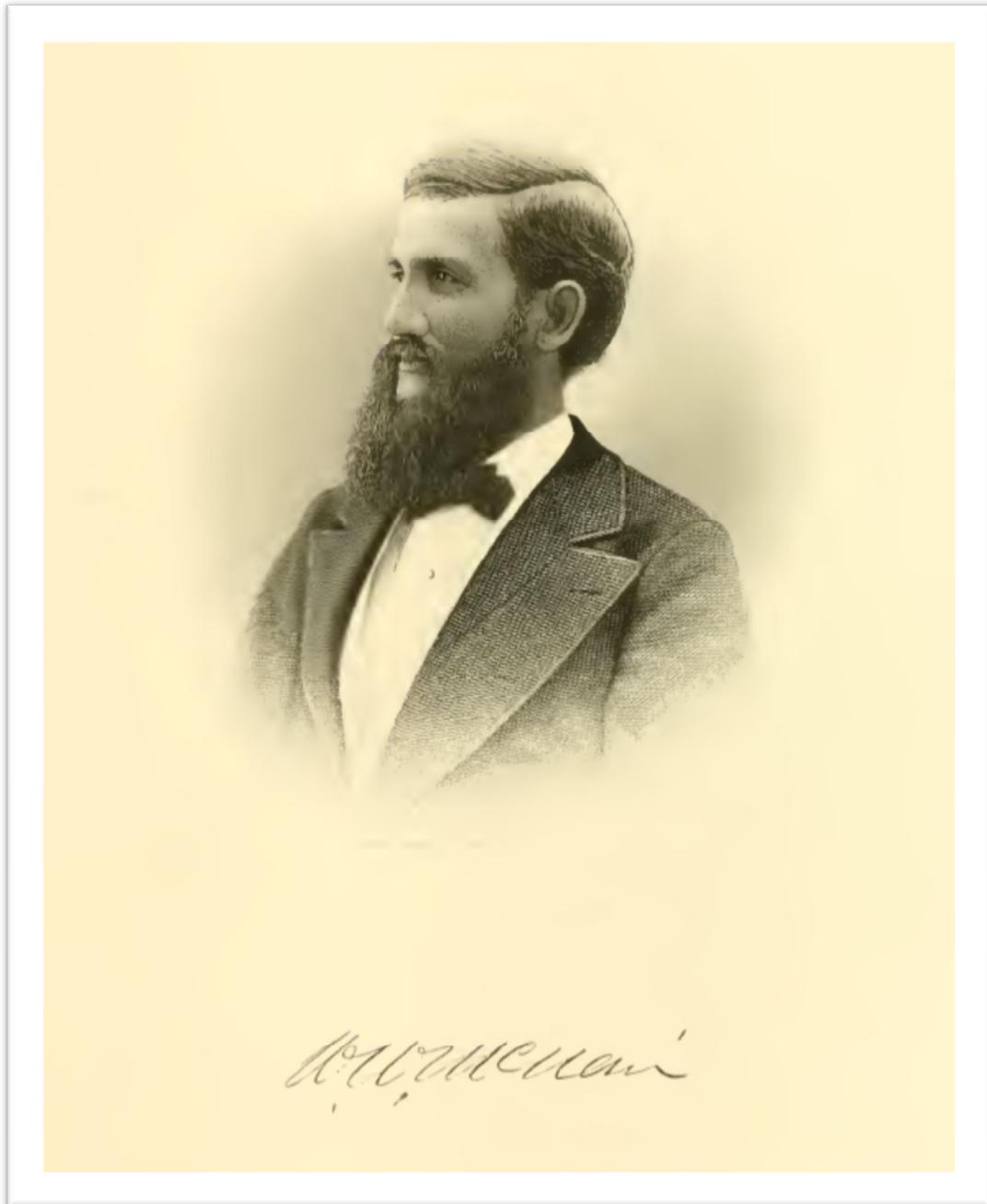


In Memoriam  
**William W. McNair**

January 4, 1836 ··· September 15, 1885



# Table of Contents

Article	Pages
Preface.....	3-4
Obituary, <i>Minneapolis Daily Evening Journal</i> , September 15, 1885.....	5-7
Obituary, <i>Minneapolis Morning Tribune</i> , September 16, 1885.....	8-10
Editorial, <i>Minneapolis Morning Tribune</i> , September 16, 1885.....	10-11
Bar Association Memorial Services, <i>Minneapolis Morning Tribune</i> September 19, 1885.....	11-21
Funeral Services, <i>Minneapolis Morning Tribune</i> September 19, 1885.....	21-23
Security Bank Resolutions of Regret, <i>Minneapolis Morning Tribune</i> September 19, 1885.....	23
Profile in Alonzo, Phelps, editor, <i>Biographical History of the Northwest</i> (1890).....	24-28
Profile in Isaac Atwater, editor, <i>History of the City of Minneapolis</i> (1893).....	29-36
Profile in Horace Hudson, editor, <i>A Half-Century of Minneapolis</i> (1908).....	36-38

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## Preface

By

Douglas A. Hedin  
Editor, MLHP

Those who begin studying the practice of law in Minnesota in the nineteenth century very quickly come across references to Wilson & McNair, Lochren & McNair and, later, Lochren, McNair & Gilfillan, three of the most prominent, politically connected and successful firms in Minneapolis in the late 1860s, 1870s and early 1880s. William Woodbridge McNair was a member of all three. In politics, he was a Democrat; as a businessman he was farsighted, invested well and became rich; in the trial courts he was highly respected.

He had several peculiarities as a trial lawyer that eulogists mentioned in memorial services after his death. Judge William Lochren, his former partner, recalled that he did little to prepare for trial:

As a lawyer he could not be called studious, and gave little time to the preparation of cases for trial. But he had been a careful student and was familiar the general principles and maxims of the law, and needed preparation less than any other practitioner that I ever met. His memory was remarkable. Whatever he had ever known or heard respecting the party, juror or witness, was remembered or made use of so far as could properly be done.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lochren's remarks are posted below, at 19-20, and comport with McNair's profile in Isaac Atwater's *History of Minneapolis*, at 30:

His forensic labors were too constant and exacting to leave much time for the study of books, but his early preparation was thorough, his memory retentive, and all his fund of knowledge at quick command. When occasion required the preparation of a brief or written opinion the work was done thoroughly and exhaustively, but he preferred to let his solid partners make the briefs and draw the pleadings.

This may be the only bar memorial in history where the deceased's failure to prepare for the trials of his cases is mentioned. Lochren's remarks were parroted in a sketch of McNair in Alonzo Phelps's, *Biographical History of the Northwest*, published five years later, and to them was added still another unusual habit of the man:

His memory was remarkable; whatever he had ever known or heard respecting a party, witness, or juror was present in his mind; and, while he never took written note of testimony, he could in his argument give the testimony of any witness not only in the exact words, but with such imitation of voice and manner as to recall and fix it in the minds of the jury and silence any cavil as to the correctness of his statement of the testimony.<sup>2</sup>

McNair died on September 15, 1885, at age forty-nine. Minneapolis newspapers devoted considerable space to his obituary, funeral and memorial services by the bar association. In later years, his widow subscribed to the publication of local histories in which she placed lengthy, flattering profiles of him. They follow, complete though reformatted. Footnotes are by the MLHP.

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<sup>2</sup> This sketch is posted below, at 24-28. Another lawyer who "seldom" made notes during a trial was Lafayette French Sr., relying instead on a prodigious memory. See remarks of Samuel A. Catherwood in "Lafayette French, Sr. (1848-1912) & Lafayette French Jr. (1887-1944)" at 1, 12 (MLHP, 2010).

