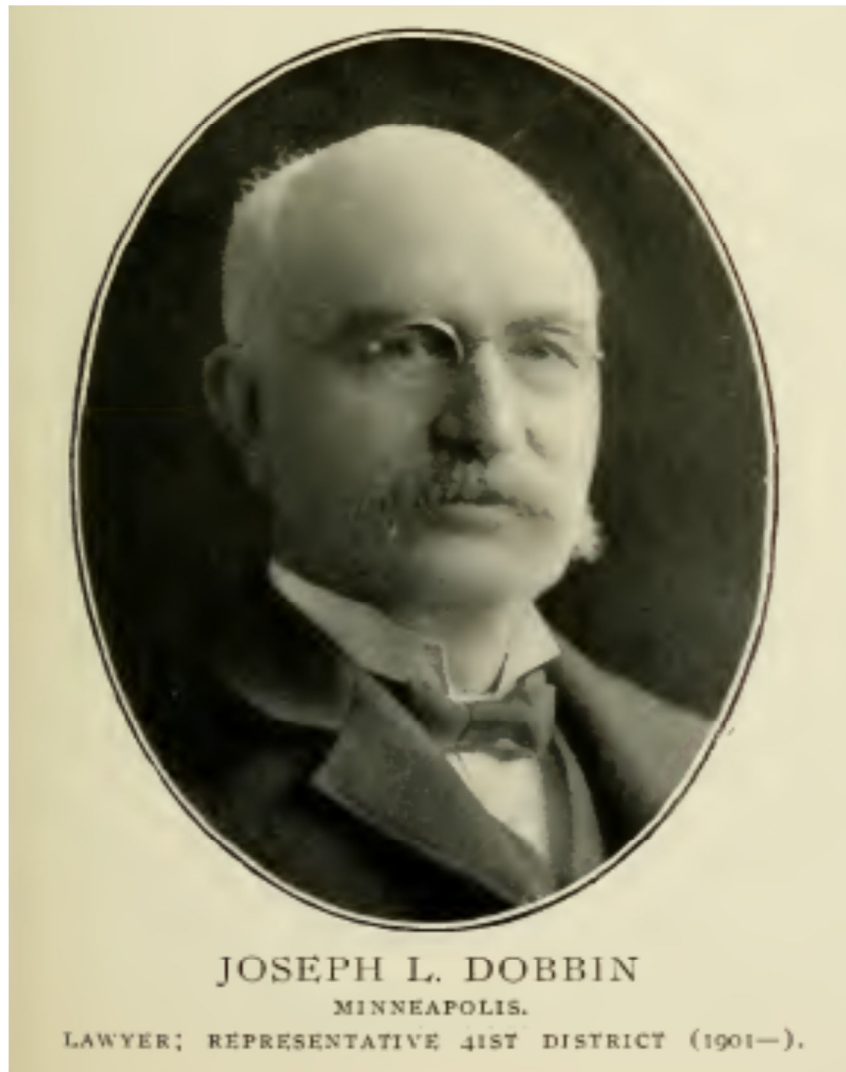


Joseph L. Dobbin

(March 11, 1845 - July 31, 1904)



(1902)

Joseph Leonard Dobbin was born in Illinois in 1846, just in time to serve in the Civil War. He graduated the University of Michigan Law School in 1876.¹ He arrived in Minnesota in 1883, bearing the title “Judge,” and began practicing law and Republican politics. In the 1880s, he practiced with Martin F. Hanley as Dobbins & Hanley, but by the early 1900s he was by himself.² He probably had a general practice and little or no trial work.

He ran for public office once. He barely survived the Republican primary for the forty-first legislative district,³ but in the general election on November 6, 1900, he led the pack of eight.⁴ He served in the regular session in 1901, and the special session in 1902.⁵ He was assigned to the committees on elections,

¹ 10 Michigan Alumnus 467 (1904). The photograph on the previous page is from *Men of Minnesota* 145 (1902).

² *Minneapolis City Directory, 1888-1889* 525 (1888); *Minneapolis City Directory, 1903*, 476 (1903).

³ The primary on September 18, 1900, was a “top four” contest:

William D. Washburn, Jr.....	2,194
Samuel V. Morris, Jr.....	1,766
Loren C. Stevenson.....	1,400
Joseph L. Dobbin.....	1,170
H. E. Fryberger.....	1,145
Julius Newgord.....	1,115
R. H. Crafts.....	970
W. Gunderson.....	946
J.M. Hazen.....	912

Minneapolis Journal, September 20, 1900, at 6.

