

Ernest W. Campbell

(November 19, 1869 – January 11, 1933)



Ernest Wells Campbell was born on November 19, 1869, in the village of Kingston, Meeker County, Minnesota, to Ortho and Isa Campbell, who had settled there a year earlier.¹ He graduated from the local high school in 1891, and then left to attend Yale University and Yale Law School. There he earned a LL.B. in 1893 and a LL.M. in 1894. He returned home and was admitted to the bar on June 5, 1896.² He started practicing law — but not for long.

In April 1898, the Spanish American War broke out. He



enlisted in Co. C, Fifteenth Minnesota Volunteers, and was made sergeant. It is not known whether he saw combat, but he was promoted and held the rank of lieutenant when mustered out. Besides the usual welcomings most

Celebration for the Fifteenth Minnesota at New Ulm, 1899.³

¹ This is his birth date on his death certificate (1933-MN-008107) at the Historical Society.

² 1 *Roll of Attorneys: Supreme Court, State of Minnesota, 1858-1970* 41 (State Law Library, 2011).

³ Minneapolis Photograph Collection, Hennepin County Library. The caption reads:

RETURN OF THE 15TH MINNESOTA INFANTRY REGIMENT AT NEW ULM
Large picnic celebration at some sort of pavilion or hall in the country. Fields are visible in the background. Unclear as to where the regiment is returning from. The original cataloger just says "the South", but given the year and the uniforms, the Spanish-American War or the Phillipine Insurrection seems most likely.

returning soldiers receive, Campbell was given an additional award: in 1899, U. S. District Court Judge William Lochren appointed him a Referee in Bankruptcy. This must have surprised his brethren at the bar because he had not practiced much in the three years since his admission. But Lochren, a civil war veteran, likely was impressed with his recent military service and, perhaps, by his understanding of business practices, gained from his father who was at times a miller, merchant and banker. In any event, he must have relished the challenges and responsibilities of being a federal referee — and the prestige — because he held this office for the next thirty-three years.

He also built a large private practice, was elected county attorney, city mayor, and became a pillar of the Litchfield business community. In 1915, the following sketch appeared in Henry Castle's history of Minnesota:

Ernest W. Campbell. One of the leading lawyers in Western Minnesota is Ernest W. Campbell, who was graduated from the law school of Yale University twenty years ago and has since gained a high standing both in legal circles and as a business man and public official. He is a learned lawyer and scholarly gentleman and a citizen in whose character the community has implicit trust and confidence.

Ernest W. Campbell was born in Meeker County, Minnesota in 1870 (sic), a date which indicates that his family were among the pioneers of that section. His father is Otho H. Campbell who was born in Connecticut in 1845, and coming out to Minnesota in 1868 was one of the early settlers at Clearwater. For many years he was engaged in business as a merchant, and is now vice president of the Bank of Litchfield and interested in several other financial institutions in various parts of the state. He is an active republican, a Knight Templar Mason, and a man of high standing and influence in Meeker County. Otho H. Campbell married Isa Creath, who was born in the State of Maine in 1848 and is still living at Litchfield.

Ernest W. Campbell finished his course in high school in 1891, and then went East and entered the Yale Law School where he was graduated with his Bachelor's degree in 1893, and in 1894 was awarded the degree Master of Laws. Since then he has been actively identified either with his profession or with business and office. During the Spanish-American war he enlisted and was made first sergeant in Company C of the Fifteenth Minnesota Volunteers, subsequently being promoted to second lieutenant of the same company. His father also has a military record, having served as a private during the Civil War.

Mr. Campbell was appointed by Judge William C. Lochren as referee in bankruptcy for the United States District Court in 1899, and has given a capable administration of the affairs coming before that court for over fifteen years. Since locating at Litchfield, and in addition to his large private practice, he served two terms as county attorney of Meeker County. He is a director of the Bank of Litchfield and politically is a republican.

Mr. Campbell married Marian R. Roraback, daughter of Uriah Roraback. They have one child, Myra, twelve years of age.⁴

He died on January 11, 1933, aged sixty-three. That day *The Litchfield Independent* carried his obituary on its front page:

**PROMINENT
LOCAL LAWYER
PASSES AWAY**

**ERNEST W. CAMPBELL SUDDENLY
STRICKEN LAST EVENING**

Litchfield people were shocked this morning to learn of the sudden death of one of our most esteemed citizens.

⁴ Henry A. Castle, 3 *Minnesota: Its Story and Biography* 1735-36 (1915).

Ernest W. Campbell collapsed and passed away at his home about midnight last night.

One of the bridge clubs had a meeting that evening at the F. M. March home in the nature of a farewell party for Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Hinterman, who leave shortly for a new location in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The party broke up shortly before midnight and Mr. Campbell had trouble starting his car, and finally gave it up and another guest at the party pushed the Campbell car home. The car was put in its stall and Mr. Campbell went into the house and suddenly collapsed and passed away.

Mr. Campbell had been a resident of Meeker county from his birth, November 9, 1869 (sic). His father, Ortho H. Campbell, was one of the early settlers of the county. His boyhood days were spent at Manannah village, where his father operated the flour mill. He took the law course at Yale, and was admitted to the bar and set up practice here, where he was still active up to his death. He was a veteran of the Spanish war, first lieutenant of Co. C, which was recruited here.

During the years that he made his home here he has filled many positions of trust, including that of mayor of the city several times. For many years he has served as referee in bankruptcy proceedings. He was at the time of his death president of the county bar association, president of the Community Club, member of the tax association and of the Court of Honor, Minneapolis area, boy scouts, and director in the State Bank of Litchfield.

As a citizen of the community he was always ready to give his time and means to any worthy cause for the betterment of the city and county.

Mr. Campbell is survived by his wife and one daughter, Mrs. Harlan Quinn of Minneapolis. One brother is living, Arthur Campbell of Parkers Prairie, and one sister, Mrs. E. L. McMillan of St. Paul.⁵

Shortly thereafter, the National Association of Bankruptcy Referees noted his death in its monthly journal:

ERNEST W. CAMPBELL

Although but sixty-three years of age at the time of his death, Referee Ernest W. Campbell, Litchfield, Minnesota was a veteran in service as a Referee having been appointed in 1899. He was a charter member of this Association. Mr. Campbell was born November 9, 1869 (sic) in Kingston Minn., received a high school education and a LL.B. and LL.M. from the Yale Law School and commenced practice in 1896. He has been county attorney of Meeker County, city attorney of his home city and was mayor at the time of his death. He had served as president of his District Bar Association. He was president of the Litchfield Community Club, chairman of the Boy Scout Court of Honor for his home district, member of the Library Board and Hospital Board, treasurer of the Presbyterian Church, vice president of the Minnesota Tax Payers Association and vice president of the State Bank of Litchfield. Death occurred suddenly January 11th. His widow and one daughter survive.⁶ □

⁵ *The Litchfield Independent*, January 11, 1933, at 1 (funeral arrangements omitted).

⁶ *Journal of the National Association of Referees in Bankruptcy* 94 (January 1933).

Related Articles

“Referees and Judges of the Bankruptcy Court for the District of Minnesota, 1898-1914” (MLHP, 2010).

Robert J. Kressel, “History of United States Bankruptcy Court, District of Minnesota” (MLHP, 2010).



Posted MLHP: September 16, 2014.