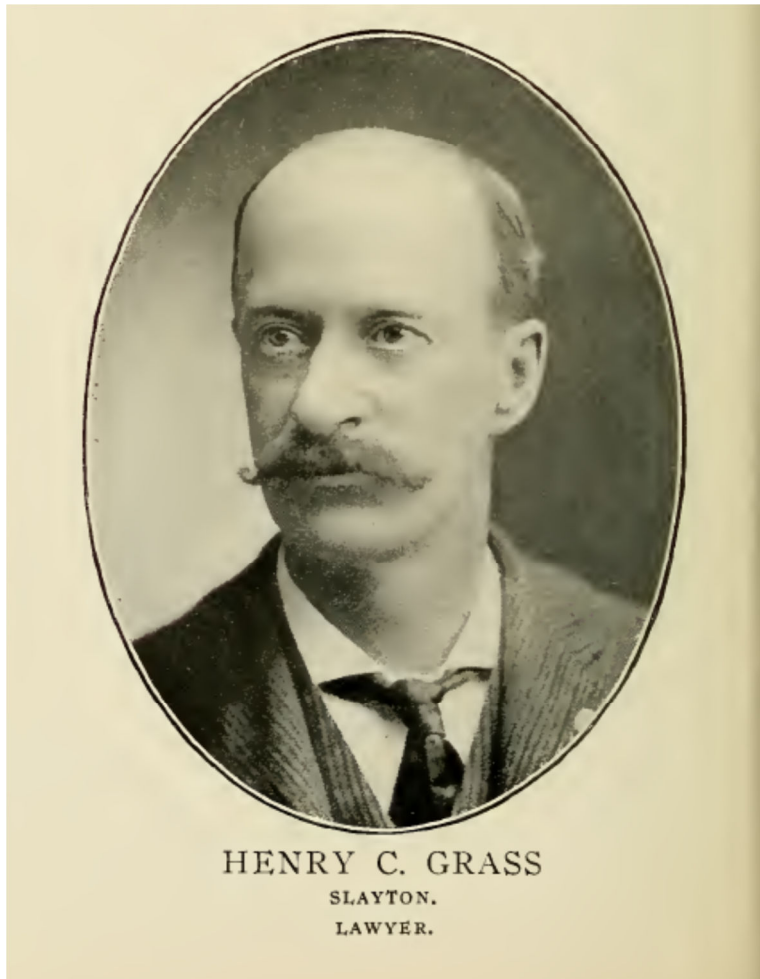


Henry C. Grass

(July 27, 1856 – December 30, 1906)



• 1902 •

Henry Clinton Grass practiced law in Murray County in southwestern Minnesota from his admission to the bar in 1878 to death in 1906. He practiced law for thirteen years in the village of Currie before moving to Slayton, the county seat, in 1891. The county had a small but growing population—3,604 in 1880, 6,692 in 1890 and 11,911 in 1900.¹

Like many small town lawyers in nineteenth century Minnesota, Grass became active in public affairs. He served several terms as county attorney. Because crime was infrequent, he did not prosecute many cases. His courtroom record was mediocre. During the two year period ending July 31, 1894, he prosecuted only two cases in district court and twelve in justice court, and of the latter, he secured a guilty verdict in only five cases or 42%. Here is his report for this biennial to the Attorney General:²

MURRAY COUNTY.