⁴ The general election was also a “top four” and all four Republicans were elected:

Joseph L. Dobbin (R).....	4,325
Loran C. Stephenson (sic) (R)...	4,290
Samuel Morris, Jr. (R).....	4,228
William D. Washburn, Jr. (R)....	4,168
Paul Gyllsturn (D).....	2,445
C. M. Ferro (D).....	2,271
George E. Nord (D).....	1,962
Philip Carlin (D).....	2,126

1901 Blue Book, at 548. The forty-first was composed of the Fifth and Sixth wards of Minneapolis. Here is his official biographical sketch:

JOSEPH L. DOBBIN, (Republican) is fifty-five years old and a widower. He was educated at Universities of Illinois and Michigan, from which latter institution he graduated. His profession is that of a lawyer. He has been a resident of Minnesota since 1883. Served his country in the Civil War as a private.

Id. at 690. In 1901 he placed this biographical sketch in *Herringshaw’s Encyclopedia of American Biography of the Nineteenth Century*.

DOBBIN, JOSEPH L., soldier, lawyer, was born March 11, 1845, in Manchester, Ill. He served as a private during the civil war; is president of the Union Veteran league of Minnesota; and one of the foremost lawyers of the west at Minneapolis.

which he chaired, enrollment, judiciary, soldiers home and the state normal schools. He did not seek re-election.⁶

On March 19, 1904, the *Minneapolis Journal* published an interview with Dobbin, one of a series of “chats” with “well-known men.” In it he reflected on the importance of social and fraternal societies.



Thomas William Herringshaw, ed., *Herringshaw's Encyclopedia of American Biography of the Nineteenth Century* 305 (1901).

⁶ The *St. Paul Globe* regretted his decision:

Representative J. L. Dobbin, Forty-first district, Minneapolis, has announced his intention to retire from politics and positively refused to stand for the nomination to succeed himself. In the retirement of Mr. Dobbin the citizens of Minneapolis lose a good, conscientious and hardworking representative and the Republicans of the Forty-first district a good candidate. As a member of the house committee on judiciary he was one of the hardest workers in the body, and on the floor of the house or in committee had always the courage of his convictions. When the occasion arose Mr. Dobbin was not afraid to defy his party majority single-handed.

St. Paul Daily Globe, May 23, 1902, at 2.

Judge J. L. Dobbin Explains Why He Rejoices to Belong to Several Fraternal Orders — He Says That "Secret Society" Is a Decided Misnomer and That the Goal Is the Least of All the Features of Fraternal Organization.

"What have you to say in defense of the 'joiner'?" was the question to which Judge Joseph L. Dobbin was requested to give instant reply as he sat in his Temple Court office.

The judge, moving slowly as all great bodies do, wheeled about in his chair, gazed sadly thru his spectacles at The Journal twain, removed the spectacles in favor of his glasses and thus armed reached for a formidable looking document and said in measured tones:

"I was just preparing a little article on that subject." He then removed his glasses in favor of his spectacles and delivered the following homily on the knights of the secret grip:

"I am not so much of a joiner myself. I belong to the Masons, the Elks and the G. A. R. and I used to be an Odd Fellow, but I am an active advocate of the principles of fraternal organization. It is not good form to call them secret organizations.

"Some persons still entertain that hoary idea that the greatest part of a fraternal organization is a large, rank goat with remarkable butting proclivities. I can honestly say that the time is gone by when it is considered necessary to lam the life out of a candidate in order to convince him of the beauties of the order.

"Fraternal organizations are doing much more for the real Christianizing of the world than they are often given credit for. It is the practical charity which beginneth at home and which helps an unfortunate brother without making him suffer the humiliation of publicity that distinguishes the modern fraternal organization. And that is one reason why it means something when you meet a man who has given you the grip.

"Yes Masonry is almost world wide — at least the principles of Masonry are. They are the principles taught by the Buddhists, by Confucius and even by Mohammed, and there is no good reason why the follower of any of these faiths should not be a good Mason. In fact one of the best Masons I ever met was a Mohammedan dervish. And I do not mean a howling dervish, either. He was a teacher and a most charming and cultivated man.

"And then, you know, in our own times and places in England and America many of our greatest men are Masons. King Edward is a Mason. And so is Dr. Marion D. Shutter.

"As for the Elks, it is forbidden any member to tell where and for whom good is being done. If he disobeys these regulations he is liable to have charges preferred against him on the floor of the lodge room. And yet in this great Minneapolis lodge, No. 44, with its 800 members paying in \$10 a year, the lodge is in debt, not because its money has been spent foolishly, but because without ostentation and, in fact, in secret, its members or their families have been aided when material aid went much farther than spiritual help.