**Obituary**  
***MINNEAPOLIS DAILY EVENING JOURNAL***  
Tuesday, September 15, 1885.

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**Death of W. W. McNair.**

**The Prominent Lawyer and  
Capitalist Breathes His Last.**

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**The Cause of his Death —Sketch of his  
Life—His Success at the Bar—His  
Characteristics and his Wealth.**

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Wm. W. McNair, the well-known millionaire lawyer, died at his residence 609 Fifth street southeast, this morning at 10 o'clock. The dust was locomotor ataxia, an affection of the spinal cord. It was generally understood that Mr. McNair was suffering from an incurable disease but no one had suspected that death was so near at hand, and the news came with a great shock to his family and friends.

The disease from which McNair died first made its appearance five years ago. For three years past it has caused him a great deal of pain and undermined his general health, although he was still able to appear at his office as usual. Three weeks ago he took to his bed, and never rose from it.

William W. McNair was born in Livingston County, New York, January 4, 1836. He was educated, reared in New York, and lived there until 1854, when he came west. He lived for three years in Wisconsin, where he studied law with Senator Doolittle, and in 1857 removed to Minneapolis. Soon afterwards he was admitted to practice in United States federal courts and soon took a leading position among the lawyers of that time. He was elected county attorney in 1861 and was afterward mayor of the town of St. Anthony

for two years. In 1862 he married in Virginia, Miss Louise Wilson, a sister of Hon. E. M. Wilson. The first law firm with which he was connected was Beman & McNair. He afterwards formed a partnership with E. M. Wilson, which lasted until 1870, when Mr. Wilson went to congress. Mr. McNair formed a partnership with Judge Lochren, under the name of Lochren & McNair. Mr. Gilfillan was afterwards admitted and the firm became Lochren, McNair & Gilfillan. This continued until Mr. Lochren became a judge, and Mr. McNair opened a private office.

As a jurist he was very successful, and his sarcastic, incisive style of speaking made him a formidable adversary at the bar. In the past two or three years he had retired from active practice. He was one of the heaviest stockholders in the Security bank, and would in all probability have eventually become its president.

Mr. McNair was one of the most genial and affable of men.

#### A Rich Fund of Anecdote,

with a bright Irish wit, made him at all times an exceedingly entertaining companion. "He was one of the most generous of givers," said a business associate, "kind-hearted as he could be, full of generosity and unostentatious charity. A great many people of whom the public know little, have had cause to bless him. He had only one fault—he would work too hard and with too little regard for his health. When engrossed in his business or his many public and private enterprises he would work on for hours without rest or a moments intermission for food."

McNair was a director of the Security bank, a trustee of the Westminster church, and a trustee of Macalester college, in which he was deeply interested. He was one of the builders of the Minneapolis & St. Louis railroad and an early mover in the street railroad. He was intimately connected with almost every enterprise that has brought wealth and prosperity to Minneapolis. His personal estate was very large. He owned a farm of one thousand acres within

the city limits, and other properties valued in all over \$1,000,000. He was building a handsome new residence on Linden avenue and Thirteenth Street,<sup>3</sup> and had almost completed plans for a magnificent boulevard through his outside possessions, which he was to give to the city.

He was politically a strong democrat, and a leader in his party. He has often been nominated to important public trusts, but owing to the strong local republican majority has seldom been elected. In 1874 he ran for congress, but was defeated.

Mrs. McNair and two daughters, Agnes and Louise, survive him. The former graduated in June at a Washington seminary, and the latter was preparing to pursue her studies shortly in another Eastern institution.

A special meeting of the Bar Association will probably be called to take action on the death of one of the most prominent, honored and successful members.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Its magnificence led to much comment, an example being this note in the *St. Paul Dispatch*, September 16, 1885, at 2:

The estate of W. W. McNair, who died at Minneapolis yesterday, is estimated at \$2,000,000. Mr. McNair was just completing an elegant residence which, when finished, will rank next to the Washburn residence, if it does not equal it. His death is a severe loss to our sister city and to the state.

Photographs of the residence are on pages 34 & 35.

<sup>4</sup> In the next issue, the *Journal* carried the following anecdote:

Speaking about W. W. McNair said H. S. Van Cleve: "He was the most sensitive man I knew and he would not do anything to offend a friend for the world. It is less than a week ago that father called to see him and during the conversation he went out, left father alone. Knowing his condition father thought no more about it until the next day, which was last Sunday. Mr. McNair sent over for him to come over, and while there he apologized for leaving him so abruptly, saying he was feeling faint at the time and did not realize what he did."

*Minneapolis Daily Evening Journal*, Wednesday, September 16, 1885, at 2.

**Obituary**  
***Minneapolis Morning Tribune***  
**Wednesday, September 16, 1885.**

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**Death of W. W. McNair**

The death of Hon. W. W. McNair, which occurred at his residence, 609 Fifth street southeast, yesterday morning, came with a shock on the community, although to those intimate with the family it was not altogether unexpected. Mr. McNair had been for three or four years afflicted with a spinal trouble, which has at last carried him off in the prime of his days. Mr. McNair's death removes from the community another of the notable men connected with the early and interesting history of the growth of Minneapolis.

He was born in Livingston county New York, January 4, 1836, and was therefore scarcely 50 years of age at his death. He was reared and educated in New York, and lived there until 1854, when he came west. He lived three years in Wisconsin, where he studied law with Senator Doolittle, long prominent at the bar and in the politics of Wisconsin. Removing to St. Anthony in 1857, before the establishment of the state government, he was admitted to practice in the federal territorial courts and soon took a leading position.

He was postmaster of Minneapolis under the administration of Andrew Johnson, before removing his residence to the East side. In 1861 he was elected county attorney, and in 1862 married Miss Louise Wilson, a sister of Hon. Eugene M. Wilson, in April, 1869. He was elected mayor of St. Anthony, succeeding Hon. Winthrop Young. Mr. McNair was a successful chief magistrate, and was honored with re-election in April, 1870.

The first law firm with which he was connected, was that of Beman & McNair. He afterward formed a partnership with brother-in-law, E. M. Wilson, which lasted until the spring of 1869 when the firm of Lochren & McNair was formed, lasting down to 1881, when Mr. Lochren was appointed judge of the district court and retired from practice. J. B. Gilfillan was admitted to the partnership, and the firm of Lochren, McNair & Gilfillan became known throughout the northwest as one of the staunchest and strongest in active practice.

As an advocate Mr. McNair was eminently successful. Without special note as an orator of the pyrotechnic variety, he had an incisive and sarcastic style of speaking, together with a knowledge of the law, which almost invariably told with judge and jury.

In his business and social intercourse, Mr. McNair was cheerful and affable, until disease had broken down his health and sapped the vital energies of his nature. His wit was genial and sparkling, and always ready. He was one of the most generous of givers, kind in heart and charitable without ostentation.

In religion he was a Presbyterian, and in its first days, when Rev. R. F. Sample was its pastor, was one of the pillars of the Andrew church. When the Westminster church was established the McNair family followed the old pastor to this side of the river, where Mr. McNair was again one of the church's chief supporters. He was a trustee of Macalester college, to which he contributed liberally in funds and in whose successful establishment he always took a lively interest.

He was one of the builders of the Minneapolis and St. Louis road and an early advocate of the street railways. He was intimately connected with nearly every enterprise that brought prosperity to the growing city of Minneapolis. After his retirement from legal practice Mr. McNair became deeply engaged in business. His personal estate, which amounted to over a million dollars, was composed of stock in the Security bank and various pieces of real estate in the city, the largest item of which was a farm of 1,000 acres within the city limits. A few weeks ago Mr. McNair offered the city land for a boulevard, 100 feet wide, through this fine property free, and the park commissioners were negotiating with him to settle the details of the enterprise when the illness which caused his death compelled a cessation from business. He was building a magnificent mansion on Linden avenue and Thirteenth street, which promised to be the equal of General Washburn's fine residence, which has been the pride of the city for several years.

Politically Mr. McNair was a strong Democrat and a leader of his party. He was frequently solicited to accept nominations, but very seldom consented to do so, preferring to work for the triumph of the party's principles than to grasp at its rewards. He did, however, hold, as has already been stated, the office of mayor of St. Anthony for two terms, in 1869 and 1870. He made a strong run for congress

in the old third district against Dr. Jacob H. Stewart, of St. Paul, who died about a year ago, polling 20,727 votes to his opponent's 22,823. In 1883 he was unanimously nominated for governor of the democratic state convention, but declined as he was on the eve of trip for his health, and did not feel able to make the race.