H. O. GRASS, COUNTY ATTORNEY.

1892. Prosecutions in District Court, 2; in Municipal and Justice Courts, 12.

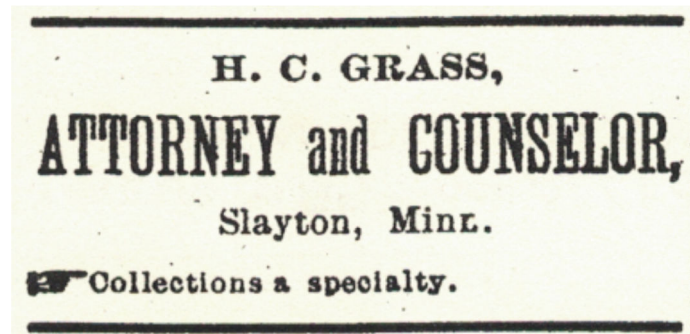
CHARGED WITH.	Prosecutions.	Convictions.	Acquittals.	Nolle Prosequi.	Pending.	Under Influence of Intoxicating Liquors.	PUNISHMENT.
In District Court—							
Forgery in second degree.....	1	.....	.....	.....	1	1	
Bigamy.....	1	.....	.....	.....	1	.....
Totals.....	2	.....	.....	.....	2	1	
In Municipal and Justice Courts—							
Assault in second degree.....	1	.....	1	.....	.....	.....	Fines \$8.
Assault in third degree.....	4	2	2	.....	.....	.....	Fines \$25.
Petit larceny.....	3	2	1	.....	.....	.....	Fined \$2.
Indecent exposure.....	1	1	.....	.....	.....	1	
Defrauding hotel keeper.....	1	.....	1	.....	.....	.....
Obtaining goods under false pretenses.....	1	.....	1	.....	.....	.....
Drunkenness (Scheffer law).....	1	.....	1	.....	.....	1	Fined \$10.
Totals.....	12	5	7	.....	.....	2	

Total costs taxed, \$195.74; fines assessed, \$45.00; total collected, \$29.15.

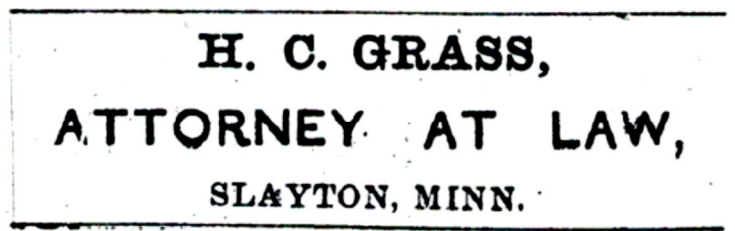
¹ United States Decennial Census.

² *Biennial Report of Attorney General to the Governor for the Period Ending July 31, 1894* 36 (1894) (columns on page combined).

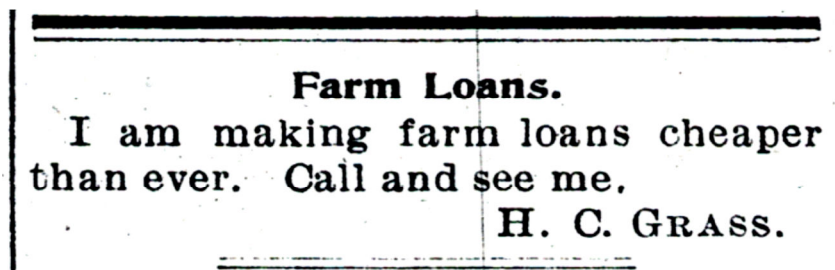
The local bar, of course, was small, usually four or five members. Each lawyer had a solo practice, and some carried on a side-business.³ In 1898, his business card was published in a Slayton newspaper with those of three other lawyers:⁴



By 1900 his card had been redesigned. From the *Gazette*, May 4:⁵



About the same time, he placed this advertisement, an indication of how hard it was to make a living from just practicing law in a sparsely-populated rural county at the turn of the century:⁶



³ M. E. Foley's business card described him as "Attorney at Law, Collections, Loans, Real Estate and Insurance." *Slayton Gazette*, May 24, 1900, at 4.

⁴ *Murray County Herald*, October 19, 1898, at 4 (enlarged). B. H. Whitney, W. J. McLeod and Jay Henry Long placed their business cards in this issue of the *Herald*.

⁵ *Slayton Gazette*, May 24, 1900, at 4 (enlarged). Business cards of five other lawyers were in this edition of the paper.

⁶ *Slayton Gazette*, October 18, 1900, at 1 (enlarged).