"The same methods are followed by the Odd Fellows and many other fraternal organizations and the world is unquestionably much better for their existence. I tremble to think of the horrible suffering among the poor and unfortunate of all races before the advent of the fraternal organization and its creation of immense families whose members live to help each other.

"As for the charges that the existence of fraternal organizations is apt to test the loyalty of its members to their country I can only say that patriotism is one of the things most taught and cultivated in fraternal circles. Only members of these organizations know how many lives have been given up on the altar of patriotism by the volunteers from the ranks of the so-called secret societies.

"This name of secret society which is now in such common use, constitutes a libel on the whole system of fraternal organization. The organizations do not have their passwords and grips for the mere pleasure of having something 'secret,' but rather as a means of protection from imposters and others vulgarly known as 'butter in' who would seek their share of the benefits derived without making that proportional sacrifice which is the essence of the great strength of fraternal organization life.

"I'm glad I'm a Mason, and I'm glad I'm an Elk and I'm glad I belong to the veterans' organizations I do, and I am only sorry I haven't membership in a few other orders. 'Bobby' Burns, who was a Mason, proved himself a prophet when he said:

Then let us pray that come what may,
And come it will for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brothers me for a' that. " ⁷

⁷ *Minneapolis Journal*, Mach 19, 1904, at 20.

In 1904 he announced his candidate for Hennepin County District Court judge.⁸ But he died on July 31st. He was fifty-nine years old. The *Minneapolis Journal* carried the story:

DEATH CALLS J. DOBBIN

HEART DISEASE PROVES FATAL WHEN BELIEVED TO BE CONVALESCENT.

Joseph L. Dobbin, a well-known lawyer and politician, and for a score of years a prominent figure in G. A. R. and Masonic circles, died of heart disease yesterday morning in his apartments in the Hampshire Arms. The burial will be in charge of the Scottish Rite bodies of the Masonic order and services will be held tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock at Masonic Temple.

Mr. Dobbin had not been in the best of health for some time. About a month ago he had a somewhat serious sinking spell. His condition had varied since then, but in the latter part of last week he showed considerable improvement, so much so that his death yesterday morning came as a surprise to his immediate friends. His only living relative is a sister at Independence, Ind. who was notified yesterday of the death of her brother. Mrs. Dobbin is at present a resident of California.

Mr. Dobbin, who was 59 years of age, came to Minneapolis in 1883. He was greatly interested in the G. A. R. and in Masonry. In the former order he became commander of George N. Morgan post, and in the administration of Department Commander E. W. Mortimer, was judge advocate general for the department of Minnesota. He was an ardent Mason and for his zeal obtained the rare honor of the thirty-third degree in the Scottish Rite. He was also a member of the Knights of Pythias and the order of Elks.

While participating freely in politics, Mr. Dobbin sought no political position until four years ago, when he was a republican candidate for the legislature in the Forty-first district. He sat in the legislative session of 1901 and the special session of 1902.

⁸ *Minneapolis Journal*, July 28, 1904, at 4 ("Many Aspire for the Ermine"). The article sketches the 12 announced candidates beginning with Dobbin:

J. L. Dobbin was a member of the house of representatives four years ago and filled the place with evident satisfaction to his constituents. He is prominent in Masonic and Elk circles.

Mr. Dobbin had already entered as a candidate for nomination as judge of the district bench at the coming primaries and was considered a strong candidate.⁹

On September 13, 1904, resolutions of the county bar association honoring Dobbin were adopted in district court. The proceedings were reported in the evening *Journal*:

HIS LIFE PRAISED

Bar Association Pays Tribute to the Late Judge J. L. Dobbin.

In the presence of a full bench and after appropriate addresses by Judge Ell Torrance, Judge J. O. Pierce, Frank M. Nye and C. A. Dalby, the Hennepin County Bar association adopted resolutions in memory of the late Judge J. L. Dobbin in Judge Elliott's courtroom this morning.

The resolutions, which were presented by a committee consisting of Judge Torrance, Judge Pierce, and H. F. Woodard, review the life of Judge Dobbin and say:

⁹ *Minneapolis Journal*, August 1, 1904, at 3. The *St. Paul Globe's* story repeated the *Journal's*

JOSEPH L. DOBBIN DIES OF HEART FAILURE Well Known Attorney and G. A. R. Veteran Passes Away

Joseph L. Dobbin, prominent lawyer, politician and G. A. R. man, died of heart disease in his apartments at the Hampshire Arms Sunday morning. The burial will be in charge of the Scottish Rite bodies of the Masonic order and services will be held this afternoon at 2 o'clock at the Masonic temple.