He leaves a wife and two daughters, Agnes and Louise, the former of whom graduated last June from Washington seminary, and a brother, Mr. H. W. McNair, junior member of the large lumber firm of Nelson, Tenney & Co.

Mr. McNair's loss will be felt deeply in social and business circles, where fine qualities of heart and head had made him a favorite. The bar association will hold a special meeting on Friday to memorialize in a becoming manner one of its most distinguished members.

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**Editorial**  
*Minneapolis Morning Tribune,*  
Wednesday, September 16, 1885.

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**The Death of Mr. McNair.**

That the health of Mr. William W. McNair had long been seriously impaired and that recently he had been very ill, was generally known but the news of his death yesterday forenoon was wholly unanticipated, and was received with sincere and universal sorrow.

Mr. McNair, though he would not have been fifty years of age until next year, was one of the pioneer settlers of Minneapolis, having come to the village of St Anthony in 1857 as a young lawyer just of legal age and just ready to begin the practice of his profession. He became at once a man of prominence in local affairs, and soon won a high standing at the bar.

While still a very young man he filled acceptably such offices as county attorney and mayor. He has always been identified with the prominent enterprises of Minneapolis, and through sagacity and business talent, and a foresight which enabled him to take early

advantage of the subsequent growth of the city he acquired a very large fortune. His public spirit was commensurate with his prosperity, and his gifts have been many and liberal. Macalester College, of which he was a trustee, was a recipient of his bounty. He was a man of prominence in political circles, and was well known as one of the leading Democrats of Minnesota, His residence in a Republican city, district and state, alone precluded his election to high offices. In 1876 he was a candidate for congress in this district and polled a vote which fell only a little short of that received by his successful Republican competitor. In various circles where he was as highly esteemed as he was useful, William W. McNair will long be missed.

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**Bar Association Memorial Services**  
*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*  
Saturday, September 19, 1885.

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**TRIBUTES TO THE MEMORY OF  
HON. W. W. McNAIR.**

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**Action of Members of the Bar Association —  
Services at the Church**

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The Minneapolis Bar association met at the district court room at 9 o'clock yesterday morning to take appropriate action on the death of Hon. W. W. McNair. In the absence of Hon. Eugene M. Wilson, president, the gathering was called to order by Attorney General Hahn. The attendance was large, among those present being the following:

Judge Atwater, Colonel R. C. Benton, H. G. O. Morrison, C. H. Woods, C. H. Benton, Judge Babcock, Seagrave Smith, Judge Daniel

Fish, W. P. Roberts, L. A. Reed, W. E. Hale, Dr. Loring, Judge Ell Torrance, A. B. Barton, A. T. Ankeny, A. M. Keith, Thomas Lowry, E. C. Chatfield, John Atwater, Judge N. H. Hemiup, E. H. Rossman, John H. Steele, John R. Vanderlip, H. O. Odell, S. L. Baker, C. A. Ebert, A. L. Levi, and others.

## REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL HAHN.

Attorney General Hahn spoke as follows:

It is unnecessary for me, gentlemen, to explain to you the purpose and object of this assembly. The occasion is an exceedingly sad one. In one sense it is common, and in another very unusual. It is common in that it is death, the common lot of all. It is extraordinary in that in this instance that great messenger, who is said to love a shining mark, has summoned one of the oldest in point of service at this bar; one of the most brilliant in point of mental ability, and one of the most successful both within and without his profession of any member of this bar, or of the bar of this state.

My acquaintance with our distinguished brother was of the most casual character, and limited to the past three years. It was never my privilege to either meet him or to witness his efforts at the bar. My knowledge, therefore, of his personal qualities and of his professional attainments is necessarily limited to the estimate in which he was held in this community, where he has long resided, the opinion of his professional brethren, and the judgment of the courts before whom he appeared. To us, then, who know how seldom a lawyer undeservedly attains professional eminence, the fact that Mr. McNair was so highly esteemed by both bench and bar as a lawyer, is sufficient evidence to us that his professional reputation was richly merited.

The high esteem in which he was held in this community, where almost the entire period of his manhood was passed, is sufficient assurance that he possessed qualities of both head and heart which add luster to the most brilliant and purify and adorn the most humble. In view of my limited acquaintance, it will not be expected that I should speak either of his personal qualities or his professional reputation. Those of you who have known him so long, and who have met him so frequently, both at the bar and socially, will doubtless bear testimony to his virtues.

In the very prime and vigor of his manhood he has been called away from us to the bar of heaven. We can have no doubt that he will there find the Judge his advocate and secure the approval of that higher court.

### RESOLUTIONS OF REGRET.

The committee, made up of Judges Atwater and Shaw and Thomas Lowry, appointed at the meeting of the association called immediately after the death of Mr. McNair, to draft appropriate resolutions of regret at the demise, then presented the following:

We, the members of the bar of Hennepin county, deem it fitting to place on record a brief memorial of our sincere regard and love for our brother, Hon. William W. McNair, who died in this city on the fifteenth day of September, 1885, aged 49. Except during the last four years he was in the active, constant and successful practice of his profession at this bar during the twenty-eight years of his residence here. He soon reached and always maintained a position in the very front ranks of the profession, preferring the actual strife of trials to the quieter work of the office.

In contested cases before juries his quickness of perception, ready tact, and great power as an advocate were brought into play, and in such contests he had few equals. Faithful and zealous in the interest of the client, honest and earnest in his convictions of duty, taking an active interest in everything affecting the public good, or the material interests of the community, state or country; benevolent without ostentation, and sagacious and far-sighted respecting public affairs, as in his own private business, he deservedly enjoyed, and to an unusual degree the regard and confidence of the people of his community and of the state. We respectfully ask that this brief expression of our regard for his memory be entered upon the records of this court.

### JUDGE ATWATER'S TRIBUTE.

Judge Atwater, as chairman of the committee, accompanied the presentation with the following remarks:

In preparing these resolutions, Mr. Chairman, the committee felt that this is a very inadequate expression of what was really the character of our departed associate. I cannot myself so well speak of him in his professional capacity, for the reason that I have been absent from the bar for a large part of the time when he was most active in it. To me he was more a friend than an associate in the practice of the law. I know his qualities in private life. I know his warm feeling of regard whom he called his friends, and they were equaled but by few. It was necessary to understand Mr. McNair fully to have known him intimately. Those who only met him casually could not fairly measure the man. There are large public interests in which Mr. McNair was very active, and which are known mostly outside of the members of the bar of Hennepin county.

His benevolence in these directions will be appreciated by those who have been the recipients of it. In all moral, educational and religious work, and in whatever tended to benefit the community and not the profession alone. Mr. McNair was always foremost, and yet so unostentatious that perhaps but few were aware of it. We feel that the community has sustained a very deep and irreparable loss.

His place may be filled, doubtless will be, but such men can never be spared with advantage to a community. To us it seems peculiarly sad, cut off as he was in the prime of life. Ordinarily he might have looked for many years of life, to have enjoyed the fruits of his successful labor. But it has been otherwise ruled by a divine providence. It can be said of him, however, that his good works will live after him.

"Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet  
And blossom in the dust."

#### JUDGE SHAW'S REMARKS.

Judge Shaw also spoke. He said:

I can scarcely expect to add much to what has been said concerning the character and memory of our deceased brother in the resolutions which have been offered, and the remarks which have already been made. I may say that my own acquaintance and association with Mr. McNair compel me to endorse, cordially and

heartily, every word that has been said in those resolutions but very imperfectly and inadequately express what might be said concerning the character and qualities of Mr. McNair.

