

MEMORIAL TO THE LATE

George C. Lambert

[September 24, 1867 • February 22, 1934]

**Ramsey County Bar Association
District Court
Second Judicial District
St. Paul, Minnesota**

March 31, 1934

George C. Lambert

WHEREAS, in the death February 22, 1934, of the gentleman for whom your committee has prepared this memorial, the Bar of Ramsey County lost an upstanding member, whose unfailing conformity to the highest ethics of the legal profession, blameless career, spotless reputation, kindness and charitable deeds, throughout the long years of his residence among us, won and kept our admiration, respect and affection.

NOW, THEREFORE, at this meeting, BE IT RESOLVED, that the members of the District Court and of the Bar of Ramsey County mourn his passing and permanently inscribed upon the minutes this tribute to the memory of Colonel George C. Lambert, a Christian gentleman and upright citizen.

Born in Menin, Belgium, September 24, 1867, at the age of 16 years he sought the opportunities afforded by the New World, migrating in 1883 to the United States, locating in Ghent, Minnesota, where resided a considerable colony of his erstwhile fellow-countrymen. In 1887 he removed to St. Paul, was admitted to the bar in 1888, and here he led his useful life to the day of his death, an honorable life replete with kind acts, a life ever mindful of the duties and highest ideals of citizenship, and indicative of his patriotic love for his adopted country. One of the most bitter disappointments of his life was his inability to qualify physically for service in the Great War, after his years of training as a soldier in connection with his duties as an officer of the Minnesota National Guard and as Adjunct General of our state, to which responsible post he was assigned in 1899 by the late Governor John Lind. His disappointment was rendered the keener because he was deprived not only of discharging his duty to his adopted Country but to his native Belgium as well.

Your committee could cite many instances as sidelights evidencing his kindness and spirit, his deep sense of obligation to ideals of helpfulness calculated to make the world and his fellows happier. Here is one characteristic episode: Colonel Lambert early in his practice associated himself with the Hon. Gebhard Willrich, formerly Judge of our Probate Court. One whom we all know, Fred W.

Gosewisch owes his start to Colonel Lambert. Shortly after entering his teens Fred in response to an advertisement for office clerk, applied for the job at the offices of Willrich and Lambert. Colonel Lambert was examining the applicants. Fred's youth and lack of stature were against him, and he summarily was rejected. Fred was intensely desirous of securing the position, and youngster that he was, he was unable to conceal his grief and disappointment, and Colonel Lambert relented to the extent that he gave Fred a searching quiz that resulted in his being hired. Fred accompanied the senior member into the office in the year 1895, when Judge Willrich took office as Probate Judge, and there Fred has remained ever since, to the great aid and comfort of many an attorney in his practice before that court. It is just one of countless instances of Colonel Lambert's tact and fine powers of discernment.

Colonel Lambert served on many civic and public committees; he filled many responsible positions with honor and distinction. He recognized the relationship of attorney and client as a sacred relationship. And never by thought, word nor deed did he falter in rendering to his clients the competent service that his fine attainments as a lawyer and his splendid ability and energy made it possible for him to furnish.

Probably, his most notable and spectacular achievement was in connection with his service to bring about favorable action on the part of the federal government ensuring the deepening of the channel of the Mississippi River. This, too, was a trait inherited from his forbearers who through the centuries had benefited from the use of water transportation facilities. At all events it amounted almost to an obsession with Colonel Lambert. He, more than any one person of his day and generation, acknowledged the heavy debt owed to the Mississippi River by the early explorers and pioneers for the part the river played in making possible and promoting the early and rapid development of this Inland Empire. Many years ago Colonel Lambert's prophetic vision foretold the necessity and value of improving and restoring the river as a facile and available method of transportation, in order that it might go hand in hand with the Great Lakes–Seaway project and thus lift the handicap under which the midwest had been laboring for many years as virtually a land–locked country. It

was fitting that Colonel Lambert lived to see assured the widening and deepening of the river channel. It is to be regretted that he was not to be spared to help bring about and witness similar assurances that we have in our own state, a short hundred 150 miles from where we are now are gathered, an ocean port on the shore of Lake Superior.

We close with a testimonial from our fellow townsman, Richmond P. Warner, an ardent co-worker with Colonel Lambert on waterways projects, through many years, who, on the occasion of the death of the subject of this memorial, said:

“Colonel Lambert was an executive and a leader. He had a remarkable mind. It was the natural thing to follow his leadership, for he was a tower of strength to us all.”

