

**MORRIS A. BENNETT**  
(1833-1861)

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**FOREWORD**

BY

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**Morris Bennett died at two o'clock in the morning. The previous afternoon, rumors about his illness circulated in town, and many townsfolk walked to his office to wish him well, but by that time he had been taken to his mother's house where he died. There was an outpouring of grief in the community.**

**Morris Bennett was 28 years old when he died. He had lived in Winona about five years and had many friends. He was a lawyer. He was just starting out.**

**In the Greek myth, the goddess Hera blessed two young brothers, Cleobis and Biton, by ordering them to die peacefully in their sleep, thus sparing them from suffering the miseries, indignities and decrepitude of old age. Morris Bennett's contemporaries did not utter such thoughts about him.**

**Memories, as all lawyers know, fade rapidly. Today no stories are retold about Morris Bennett. He seems to be recalled only as the first member of the county bar to die.**

**The following article from the *Winona Daily Republican* on Tuesday, April 23, 1861, and a eulogy published the next day, are complete, though reformatted. Spelling, emphasis and punctuation are not changed. ■**

# THE WINONA DAILY REPUBLICAN

APRIL 23, 1861

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## DEATH OF MORRIS A. BENNETT, ESQ. —

A shade of gloom has been cast over our entire community—but more especially the younger members of it—by the sudden death of MORRIS A. BENNETT, one of our best known and most esteemed young men, an event which took place at 2 o'clock this morning, at the residence of his mother. — But a few days ago, Mr. BENNETT was attending to his usual business, and mingling cheerfully with his friends and acquaintances, in the possession of good, health, and sudden illness and death has contributed greatly to the sorrow with which his loss is felt.

MORRIS A. BENNETT was born in Rome, in the year 1833, and was therefore about 28 years of age at the time of his decease. In 1854, he graduated at Hamilton College, New York, and two years later, in 1856, came from his native town to Winona, where he entered on the practice of the law, having previously completed his studies in Rome. Since his residence in this city, he had by his uniform cheerfulness of disposition, his readiness and zeal in forwarding all measures pertaining to the public weal, and his seldom failing generosity, won the confidence and esteem of a wide circle of friends, who now lament his early decease with unfeigned sorrow and regret.

As a lawyer Mr. BENNETT, although young, occupied a high place at the bar in this city, and he was fast acquiring a professional position which would have ultimately, had he been spared, redounded much to his credit and reputation.

In common with many others, we shall sadly miss his ever-cheerful daily greetings; but our loss, and that of his

acquaintances generally, is as nothing compared with the bereavement which has fallen upon his own household, of which it is not too much to say that he was the very light and life.

—Since the above was in type, we have received from a friend of the deceased, a brief sketch of life and character, doing more justice to the subject than we have attempted, and which we will gladly publish in our next issue.

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## THE WINONA DAILY REPUBLICAN

APRIL 24, 1861

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**OBITUARY.** —The sudden and unexpected decease at 2 o'clock on Tuesday morning, of MORRIS A. BENNETT, a member of the Winona bar, has given an unusual shock to the whole community. The event is all the more impressive on account of the singular exemption of Winona, since her first settlement, from mortality among her adult citizens. Ten days ago, the deceased was in his usual robust health; and not until twenty-four hours prior to his death was his case considered alarming. The fact was published on the street, and spread like a conflagration. Men in all stations left their drays, shops, stores and offices, and hurried to his place of business to inquire the truth of the rumor. Hundreds visited his residence on the same errand. All day Tuesday, until late in the evening, inquiries concerning his condition were incessant, and it was almost the only topic of conversation. This general anxiety showed the hold he had upon the hearts of the people; and their spontaneous and unaffected expression of admiration for his character and sorrow for his loss is his highest praise and best monument.

The writer has known him long and well, as an attorney and

a friend. His intellectual gifts were far above the average. They were rather solid than glittering. Though quick to see a point, or detect a resemblance, or make repartee; though sometimes witty and even brilliant he was distinguished chiefly for his strong common sense, his rare judgment and sound reasoning. He had, what is termed among the profession a good legal mind. He founded his opinions more on principle than on precedent, and it was his great delight to go back to the fountains of English common law, at the time when precedents were not, and when decisions were made *exclusively* upon principle.

To a good classical education and thorough reading of elementary law, he added a rare knowledge of business, and by a patient, persevering but unpretending industry, he was fast ripening into a good lawyer, and promised to become an ornament to the Minnesota Bar. In manner he was abrupt, sometimes almost harsh, and to those who knew him only partially, he revealed none of the noble impulses and generous sympathies of which his heart was full. His benevolence was altogether unostentatious and he preferred to hide his charities from the world. He seemed to use his rough manner as a veil to the good wishes and kind acts in which he abounded. He emphatically put the worst side out, and disappointed even his friends with his genuine kindness of heart. For hypocrisy, ostentation, and pretense, in religious, social, or professional life, he had a hearty contempt, and the great strength of this feeling in him largely influenced his manner and course of life. He was ambitious to *be* better than he *seemed*.

He has been cut down in the morning of life, and we bow uncomplainingly to the Providential stroke. The community will mourn in him one of its best citizens, the Bar one of its promising members, and his intimate associates one of their most reliable and valuable friends. To his sorrow-stricken relatives and particularly his widowed mother, his loss is irretreable.

Winona, April 23, 1861.



## RELATED ARTICLES

A sketch of Bennett can be found in Justice William Mitchell's "Reminiscences of the Establishment of the Territorial Courts, Judges, Justices and Members of the Bar of Winona County" 22 (1899) (MLHP, 2013).



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