My own acquaintance with him has been mostly and almost entirely of a professional character. I have not been intimate with him in a social way, and I am not, therefore, prepared from personal knowledge to speak of him in private life, or in any other capacity than that of his professional career. I can, however, testify to what his repute is in that regard. My own knowledge of his repute in respect to his private character and social qualities coincide with what has been said in the presence of the bar here this morning.

But I wish to speak of Mr. McNair for moment in the phase of his character in which I more intimately knew him. I have practised at this bar with him for over fifteen years. When I came to this the city to enter into the practice of the law Mr. McNair was an active practitioner, and I have this to say in relation to his abilities and qualities as a lawyer: that he was a man that wherever or whenever you met him he would put his opponent to the test and to the use and employment of the best that was in him. That is perhaps as much as could be said of any man. When one has such command of his own faculties and abilities, and is always ready and able to put himself in a position in the trial of a case such as to call forth on the part of his opponent the best exercise of his abilities, always and without fail, then it may be said that that man is one who can be depended upon, and whose qualities as a lawyer are always up to the mark. Mr. McNair was remarkable, as has been stated in these resolutions, for the quickness of his perceptions, and his ability was peculiarly shown in the trial of cases before a court or jury. It was there that his efforts shown with a lustre which I have rarely seen equaled, and I think I am warranted in saying that I have never in the course of my professional career seen a man, who in his aptitude, in his quick and intuitive perception, his infallible judgment of what was the best thing to do upon the emergency of the moment, was the peer of W. W. McNair.

So far as my social acquaintance with him has gone, I think he was one well fitted to shine in social life. He certainly was an agreeable companion, and was the life of any company in which he happened to be. He was a man of ready wit, of agreeable address; and who, in his late recourse with his fellow men, would at once recommend himself

to the affection and respect of those with whom he came in contact. He was a man of high moral perceptions, a man, who, in every position in life, in which he was placed, merited the confidence of those who placed their reliance in him. He was always ready to do the best that was in him in the performance of every duty that was imposed upon him.

### TESTIMONY TO HIS MERITS.

Colonel Benton said:

Mr. Chairman, it is due to the very kindly relations which I have sustained toward our departed brother that I should bear a word of testimony to his merits. I had the pleasure for some six years of my life in this city of meeting Mr. McNair very frequently in our profession, and while I can add little to what has been so well said in the resolutions and in the remarks of those who have preceded me, it is due to him that I should offer this cumulative testimony to his character. It has been my pleasure to have a large circle of acquaintances among members of our profession in this and other states, and I can say, in accordance with the statement of Judge Shaw, that I have never met his equal in some respects. The resolutions aptly express it when they speak of his quickness of perception and his tact in the management of cases. He had a wonderful quickness of perception; he had a wonderful tact, and an appreciation of the right thing in the right place. He had that intuitive perception of what was the proper and just thing to meet the emergency of that particular case or that particular jury such as no other man I ever met.

In the course of our professional experience it was almost invariably my portion to be on the opposite side from Mr. McNair, and I can bear testimony to one thing which is not adverted to in the resolutions—and that is the uniform good temper and equability of our friend who has departed. We have been together in many hard fought contests, and I never saw him thrown off his guard. I never saw him ruffled. I have seen him earnest, but never angry. I have seen him a very hard man to meet, but never an unfair opponent, never an uncourteous opponent. He was always good-natured and self-possessed; always a hard man to meet, but never abusive. He never allowed his zeal to outrun his discretion in that respect; always

preserved his good temper. One thing more that I ought to bear testimony to, and that is from personal knowledge, not only in court but out of court. It is that our friend had a kindly heart and a generous disposition. He was sensitive to the appeals of affliction; he felt for misfortunes, even the misfortunes of those to whom his professional duty required him to be adverse. I have seen that. I have seen it in his private connections. A kindly heart and good man has gone from us.

Judge Babcock moved that the committee be directed to present the resolutions to the district court at this time, and to the supreme court at its next sitting. Mr. Thayer offered an amendment, which was accepted, that a copy of the resolutions be presented to the family of the deceased. The motion was amended was adopted unanimously.

#### FROM THE YOUNGER MEMBERS.

Mr. John H. Long said:

Mr. Chairman—As one of the younger members of this bar, it is well that I, too, should cast a flower upon the bier of Mr. McNair.

I heartily concur in the sentiment of the resolutions which have been read, the numerous obituary notices which have been published in the newspaper, and the tender and eloquent eulogies which have been pronounced, by his associates in honor of our lamented brother all of which seem to me to do but imperfect justice to his rare attainments in the profession which he loved and honored and to his exalted qualities of mind and heart which have taken strong hold upon the affections of our brotherhood, and upon the community at large.

It is more fitting that the senior members of the bar, who have known him longest and consequently better, should, as they have, speak most at length of the life and character of him whose death is to each of us a great and irreparable loss. Every one of us is compelled to say in sorrow, "I have lost a friend," and in the breast of each there is welling up a tribute to his memory more tender, more beautiful than we can express.

Nearly three years ago came a stranger to Minneapolis to embark in my chosen profession, and from that time until his death Mr.

McNair was to me a most valued friend. It was upon his motion I was admitted to practice in this court. He kindly took me by the hand and bade me God speed; and I remained in his office nine months, where I saw him nearly every day and often had his advice.

To him my debt of gratitude is very, great, and not soon to be forgotten. I deeply feel and mourn his death. Not only this bar, but this city, this county, this state and America have lost a bright ornament.

“There is a reaper whose name is Death,  
And, with his sickle keen,  
He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,  
And the flowers that grow between.”

“Death loves a shining mark,” but perhaps the shaft has never fallen upon one who was more esteemed or whose loss was more deeply felt than our lamented brother who has just fallen. He has done well his part among his fellow men, and, if he did not reach all the high places for which he may have aspired, it can be truly said by all that knew him that his life was a success, and in his death the community has sustained an irreparable loss.

Well has it been said, my friends, that life is a fountain fed by a thousand streams, that perish if one be dried. It is a silver cord twisted in a thousand strings, that parts asunder if one be broken. Frail and thoughtless mortals are surrounded by innumerable dangers, which make it more strange that they escape so long than that so many perish so suddenly at last. We are encompassed with accidents, ever ready to crush the mouldering tenement that we inhabit. The seeds of the disease are planted in our constitution by the hand of nature: the earth and the atmosphere whence we draw our life are impregnated with death. The soul that animates the body by vivifying fire, lends to wear it out by its own action. Death links in ambush about all our paths.

Our friend and brother died in the prime of life. His success had been equal to that of the favored ones of his day. He had acquired fortune, friends, and the confidence of the public. He left us at a time when the past yielded much for gratifying retrospection, when the present afforded the richest elements of happiness, and the future invited him to higher hands and ampler resources of enjoyment. All that he possessed and all that he hoped for could not stay the hand

of the Great Destroyer, silent and sure and remorseless. Death heeds neither youth nor age, genius nor learning, poverty nor wealth, honor nor shame, the tears of relatives and friends, nor the cold indifference of strangers. All equally. The unwearied reaper gathers to his ever tilling, yet ever unfilled garner, the tomb. Nature shrinks from the darkness of the grave but revelation pours into it her cheering light.

In the midst of life we are in death, yet it is not all of life to live. The court and bar have occasion to notice the frequent occurrence of these memorial scenes. Lawyers are a short lived class. Frequent and thick like autumn leaves they wither and fall. The fallen leaf, ever in its decay, enriches the parent earth, so we in death may contribute by our virtues to the death of our common humanity.

### THE BAR'S TESTIMONIAL.

Judge Atwater then tendered the resolutions of the court, represented by Judges Lochren and Koon on the bench. The judge also made the request expressed in Judge Babcock's motion, and further asked for the adjournment of court for the day in order for members of the bar to attend the funeral services in the afternoon.

### JUDGE LOCHREN'S EULOGY.

Judge Lochren accepted the resolutions, with the following words:

Gentlemen of the bar of Hennepin county: It is most appropriate that some testimonial such as you have presented should have a place in the records of this court, at the bar of which most of the prominent work of our friend and brother was performed, and where his presence was familiar for a quarter of a century.