In 1898, he ran on the Republican ticket to represent the Fifteenth District in the state House of Representatives. The Fifteenth covered Nobles and Murray Counties. He received 55% of the total vote and carried his home county. The results of the election on November 8, 1898, were:⁷

	Nobles	Murray	Total
Henry C. Grass (Republican).....	1,067	842	1,909
Edward Mott (Peoples-Democrat).....	833	723	1,555

Two years later he was re-elected, receiving 57% of the total vote and winning Murray County by a wide margin. The results of the election on November 6, 1900, were: ⁸

	Nobles	Murray	Total
Henry C. Grass (Republican).....	1,592	1,340	2,932
L. C. Long (Democrat-Peoples).....	1,292	953	2,245

The following profile was published in the 1901 Legislative Manual: ⁹

FIFTEENTH DISTRICT.

Henry C. Grass (Republican) was born in Michigan City, Ind. He came to this state in November, 1869; was educated in the high schools at Winona and St. Charles; admitted to the bar July 13, 1878. He has held the office of county attorney of Murray county for ten years. Mr. Grass is forty-five years old, married and resides at Slayton.

He did not run for re-election in 1902. He continued practicing law, remained active in the community and served as mayor of the town. In early 1906, his health began to fail. This was a time when a prominent family such as the Grasses was expected to keep the community informed about such matters. And so, for many months,

⁷ 1899 Blue Book, at 510.

⁸ 1901 Blue Book, at 545.

⁹ Id. at 683.

changes in his condition and treatment were chronicled in the local press. On June 7, 1906, the *Slayton Gazette* reported that “Hon. H. C. Grass went to Rochester last Friday for treatment. He spent Sunday with his parents at St. Charles and returned home on Tuesday.”¹⁰ The following week the *Gazette* reported an ominous turn:

Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Grass went to Minneapolis last Saturday. Mr. Grass will remain there some time at a sanitarium. Mr. Grass’ health has been failing for some time and his friends hope that rest and treatment will bring him out all right in a short time. Mrs. Grass returned on Monday.¹¹

On June 21st, the *Gazette* reported that his condition had worsened and “he went into a stupor on Tuesday morning and his pulse was scarcely perceptible, but after suitable treatment he revived and was considerably better in the afternoon. Yesterday morning he was very low again.”¹²

The public vigil continued. On August 2 the *Gazette* carried the latest report from Mrs. Grass:

Mrs. H. C. Grass returned last Saturday from Minneapolis. On Thursday Mr. Grass was taken from the private hospital in Minneapolis to the insane hospital at St. Peter. Physically he is quite weak and mentally there are moments when he is rational.¹³

He died on December 30, 1906, in the State Hospital for Insane at St. Peter.¹⁴ He was fifty years old. The weekly *Slayton Gazette and Murray County Pioneer* carried his obituary on January 3, 1907:

¹⁰ *Slayton Gazette*, June 7, 1906, at 4.

¹¹ *Slayton Gazette*, June 14, 1906, at 5.

¹² *Slayton Gazette*, June 21, 1906, at 5.

¹³ *Slayton Gazette*, August 2, 1906, at 6.

¹⁴ His death certificate lists the cause of death as “General Paresis. Pulmonary Edema. 36 hours.” Death Certificate #1906-47-1161.

Death of H. C. Grass

Henry Clinton Grass was born in Michigan City, Indiana, July 27, 1855. In 1869, the family moved to Winona, Minn., and later to Charles City, Minn., where he grew to manhood, and received a good English education. He studied law in the office of the Hon. Edwin Hill and on July 13, 1878, he was admitted to the bar before the District Court at Windom. Soon after he located at Currie and practiced his profession there until 1891, when he moved to Slayton, where the family has since resided.

The deceased was married to Miss Lettie A. Moore, on October 30th, 1880. She died in 1887. On July 24, 1889, he was married to Miss Alice M. Cooper, who, with two daughters survive survives him. One son by the first marriage, Charles G., also survives him, besides his aged father and mother, who still reside in St. Charles.