By the committee:

Herbert P. Keller
Chairman.
Linus O’Malley
Herman Stark



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The following sketch of Col. Lambert was included in the third volume of Theodore Christian's history of Minnesota, published in 1935:

COL. GEORGE C. LAMBERT. It is generally believed that Minnesota's escape from the profoundest results of the economic depression that settled over the agricultural West in the post-war era, was due to the development of singularly efficient cooperative organizations for distributing and marketing. These various organizations have been extended to embrace nearly all the essential commodities which are produced in the Minnesota area, and also many of the commodities which the farmer buys. When the complete history of this movement is written, probably no man will receive a higher meed of credit for leadership than the late Col. George C. Lambert, whose death at St. Paul, February 22, 1934, was an unmitigated loss to the citizenship of the state.

Colonel Lambert had been a resident of Minnesota for half a century. His friends and associates often spoke of his remarkable gifts. As a youth he had attended the universities in Belgium, France and England. He was a cosmopolitan type of man, possessed of both innate and acquired culture. He might have become wealthy if he had devoted his activities to money making, but the enterprises into which he threw himself with heart and soul were those affected with a public interest and were profitable to many rather than to few.

Colonel Lambert was a native of Menim, Belgium, on the border of France and Belgium. The Lamberts were a French speaking people. Colonel Lambert was educated in Europe. He came to America in 1883, first locating at Ghent, Minnesota, and in 1887 transferred his home to St. Paul. His education and talents for the law and business were in large measure devoted to community and state interests. He was interested in military affairs, and rose to the rank of Colonel of the First Field Artillery regiment in the Minnesota National Guard. It was this regiment which during the World War became the One Hundred Fifty-first Field Artillery. During the, decade of the '90s, when John Lind was governor, Colonel Lambert became adjutant general of the state. He and his brother, Louis F. Lambert, now a resident of Pennsylvania, were for some years interested in a business known as the American Spawn Company.

Colonel Lambert was one of the pioneer leaders in the modern movement to restore the Mississippi River to its rightful place as a great natural transportation artery of the Middle West. He was one of the small group of men who before the World War proposed a six-foot navigation channel, and after this was accomplished, he distinguished himself by his leadership in the long fight for Congressional authorization of a nine-foot channel. He made many trips to Washington to testify before Congressional committees and boards of army engineers, and brought the effective backing of various midwestern shippers groups and other organizations to the project. Probably no Minnesota man derived more sincere satisfaction from the virtual assurance of completion of this navigation artery than Colonel Lambert.

In 1922, the Ramsey County District Court appointed Colonel Lambert receiver for the Equity Cooperative Exchange. For ten years after that his counsel as an attorney and his attributes and business talents were wholly devoted to the building up of cooperative movements in the Northwest. With the inception of the Farmers Union Terminal Association in 1922 he served as secretary-treasurer and general counsel until December, 1932, when he resigned to become legal counsel in this district of the Farmers National Grain Corporation. The source of his keen interest in water transportation was his conviction that such transportation would effect lasting economic savings to agricultural interests of the Northwest. Colonel Lambert was appointed by Governor Christianson chairman of the Minnesota and St. Croix Commission. In 1932 he had been appointed by the St. Paul City Council as "Port authority." He had also served as a member, of the executive committee of the Upper Mississippi Waterways Association. He was a member of the St. Paul Athletic Club.

Colonel Lambert married Mabel G. Gravel, who survives him. They had five children: Mary, of St. Paul; Paul H. and George C. Jr. of St. Paul; Richard F. of St. Paul; Edmund B., of Washington, D. C. All the children were born in St. Paul.

The son Paul H. Lambert for several years has been assistant manager of the Farmers Union Central Exchange, Incorporated. This is one of the organizations growing out of the Farmers Union Terminal Association in which his father had such conspicuous part beginning in 1922. The Farmers Union Central Exchange,

Incorporated, is one of a group of three cooperative organizations serving Farmers Union members in the Northwest. This group includes the Farmers Union Terminal Association, The Farmers Union Central Exchange, Incorporated, and the Farmers Union Livestock Commission Company. The three embrace both marketing and purchasing facilities, on a cooperative and nonprofit basis, altogether constituting one of the strongest and most successful organizations of the kind ever attempted in this country. The magnitude of its operation is indicated by such items as gasoline and oil, the distributions of which is one of the functions of the Farmers Union Central Exchange, Incorporated. This is now second in point of business volume to the Standard Oil Company in North Dakota.