Probably no one present had such opportunity for knowing him as I did. As a brother attorney slightly his senior I was fairly intimate with him from the time he first came here in the spring of 1857, and soon perceived, as did everyone, that he was certain to become prominent in his profession.

After my return from the army we began to try cases together, and this continued to a considerable extent, until we formed a general partnership in the spring of 1869, which continued while I remained at the bar, Mr. Gilfillan being associated with us most of the time

During all this time our relations were closer than those of business partners. We were firm friends, between whom no shadow of dissension or difference ever arose. And he had the characteristics which attract friendship and bind men to their possessor. He was affable, genial, generous and kind-hearted, and true as steel, with nothing of selfishness or double-dealing in his composition.

In many respects he was an extraordinary man. I do not speak of his sagacity and foresight in business, the evidences of which remain in his ample fortune. Besides this he was almost among the first and most effective in promoting all enterprises for advancing the material, and business interests of this city and community, and while never wasteful, extravagant, nor given to ostentatious[ness], he bestowed much, in a quiet way, for purposes of religion and charity.

As a lawyer he could not be called studious, and gave little time to the preparation of cases for trial. But he had been a careful student and was familiar the general principles and maxims of the law, and needed preparation less than any other practitioner that I ever met. His memory was remarkable. Whatever he had ever known or heard respecting the party, juror or witness, was remembered or made use of so far as could properly be done. His tact in the examination of witnesses, and especially in the cross-examination of hostile witnesses was unsurpassed, and certainly he has not been surpassed at this bar as an advocate before juries.

Although he always took an intelligent interest in public affairs and frequently appeared in conventions and upon political committees, and at rare times was prevailed upon to stand as the candidate of his party for some office, it is certain that he never sought or desired office, and could hardly be called a politician, he had always the courage and manhood to act upon his own convictions of right and duty, from which he never deflected in the slightest to secure popular favor.

In his family relations no man was more fortunate or happier. His affections centered in his home and family, where contentment and love abounded. But with everything to live for, he has been removed while yet in his prime, and we can but express our regret and sorrow.

Gentlemen, the clerk will record your memorial in the minutes for this day, and in respect for the memory of our deceased brother, the court will, at the close of this proceeding adjourn.

### A FEW WORDS FROM JUDGE KOON.

Judge Koon spoke briefly, saying:

It is not necessary for me, perhaps, to add anything to what has been said by Judge Lochren. In fact, my own personal acquaintance with Mr. McNair at the bar, my opportunities of observing him as a lawyer have been so limited that it would be impossible for me to accurately or justly to estimate his character or ability in his profession. But from what I did see and know of him, and from somewhat intimate personal, non-professional and business acquaintance with him for five or six years, I cheerfully and heartily concur not only in the sentiments expressed in the resolutions, but for what has been said by the members of the bar and my associate, and think it proper and fit that this memorial should stand upon the records of this court in respect to the memory of our deceased brother.

The meeting then adjourned. Court also adjourned at once for the day.

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### The Funeral Services.

The last tribute of mortal man to the dead was paid the late W. W. McNair yesterday afternoon. Impressive funeral services were held at the Westminster Presbyterian church, that were largely attended by lending business and professional men, who gathered to express by their presence their esteem for the deceased and regret at his death. As appropriate to the occasion, the church was richly draped. Across the organ loft were heavy festoons of crape, with the altar, desk, and front of the platform covered with the same sombre material. Upon a pedestal at the right of the platform was a large floral cross and anchor, with a sickle of flowers and sheaf of wheat on the opposite side. The table between bore several pieces of flower work. At 2 o'clock the remains of the dead man were brought from the family residence on Linden avenue, corner Thirteenth street north, to the church.

The pall-bearers were Judge Lochren, Thomas Lowry, Judge Shaw, Judge Vanderburgh, C. H. Pettit, Hon. C. M. Loring, R. P. Russell and P. M. Babcock.

In the meantime the church had been well filled by those attending the services. The members of the Minneapolis bar association occupied the left center section, with the trustees of Macalester college in the section at the right, The body rested in a plain black cloth covered casket, that bore no was beautiful in its design absence of color.

The services were opened by the singing of the chant composed by Professor Procter, "My Jesus, as Thou Wilt." The church quartette of Mrs. David Cassiday, soprano Miss Annette L. Bunce, contralto Dr. W. A. Jones, tenor and Dr. S. F. Mackey, bass, attended, with Professor Procter at the organ. Succeeding the singing Rev. T. A. McCurdy, president of Macalester college, assisted by Rev. Peter Stryker, of the Andrew Presbyterian church, officiated, Rev. Dr. Sample, pastor of the Westminster, being absent. Rev. Mr. McCurdy read a selection from the Bible, beginning with the familiar words. "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday," and then offered a devout prayer.

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## THE SERMON.

Rev. M. Stryker read the hymn, "Father, What 'Ere of Earthly Bliss," which was sung to the tune of "Naomi." after which Rev. Mr. McCurdy spoke at some length upon the life and character of Mr. McNair, and the lesson to be drawn from his death. After regretting the absence of Dr. Sample, who could, Mr. McCurdy said, speak better than any one else of the deceased out of his long and close acquaintance, it was said that even a limited acquaintance gave pleasing glimpses of Mr. McNair's sterling qualities. It was asserted that the city had lost no ordinary man in the death of Mr. McNair; his associates had lost no ordinary friend; the church had lost no ordinary member; his family have sustained no ordinary loss. But while mourning around the silent coffin it was urged that those with hearts sorrowing should remember that it was the will of Him who

**gave the life that had been returned to its creator. The mysterious ways of Providence were then touched upon, the speaker dwelling tenderly upon the nearness death brought all to Him who does all things well. "Take your grieving heart, your sorrow," said the speaker at the close, "and lay them at the feet of Jesus and be comforted. Do with these earthly remains as the disciples did with the remains of John. Take up the body and bury it, and go and tell Jesus."**

**The singing of the solo, "One sweetly solemn thought," by Mrs. Cassiday, and a prayer by Rev. Mr. Stryker followed. The casket was then removed to the funeral carriage and conveyed to Lakewood for interment,**

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### **Deplore His Loss.**

**A meeting of the directors of the Security bank was held yesterday, at which the following resolutions of regret at the death of Mr. McNair were adopted:**

**Resolved, That the members of the board of directors of the Security bank, as individuals and as a board, greatly deplore the loss we have sustained by the lamented death of our beloved fellow-member, William W. McNair, who has been a member of this board of directors since its organization that we testify unqualifiedly to his character as a business man, as a citizen and as a Christian, and to his worth as a friend and as a man that we feel that in his death this board, with which he has been so long Identified, and the community at large, have sustained a loss which is irreparable.**

**Resolved, That we tender to his family our heartfelt sympathy in this their great bereavement and sorrow.**

**Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be transmitted to his family.**

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Profile from Alonzo Phelps,  
*4 Biographical History of the Northwest*  
(1890).