Mr. Grass was one of the ablest and most prominent lawyers in this entire section of the state. He was a careful, conscientious student of the law, never letting go of a knotty point until he had exhausted all the authorities on the subject. Through his advice many a little dispute between neighbors was settled. He never advised a man to go to law unless he was certain that the cause was a just one. In all public questions he took an active interest and was always identified with every movement for the advancement of his town and county. He served several terms as county attorney, and was two terms in the legislature, was a delegate to the last Republican National Convention in Chicago and was serving his third consecutive term of president of the village when stricken with the disease of which he died.

For several years the close neighbors and friends of Mr. Grass noticed that he was failing in health and that his large practice was wearing on him. Few realize how closely he applied himself on important cases he had in court. The work told on him and the result was, as in many instances among professional men, a physical and mental collapse. He was taken to a sanitarium in Minneapolis, but later was taken to St. Peter, where he could be treated by a specialist. He gradually failed until relieved by death last Saturday. Mrs. Grass was summoned to that place and arrived before his death. On Tuesday afternoon the remains, accompanied by Mr. Whitney, Mrs. Grass and his father and mother arrived here. The Masons, Woodmen members of the Eastern Star chapter and a large number of sympathizing friends were at the station to meet the funeral party and escort the remains to the residence.

The funeral was held at the court house yesterday afternoon under the auspices of the Masonic order, assisted by the Modern Woodmen, to both of which orders he belonged. He was also a member of the Mankato Lodge of Elks. Mr. Barbour conducted the services and preached an excellent sermon.

The writer has known Mr. Grass for nearly a quarter of a century. Like the rest of us he was human, but "Bob" Grass' heart was in the right place. He was a true friend, a good citizen, a dutiful son and affectionate husband and father. His memory will long be cherished by a host of friends. To the mourning wife and children and to the aged parents and absent brother this paper extends a sincerest sympathy.¹⁵

¹⁵ *The Slayton Gazette and Murray County Pioneer*, Thursday, January 3, 1907, at 5.

The obituary in the *Murray County Herald* followed on January 4, 1907. Like many newspapers of this period, it strained to draft its headline in the language of the bar.

Answered Final Summons.

In the death of Hon. H. C. Grass, prominent attorney, highly honored and respected resident of this city, Slayton and Murray County loses one of his most valuable and distinguished citizens. His death occurred Saturday at a hospital at St. Peter at the age of fifty-one years. His death was due to a nervous and mental collapse consequent upon overwork and physical exhaustion. His remains were brought here Tuesday and the funeral was held Wednesday from the court house. He is survived by a widow and three children.

Deceased was born in Michigan City, Ind., July 27, 1855. At the age of fourteen he removed with his parents to Winona, this state, where they resided for a short time, removing later to St. Charles where Henry went to school and received a good school education. After finishing school he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1878 at Windom and soon thereafter located at Currie where his abilities as an attorney were at once recognized and his business grew rapidly. While there he was married to Miss Lettie Mooer (sic). She died in 1887, leaving one child, Charles G. Two years later he was married to Miss Alice M. Cooper, who, with two daughters, Helen and Ruth, survive. In 1891 the family came to Slayton and have continued their residence here ever since.

Mr. Grass became interested in public affairs and was elected county attorney for several terms, twice to the state

legislature and has held the office of mayor, which office he occupied at the time of his death. He was widely known over this section of the state and enjoyed the confidence and esteem of a host of friends.

The funeral was held Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock from the court house. . . . The spacious court room was filled with sympathizing friends from all parts of county and from a distance, who came to pay last respects to the dead.

To the grief stricken relatives who mourn the departure of a dutiful son, a loving and kind hearted husband and father and to the friends of the deceased who have lost a true and noble friend and councilor, the sympathy of the community goes out. His memory will long be cherished by everyone who knew him.¹⁶



Posted MLHP: May 24, 2018.

¹⁶ *Murray County Herald*, January 4, 1907 (funeral arrangements omitted). A bar memorial has not been located.

The photograph on the first page is from *Men of Minnesota* (1902).