortunate. Always a kind, loving and considerate husband and father he was surrounded by a family that now will feel his loss most keenly.

The paths of his efforts for thirty years and more will know him no more in the flesh;

his cheery voice will no more be heard in the court room in expounding the law or pleading a client's cause before the bar of justice, but his memory will long live among his associates who perhaps knew best his worth and appreciate the help that he often rendered them

Dated at Cambridge, Minn., this 13th day of December, 1910.

**Godfrey G. Goodwin
A. H. Southerland,
John W. Clover.¹⁰ ◇**

□□ ▼ □□

¹⁰ Id.

APPENDIX

A. The following profile appeared on page 49 of *The Book of Minnesota*, published in 1903:

HENRY F. BARKER, of Cambridge, Minnesota, was born at Naples, Maine, in 1850. He was educated at the common schools, North Bridgeton Academy, Westbrook Seminary and Albany Law School. He came to Minnesota in 1868, returned to Maine in 1870, and was admitted to practice law in 1875, which profession he now follows. He came to Minnesota again in 1876, and settled in Cambridge in the summer of 1878. He has held the offices of county superintendent of schools, county attorney for fourteen years, and was a member of the house in 1883 and 1887. Has attended every Republican National Convention since 1876, being a delegate from the Fourth district in 1900. He is now State senator from the Forty-fifth district.

B. The following appeared on page 29 of *The Book of Minnesotans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Men of the State of Minnesota*, edited by Albert N. Marquis, and published in 1907:

BARKER, Henry Freeman, lawyer; born at Naples, Me., May 8, 1850; son of John and Catherine (Larrabee) Barker; educated in common schools, at North Bridgton Academy and Westbrook Seminary, Me.; Law School, Albany, N. Y., graduating degree of LL.B., 1875. Taught in public schools portion of time, 1867-77; began practice of law at Ellsworth, Me., 1875; came to Minnesota,

1876, and located at Princeton, where he taught school one year; settled in Cambridge, Minn., 1878, where he has since engaged in practice of law. Editor and proprietor Isanti Co. Press, 1880-82 and 1903 to Dec. 1905; president Cambridge Starch Co., Cambridge Milling Co.; County attorney Isanti Co., 14 years; member school board, Cambridge, 20 years; State Senator, 45th district of Minnesota, since 1899. Republican. Member Minnesota State and American Bar associations. Member I. O. O. F., Sons of American Revolution (four great grandfathers served in Revolutionary War). Married at Princeton, Minn., Nov., 1879, to Miss Margaret C. Byers. Recreations: Travel, likes to hunt and fish. Address: Cambridge, Minn.¹¹ ■



Posted April 1, 2014;
Photograph on page 6 added
January 30, 2021.

¹¹ The photograph on the first page of this article is from *Men of Minnesota* (1902). This photograph also illustrates his profile, above, in *The Book of Minnesotans* (1907).