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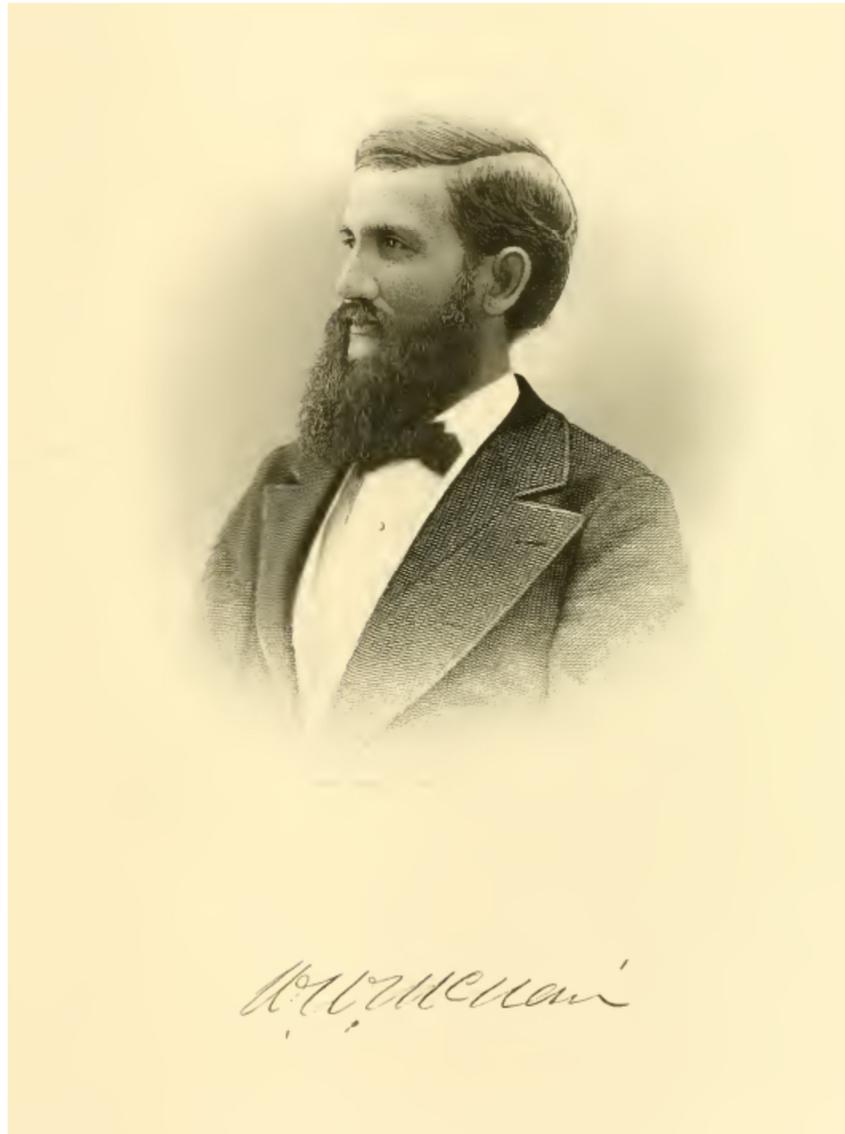
**WILLIAM W. McNAIR.**

AMONG the young men whom a spirit of enterprise brought to Minnesota in territorial times, and whose energy, enterprise, and intelligence contributed in marked degree to the rapid growth and development of that State, few accomplished as much of practical value to the commonwealth as William W. McNair. Though quiet and unobtrusive in demeanor, and shrinking from rather than seeking notoriety, he saw clearly the possibilities and future of the State, and especially of the city of Minneapolis, where he dwelt; and by his foresight, energy, and material aid helped to initiate, and urge on to consummation and completion, most of the enterprises of business or public character, which, with its natural advantages, have brought to that city its growth and prosperity, almost without parallel in this country or elsewhere.

William Woodbridge McNair was born at Groveland, Livingston County, New York, on the fourth day of January, 1836, and was the eldest son of William Wilson McNair, whose family, of Scotch-Irish descent, removed from eastern Pennsylvania before the beginning of the present century. His mother, Sarah Pierrepont, was of English lineage, a descendant of Rev. James Pierrepont, one of the founders of Yale College; a family which traced its ancestry in a direct line from Robert de Pierrepont, who came over from Normandy with William the Conqueror.

From each of his parents he inherited strong and decided traits of character, and even his childhood gave evidence of marked intellectual ability. His education was obtained in the academics at Genesee and Canandaigua. But his well-directed reading brought more of general knowledge and information than is usually attained with much great educational advantages. The ardent piety of his parents left an impress upon his character which never was effaced, and exercised an ennobling influence on his life. In early youth he

united with the Presbyterian Church, to which his parents adhered, and he continued through life an earnest, conscientious member of that church, squaring his conduct with his profession while avoiding all ostentation of religion as he avoided ostentation and pretence of every kind.



In 1855, somewhat against the wishes and advice of his father, who regarded him as still too young to make his way in the world, he came to Wisconsin and entered as a law student the office of Hon. James R. Doolittle and Hon. John W. Cary at Racine, studying hard and making rapid progress. But, without waiting for admission to the

bar, the report of prospects farther west induced him to come to Minneapolis early in 1857. He was impressed with the natural advantages of the place, with its immense water power, at the head of navigation of the Mississippi, and foresaw that the village of a few hundred inhabitants, on the verge of civilization, must become in brief time one of the great business centres of the country. Here he made his home and resumed the study of the law. He also at this time pre-empted and became the owner of one hundred and sixty acres of land in the neighboring county of Carver. During the same year he was admitted to the bar, and soon made his way to the front rank of his profession. In 1859 he formed a law partnership with H. D. Beman, which continued until 1861. Then he formed a partnership with Eugene M. Wilson, which lasted until the election of Mr. Wilson to Congress in 1868. Then followed a partnership with William Lochren, in which John B. Gilfillan became, in 1871, a member, and which continued until Mr. Lochren became a judge of the district court, in 1881. The firm of McNair & Gilfillan continued in business until 1884, when, upon the election of Mr. Gilfillan to Congress, Mr. McNair finally withdrew from the practice of the law.

In the trial of causes before juries Mr. McNair was for many years matchless at the bar of Hennepin County. He was well versed in the principles of jurisprudence, and his genial, companionable qualities, united with his character for strict integrity, insured him the confidence and good will of juries. His tact and skill in the examination of witnesses, especially in the cross-examination of hostile witnesses, was unequalled, and he was a most powerful and convincing advocate, always supporting his solid arguments with apt and pleasing illustrations, and rising at times to fervid eloquence. His memory was remarkable; whatever he had ever known or heard respecting a party, witness, or juror was present in his mind; and, while he never took written note of testimony, he could in his argument give the testimony of any witness not only in the exact words, but with such imitation of voice and manner as to recall and fix it in the minds of the jury and silence any cavil as to the correctness of his statement of the testimony. For many years the firms of which he was a member had a very large practice, extending to almost all the important cases in the district court of Hennepin County, and Mr. McNair was constantly engaged before juries in

term time, working beyond the capacity of most men and with notable success.

Though he never sought public office, he took an intelligent, earnest interest in public affairs and followed his own convictions of right and expediency regardless of the popular current of thought. He was in accord with the Democratic party, and soon became and continued to be one of its most honored and influential leaders in the State. In 1876 he was prevailed upon to accept its nomination for Congress, the Republican majority in the district being so great as to preclude hope of success. Although his personal popularity carried him several thousand votes in advance of his ticket, he was not elected. In 1883 he was the unanimous choice of his party as its candidate for governor, and was nominated for that office, notwithstanding his previous assurance to many that his health would not permit him to accept the nomination, and he fell for that reason compelled to decline that honor. His previous services as county attorney of Hennepin County, mayor of the city of St. Anthony before its union with Minneapolis, member of the Board of Education, and of other boards connected with the municipal government, though important, had little connection with politics.

But it was his influence and energy in the promotion, construction, and establishment of railroads and other enterprises tending to the growth and prosperity of Minneapolis that produced the most permanent beneficial results to that place. The first railroads in the State built upon land grants were all projected and controlled by citizens of the rival city of St. Paul, then the larger town, having the entire jobbing trade of the region to the northwest, and all railroads were made to centre in St. Paul, apparently, so far as could be done, avoiding all direct communication with Minneapolis. The great water power of the latter place was but little improved, facilities for transportation being inadequate and rates too high to admit of successful competition with other manufacturing localities.