Mr. Dobbin was fifty-nine years old, coming to Minneapolis in 1883. He was ever prominent in Grand Army circles, and has been more or less mixed up with politics. He never sought a political office for himself until four years ago, when he ran for the legislature in the Forty-first district as a Republican candidate. He sat in the legislative session of 1901, and the special session of 1902. He had announced himself as a candidate for the nomination as judge of the district bench, and was considered one of the most likely candidates.

St. Paul Globe, August 2, 1904, at 10.

Several days later the *Journal* reported the size of his estate:

In a petition to probate the will of the late J. L. Dobbin, filed this morning in the probate court, the estate is valued at \$13,000, all personal property. The one heir named is Annie L. Dobbin, a sister, living in Independence, Kan.

Minneapolis Journal, August 5, 1904, at 6. The omission of his wife suggests they were legally separated at the time.

“As a lawyer he maintained an honorable standing in the courts of Minnesota and enjoyed the respect and confidence of his professional brethren. His reputation in the community and among his clientage was that of a prudent, judicious and safe adviser and his reputation among his associates at the bar was that of an affable, honorable and courteous lawyer. His idea of the profession he followed was a noble and lofty one. He was sincere, honest and high-minded.”

The court ordered the resolutions entered on the records of the district court of Hennepin county.¹⁰

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APPENDIX

In the early 1890s, Dobbin was involved in litigation over a lease. He lost at trial. His appeal to the state supreme court was dismissed with a citation to a legal maxim most litigants would find humiliating.

Supreme Court of Minnesota.

DOBBIN v. McDONALD.

60 Minn. 380, 62 N.W. 437
(March 5, 1895)

1. Held, that the evidence in this case was ample to support the controlling findings of fact.
2. Application of the maxim, “De minimis non curat lex.” [the law does not concern itself with for small or trifling matters]

(Syllabus by the Court.)

Appeal from municipal court of Minneapolis; Stephen Mahoney, Judge.

Action by Joseph L. Dobbin against Morris McDonald. From a judgment for defendant, plaintiff appeals. Affirmed.

George R. Robinson and *Chas. E. Bond*, for appellant. *W. A. Lancaster*, for respondent.

¹⁰ *Minneapolis Evening Journal*. September 13, 1904, at 6.

COLLINS, J. The judgment appealed from in this case must stand affirmed if there was evidence sufficient to support the finding of fact made by the trial court that on May 4, 1891, the defendant surrendered possession of the leased premises to the plaintiff; that the latter accepted such possession, and attempted to rent the property in his own right, and not for defendant's benefit. There was an abundance of testimony to sustain the finding. The plaintiff was informed in March, 1891, that at the expiration of the lease, April 30th, defendant would move out. On April 17th he put the premises in the hands of a rental agent, and a placard was put up on the house announcing it "For Rent," the placard remaining up so long as defendant occupied the same." April 29th the plaintiff received a letter from defendant, in which the latter stated that he would vacate at the expiration of the lease, "or within a few days of the time." To this plaintiff made no reply or objection, and the last of defendant's goods were removed May 4th. That day the keys of the house were sent to plaintiff's office, but they did not come to his hands until May 8th. May 26th plaintiff addressed a letter to defendant demanding that he call and settle for damages done to the property. May 29th, when replying to the letter, defendant inclosed a sum sufficient to pay the rent for the four days' Occupation in May, but plaintiff returned it, saying, briefly, that he would not accept it. In the letter of May 26th plaintiff did not intimate that there was anything due him for rent, nor did he ever make Such a claim until this action was brought, in February, 1893, to recover for 12 months' use of the premises as a tenant, commencing May 1, 1891, at the rental per month fixed by the lease made May 1, 1890, less the amount received from another tenant for a part of the time, at a reduced figure. From this Statement it will appear beyond question that the findings were properly made. The evidence is almost conclusive that the plaintiff consented to defendant's occupation for a few days after April 30th, and that the claim for rent made almost two years later, for the first time, was an afterthought. There is no merit in any of the assignments of error relating to the admission of evidence. The plaintiff's counsel urges that his client should, at least, have recovered the amount due as rent for the few days in May, amounting to less than \$5, and once refused by him. We might dispose of this point by saying that it is now made for the first time, or on another ground; but, under the circumstances, we prefer to apply the maxim, "De minimis non curat lex." This maxim seems to fit the case better than any ordinary rule of law. Order affirmed. •

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