Paul H. Lambert was educated in grade and high schools of St. Paul, and was in his third year at the University of Minnesota when he volunteered to join the colors in 1917. He received a commission at the First Officers Training Camp at Fort Snelling, was assigned to the Field Artillery, and during the greater part of the war was in the Ordnance department. He has been associated with the Farmers Union Central Exchange, Incorporated, since 1928.¹



The role of Col. Lambert in the movement to improve navigation on the Mississippi and why “Lambert’s Landing” was named in his honor are the subjects of the following article in the February 2011 issue of *Waterways*, a publication of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association. ²

¹ Theodore Christianson, 3 *Minnesota: The Land of Sky-tinted Waters* 129-131 (1935).

² *Waterways* 1, 3-4 (February 2011). Permission to post granted by the UMWA, Russell Eichman, Executive Director.

Waterways

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Still important to St. Paul...

Landing has UMWA connection

(Editor's note) Long before roads or railroads reached the area, St. Paul's Lower Landing was one of the most hectic and hardworking steamboat landings in the country and was the main communication and commerce connection to the outside world. Today there's a plaque along the river in the Lowertown area designating the spot as Lambert's Landing and it continues to serve towboats which bring vital commodities up-river and carry agricultural and other bulk commodities to U.S. and world markets.

Many UMWA members know it as "Lambert Landing" and know that it's named for one of the founders of the organization, but may be a bit vague on details. With that in mind, *Waterways* asked Dick Lambert, director of ports and waterways for the Minnesota Department of Transportation, to tell us more about his ancestor and his



(Above) Lambert's Landing frequently provides services to line boats waiting for their down-bound tows.

history. Based on research at the Minnesota History Center and Lambert family records, here's Dick's report.

George C. Lambert was born in 1867 in Menin, Belgium and immigrated to the U. S. and settled in Minnesota with his parents in 1883. He studied law and became an attorney in St. Paul. He and his partner opened the law office of Willrich and Lambert in 1893.

George Lambert enlisted in the Cavalry in 1890 achieving the rank of Captain in 1898, and participated in quelling the Leech Lake Indian uprising in Northern Minnesota that same year. In 1899 Governor John Lind appointed him Adjutant General for the State of Minnesota with the rank of Brigadier General.



Above: St. Paul's Lower Landing in its heyday. Note the river obstacles visible in mid-channel. Pilots on these early boats would have greatly appreciated today's safer, 9-foot channel.

George later returned to the 1st Field Artillery and achieved the rank of Colonel in 1913. The 1st Field Artillery, originally a Minnesota National Guard unit, later became the 151st Field Artillery of the Regular Army. Since then he affectionately retained the title of "Colonel George," by all that knew him.

In 1925 the Upper Mississippi Barge Line Co. was organized in the Twin Cities to build towboats (steamboats) and barges to be used and leased to the Inland Waterways Corp. to be operated on the River. George Lambert joined and was appointed to the Board of Directors of the UMBL Co. in 1927.

C. C. Webber of Minneapolis was President of the Board of Directors. Mr. Webber sent a letter of support to improve navigation for Upper Mississippi to

Walter H. Newton (House of Representatives). In 1928 President Coolidge supported the project. Later, in 1929, the President Hoover also supported navigation on the Upper Mississippi.

The Upper Mississippi Barge Line Directors asked Lachlan Macleay, Secretary of the Mississippi Valley Association in St. Louis, to come to Minneapolis to discuss support for navigation for the Upper Mississippi.

George Lambert met with Colonel C. L. Hall of the Rock Island Corps of Engineers to discuss the nine foot channel project in November of 1928. Hall's decision was that deepening navigation to 9 feet would not be cost effective.

George Lambert and B. F. Beck were asked by the Upper Mississippi Barge Line Board President C. C. Webber to prepare a case for the nine foot channel on the Upper Mississippi that could be presented to the Board of Engineers of the U. S. Corps of Engineers.

In 1929 the Board of Engineers overruled Col. Hall and recommended a survey to determine the cost. This was completed and the estimated cost was \$98 million to convert the Upper Mississippi from a 6 foot to a 9 foot deep navigation system with locks from St. Louis to St. Paul. These results were then presented in time for consideration by the U. S. Congress in December of 1929.

In 1930 the Rivers and Harbors Act authorized and funded the 9 foot deep navigation system for the Upper Mississippi.

Also, about this time with the enactment of the Minnesota and St. Croix Commission, George Lambert was appointed its Chairman by Governor Christianson. This was another organization that supported navigation.

In 1932 the City Council appointed Col. George Lambert as St. Paul's Port Authority in preparation for more barge traffic to the Twin Cities.

The same year, the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association was formed to further support the construction and promote business for the 9 foot navigation system.

Early in 1934, Col. George C. Lambert passed away at the age of 66, before he could see the completion and results of the 9 foot channel project. Several years later in recognition of his work for the river, the City of St. Paul named their Lower River Landing in his honor, “Lambert Landing.”

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