Mr. McNair was the first to perceive and urge the need of providing greater transportation facilities; and he, in concert with other influential and equally enterprising citizens of Minneapolis, projected and constructed the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, and obtained

direct connection with the Lake-Superior & Mississippi Railroad and Northern Pacific Railroad. This gave an impetus to manufacturing, which in turn produced such increase of freight as soon attracted to the city every railroad of any importance in the State, lowering rates and increasing manufacturing, by the side of which a large jobbing trade came into existence, and business of every kind has flourished, and population and wealth increased beyond precedent. Mr. McNair was also one of the projectors and active promoters of the Minneapolis Gaslight Company, the Minneapolis Street Railway Company, and indeed of every enterprise tending to the material growth of the city. And all his enterprises were practical and successful, and brought wealth to himself as well as to the community.

He was married August 21, 1862, in Virginia, to Louise, daughter of Hon. Edgar C. Wilson, formerly member of Congress from that State, and father of Eugene M. Wilson, then Mr. McNair's law partner. His marriage was a most felicitous and happy one, and from all the toils and cares of his active, busy life, he could turn to the perfect enjoyment of his home, and the fond love he bore to his wife and children. Mrs. McNair and their only children, Agnes O. and Louise P. McNair, still reside together in his elegant mansion.

Mr. McNair, as before stated, was sincerely religious, but without a trace of intolerance or austerity. He gave liberally to the support and furtherance of religion, and did not confine his benefactions to his own church or denomination. He also bestowed much for charitable uses, but sedulously avoided parade of gifts whenever that was possible.

Socially he was one of the most agreeable of men; affable, genial, generous, kind-hearted, and unflinchingly true to his friends, he had the characteristics which attract and bind men to their possessor, and no man in the community was more generally or more highly esteemed. Whatever of work or enterprise engaged his attention was carried on with little regard for his personal strength or power of endurance, and his naturally vigorous constitution at length gave way. He died at his home, September 15, 1885.

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**Profile from Isaac Atwater**  
**1 *History of the City of Minneapolis,***  
**(1893).**

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**WILLIAM WOODBRIDGE McNAIR.** The lamented death of W. W. McNair, which occurred September 15, 1885, removed from Minneapolis one who was a most enthusiastic and efficient participant in public enterprises, a leader at the bar, and above all, one whose vivacity of disposition, honorable life, and genial companionship, had endeared him to all who knew him.

He was born at Groveland, Livingston County, New York, on the fourth day of January, 1836, and was the eldest son of William Wilson McNair, whose family of Scotch-Irish descent removed from Eastern Pennsylvania before the beginning of the present century. His mother, Sarah Pierrepont, was of English lineage, a descendant of Rev. James Pierrepont, one of the founders of Yale College, a family which traced its ancestry in a direct line from Robert de Pierrepont, who accompanied William, the Conqueror, from Normandy in the invasion of A. D. 1066. He attended the academies of Genesee and Canandaigua, and added to the acquisitions of the schools by careful and well directed reading. The home was a devotedly Christian one, and in early boy-hood he united with the Presbyterian Church, and remained through his busy life an earnest and devout member of that church.

At the age of nineteen he left the home of his youth and entered the law office of Hon. J. R. Doolittle, at Racine, Wis., where for two years he was a careful student of the law, which he had decided to make his profession. Looking westward for a location, he was so charmed with the beauty of Minnesota, and so prepossessed by the advantages offered at the Falls of St. Anthony, that in 1857 he took up his residence in Minneapolis, and continuing his studies, was admitted to the bar during the same year. Two years later he formed a partnership with Henry D. Beman, an accomplished gentleman and able lawyer of southern origin. At the breaking out of the war of the

rebellion, his partner returned to his southern home, and Mr. McNair associated himself with the late Eugene M. Wilson. The new firm had a large practice but was broken up by Mr. Wilson's election to Congress in 1868. The firm of Lochren and McNair was then formed, to which J. B. Gilfillan was afterwards admitted, and continued the leading law office of the city until Mr. Lochren's appointment as Judge of the District Court in 1881. The business was continued by McNair and Gilfillan until the election of the latter to Congress in 1884, when, through impaired health and the pressure of outside business connections, he retired from law practice.

Mr. McNair practiced in the courts of Minnesota for twenty-seven years. For four years prior to 1863 he was County Attorney of Hennepin County. While efficient as a practicing attorney, his inclination and adaptation were rather for the defense than the prosecution. No member of the bar during the period of his practice appeared in as many trials as he. At every term of court he was incessantly engaged in contested cases, sometimes appearing in nearly every trial. It was a subject of wonder how one, not especially vigorous, could sustain so constant a strain upon his physical powers, and endure such intense tension of mind. But he always came up fresh to every new encounter. He was almost invariably successful. His tact and resources were exhaustless. He seemed to have an intuitive perception of the mental state of witness or juror. His memory was tenacious, and he seemed to know the history and idiosyncrasy of every one coming in contact with him. His skill in the examination of witnesses was faultless, and in his addresses to the jury he seemed to know at once the secret of conviction. He was logical, humorous, accurate, and at times truly eloquent. In his relations to the bar he was uniformly courteous, and if he differed from the court he would almost seem to put the court in the wrong. His forensic labors were too constant and exacting to leave much time for the study of books, but his early preparation was thorough, his memory retentive, and all his fund of knowledge at quick command. When occasion required the preparation of a brief or written opinion the work was done thoroughly and exhaustively, but he preferred to let his solid partners make the briefs and draw the pleadings. His forte was the *nisi prius* trial, and in this he was without a peer at the bar where he practiced, especially after the retirement

of the late Judge Cornell. Mr. McNair was greatly sought for counsel in varied domestic and private difficulties, and delighted in making settlements without litigation. He seemed to be able to harmonize opposing feelings, and unify discordant elements. And he was accessible to all. The poor man, with no prospect of a fee, found himself as well served as the richest client. Mr. McNair was no specialist in legal practice. In equity jurisdiction, probate, real estate titles, damage suits, contracts, prosecution or defense of prisoners, the long and tedious examination of accounts — in any and all branches of the law he seemed equally at home. But these incessant and exhausting labors, together with the growing burden of a private estate, which was one of the largest ever left by a professional man here, and a multitude of private trusts, were steadily sapping his stock of vitality, and when the law was abandoned in 1884 his physical power was well nigh exhausted, but his vivacity and exuberance of spirits survived until the end.

The activities of Mr. McNair's life were not confined to the practice of the law. He had rare fitness for a public career, though he did not seek its honors, but rather accepted them as a call to duty. Thus as early as 1868 he was elected as one of the school directors of the City of St. Anthony, and served in that useful, though not conspicuous, office.

In 1869 he was elected Mayor of the City of St. Anthony, and so satisfactory was his administration of municipal affairs that he was re-elected in 1870, and continued at the head of the city government until its consolidation with Minneapolis in 1872.

In later years he affiliated with the Democratic party, though it seemed in a hopeless minority in the city, the congressional district and the state. He was one of the trusted leaders of the party in council. At the congressional election in the fall of 1876 the nomination of the party for member of congress was tendered him, and against his desire he made the run. As was anticipated he was not elected, but the canvass was spirited and he received the compliment of reducing largely the adverse majority. Again in 1883 the nomination for governor of the state was tendered him, but he

positively declined it, thinking his party duty fully performed by the congressional race.

In business enterprises of a *quasi* public character, his co-operation was sought and often obtained. These were not always profitable, but they introduced new industries and improvements and helped to build up the city. Thus he was for many years a director of the State National Bank, and of its successor, the Security Bank. To the administration of the latter institution he gave much time, serving on its discount committee, and it was largely due to his inconspicuous, though powerful influence, that the bank attained the financial leadership in the city.

With nine associates Mr. McNair participated in organizing the Minneapolis Gas Light Company, which built an extensive plant, and introduced illuminating gas into the city. Likewise he joined with a few other enterprising citizens in incorporating the Minneapolis Street Railway Company, which laid the first line of rail and operated the first cars in the city. The enterprise was not at first a financial success, but it was the nucleus from which has grown the unequalled rapid transit system of the city.

