

Judge Benjamin Franklin Wright
(1861-1936)

At a regular session of the District Court for Beltrami County, held in the Court House in the City of Bemidji, at 10 o'clock A.M. February 23rd 1937, Honorable Graham M. Torrance, District Judge presiding, the following Memorial to the late Benjamin F. Wright, late Judge of said Court, was presented by the Beltrami County Bar Association, and it was moved that it be spread on the minutes of the Court and a copy presented to his widow Laura M. Wright.

The Court ordered the memorial be spread on the minutes of the court records to be permanently preserved.

Memorial.

Benjamin Franklin Wright was born on a farm near Durham in the State of Maine on August 27th 1861.

His mother left a widow when he was only two years of age the family moved to Lewiston in that state where he received his early schooling, graduating from the high school there in 1879.

The same year he entered Bates College and after one term matriculated at Colby College, Waterville from which he graduated with the class of 1883.

He taught school at Topfield, Baring and Princeton, and later commenced the study of law in the office of Savage Oaks in Lewiston and completed his studies in the office of W. T. Hains at Waterville and was admitted to the bar of that state.

After two years of practice in his home state, learning of the larger field of usefulness in the West, he came to St. Paul, Minnesota where for a short time he was employed by the West Publishing Company.

He left St. Paul in 1887 and accepted the position of Principal of the public Schools of Melrose and while teaching there was admitted to practice in the courts of the State of Minnesota.

In 1891, he opened an office in St. Cloud, but remained there only until the Fall of that year when he moved to Park Rapids where he engaged in active practice of his profession, until he was elected to the Bench of the 15th Judicial District, and where he resided to the time of his death.

At the 1908 General Election he was elected Judge, succeeding the late C. W. Stanton, which office he held uninterruptedly until his death.

No man who ever occupied the Bench of this District was better known, or more beloved by the members of the bar, or by the people in general who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.

In fact,—“None knew him but to love him,
None named him but to praise”.

He was always kind and considerate to those who had business in his court, be they lawyers or laymen, and remembering his own troubles and embarrassments as a young lawyer, he was especially kind and helpful to young attorneys appearing before him. Even to those unfortunates convicted of crimes brought before him for sentence he was never vindictive, but on many occasions brought hope and a ray of sunshine by a fatherly talk and good advice.

Before leaving for the West he was united in marriage with Miss Laura M. Clay of which union three children were borne, two of whom together with his widow survive. The son Clay lives at Park Rapids, and the daughter Mrs. Rosaline O'Connell near Boston, Mass. The eldest daughter died at the age of ten years,—the first great sorrow of the struggling young couple.

For more than a year prior to his death he realized as did his friends that his health was failing, and that he was entering the valley of the shadows, but although his associates on the Bench sought in every way to lighten the burden of his duties,—to take over the greater part of his work, he insisted on doing his share, and when called by the angel of death was completing an adjourned term of Court here in Bemidji.

He was large hearted and public spirited and gave generously and graciously of his time and money to every movement for the relief of human suffering and for the betterment and upbuilding of his community.

In 1897 he drove from Park Rapids to Bemidji by team over almost impassible roads and made the first 4th of July speech in the then embryo village consisting of less than 200 people. He had a great liking for Bemidji and its inhabitants, at all times and took great interest in seeing it grow into a metropolitan city.

Stricken Friday October 16th when here completing the September 1936 general term of this court, he lingered until at 11-45 A. M., Monday, October 19th when, notwithstanding the best medical skill and ministrations of a loving wife, the bailiff Death adjourned his court for all time.

He lived a good and upright life,—past the biblical span of three score and ten, and tho he loved life, and lived for his family and friends, we feel and know that when the summons came for him to join the enumerable caravan which moves to that mysterious realm where each must take his chamber in the silent halls of death, he went, not like a quarry slave at night scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed by an unfaltering hope approached his grave like one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams.

And we, not only members of the bar of Beltrami County, but his many friends,—and they are all who knew him, fondly hope that his spirit is enjoying supreme happiness “Over There” in that far away land the “beauties of which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard”, and that as his ears closed to the sound of human voices, they opened to hear the words of the Eternal Judge,—“Well done thous good and faithful servant.”

/s/ P. J. Russell

/s/ G. W. --- Bell

/s/ F. J. McPartlin

Committee.

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