He also gave much thought to the improvement of the transportation facilities of the city. It was felt that direct communications with Lake Superior, and with the Minnesota Valley were essential. For this purpose the Minneapolis and Duluth, and afterwards the Minneapolis and St. Louis railroad companies were organized. Mr. McNair was an original stock-holder in both, as well as a prominent member of their Boards of Directors. He took great interest in the construction of these lines, which have proved to be the key to the commercial interests of the city.

He was also connected with several business enterprises, prominent among which was a lumber company, which purchased large tracts of pine timbered land in the northeasterly part of the state, and built and operated a saw mill, and took large contracts for the supply of timber and lumber along the line of the Northern Pacific railroad. He was also interested for many years in the manufacture of the hard yellow brick, so characteristic of the city, and from which so many of its buildings were made in the earlier days. He had much

business sagacity, his undertakings and investments being successful and profitable. He was so strongly impressed with the destiny of the city that he was continually acquiring lands in its vicinity, so that at his death he was the owner of more than a thousand acres of land in the environs of the city, much of which is now laid out and occupied.

August 21st, 1862, he was united in marriage with Miss Louise Wilson, daughter of Hon. Edgar C. Wilson, of Virginia, and sister of Hon. Eugene M. Wilson, his law partner. His marriage was a most happy one, and from all the toils and cares of his active life, he turned to the perfect enjoyment of his home. His family and his children were his joy and delight. There were two daughters, Agnes O. and Louise P. McNair who, with his wife, survive him.

Mr. and Mrs. McNair soon after marriage made their home in a modest house on the east side, which they continued to occupy until just before his death. For several years he had been erecting a beautiful stone mansion. This house is the residence of the family, and is an enduring memento of the elegant taste and liberal spirit of its proprietor.

Mr. McNair was fond of the rod and the gun. It was his delight to escape from professional labor and business care for a few days' vacation in the woods or beside the sparkling brooks. He was an expert with both implements, and seldom returned with empty bag or creel. Among the valued accessions of his house was always to be found a well trained pointer or sagacious setter dog, faithful companions upon these rural excursions. He enjoyed traveling, though forced by the press of business to limit the indulgence of the taste to occasional trips.

As health began to decline he indulged a native taste for rural life. On an elevated point upon his lands overlooking the city he built a farm house and capacious barns. There were gathered horses of the best blood, and sleek cattle. A conservatory and flower garden furnished bloom and fragrance, and he spent many hours in his fields and among his herds. But it was too late to arrest the progress of his maladies. The years of professional labor and business anxiety had too much taxed his vital force. The bow was unbent, but had lost its

elasticity. His final release from all earthy care and struggle was on September 15, 1885.



RESIDENCE OF MRS. L. W. McNAIR, 1301 LINDEN AVENUE, BUILT IN 1881.

Exterior of residence of Louise Wilson McNair,  
1301 Linden Avenue, Minneapolis.  
Mrs. McNair was the widow of William Woodbridge McNair,  
who died on September 15, 1885, while this house was  
being constructed. Mrs. McNair oversaw its completion.  
Source: Isaac Atwater, 1 *History of Minneapolis* (1893).



INTERIOR, RESIDENCE OF MRS. W. W. MCNAIR.

Interior of residence of Louise Wilson McNair,  
1301 Linden Avenue, Minneapolis.  
Source: Isaac Atwater, 1 *History of Minneapolis* (1893).

No citizen of Minneapolis was ever more deplored. Not alone professional brethren, associates in business, companions in social life, but all classes and ranks of people joined in lamenting his demise. They felt a personal loss; that a friend had departed.

Though cut short at its meridian, his life was a memorable one. He had brilliant qualities, which made him an inspiration in social life. He was the soul of honor in his dealings with others, though acute and prudent. He was devout in spiritual life, dominated by thoroughly

religious conviction, but without sanctimoniousness or bigotry. He was acquisitive, but generous, and charitable without ostentation. He was ambitious, but mounted only through manly and honorable paths. He was public spirited and patriotic. He was kind and loving in domestic life.

The tall shaft at Lakewood which rises over his resting place but signalizes the commanding eminence which he held in life among the active and restless citizens of Minneapolis.

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**Profile from Horace Hudson, ed.,  
*A Half-Century of Minneapolis.*  
(1908)**

McNAIR, William Woodbridge, one of the pioneers of Minneapolis, and for many years a distinguished member of the Hennepin county bar, was born at Groveland, Living-stone county, New York, on January 4, 1836. He was the oldest son of William W. McNair, whose family was of Scotch-Irish descent, while his mother, Sarah Pierrepont, was a descendant of Rev. James Pierrepont, one of the founders of Yale College, and of a family which traced its line back to the time of William the Conqueror. Mr. McNair's talented mind received from private tutors and the academies of Genesee and Canandaigua education and culture.

When nineteen years old. He came west and entered the law office of Judge J. Dootlittle at Racine, Wisconsin, but after two years came to Minneapolis in 1857. He was admitted to the bar during the same year, and for twenty-seven years remained in active practice in this city. From 1861 to 1868, Mr. McNair was associated with the late Eugene M. Wilson under the firm name of Wilson & McNair, and after

Mr. Wilson's election to Congress in 1868,<sup>5</sup> he formed a partnership with Judge William Lochren as Lochren & McNair. J. B. Gilfillan was later admitted to this firm, which for many years was the leading law firm of the city. After Judge Lochren's appointment to the district bench in 1881, the business was continued by McNair & Gilfillan until Mr. Gilfillan's election to Congress in 1884, when, on account of impaired health, Mr. McNair retired from practice.<sup>6</sup>

During his long practice in Minneapolis, he was connected with much important litigation and was considered one of the strongest lawyers at the bar. Although much engaged with his practice, he was deeply interested in public affairs, but though frequently importuned to accept office, on only a few occasions consented to public service. For four years prior to 1863, he was county attorney, and in 1868 was elected one of the school directors of St. Anthony. In 1869, he was elected mayor of St. Anthony and continued at the head of the city government until the consolidation of St. Anthony and Minneapolis in 1872. He affiliated with the democratic party and, against his wishes, received the nomination for Congress in 1876 and was complimented by a vote which largely reduced the usual republican majority in the district.<sup>7</sup> In 1883 he was tendered the nomination for governor, but positively declined.

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<sup>5</sup> The Republican party was divided in the election for the Second Congressional District in 1868. Christopher Andrews had the party nomination, but Ignatius Donnelly ran as a Republican without the party's endorsement. This split led to Wilson's victory. The results of the election on November 3, 1868, were:

Christopher C. Andrews (Republican).....	8,595
Ignatius Donnelly (Republican/independent).....	11,229
Eugene M. Wilson (Democrat).....	13,506

Bruce M. White, et al, *Minnesota Votes* 69 (Minn. Hist. Soc. Press., 1977).

<sup>6</sup> The results of the election on November 4, 1884, were:

John B. Gilfillan (Republican).....	28,930
Orlando C. Merriman (Democrat).....	24,496
John M. Douglas (Prohibition).....	978

Id. at 77.

<sup>7</sup> The results of the election on November 7, 1876, were:

Jacob H. Stewart (Republican).....	22,823
William W. McNair (Democrat).....	20,717

Id. at 72-73.

A business man of unusual ability, Mr. McNair's name was connected with many of the successful enterprises of his time, including the Minneapolis Gas Light Company and the Minneapolis Street Railway Company, in each of which he was one of the original incorporators. He was also an original stockholder and director in the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, and was extensively interested in lumbering and contracting for timber supply for the northwestern railroads. Being strongly impressed with the future of the city, he invested very largely in real estate in and about Minneapolis.

Mr. McNair possessed fine social qualities and the most genial and generous disposition. Mr. McNair was married on August 21, 1862, to Miss Louise Wilson, daughter of Edgar C. Wilson of Virginia, and sister of the late Eugene M. Wilson of Minneapolis. They had two daughters, Agnes O., now Mrs. Louis K. Hull and Louise P., now Mrs. Francis M. Henry. Mr. McNair died on September 15, 1885, leaving many devoted friends who mourn their great loss.

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## Related Article

“Eugene M. Wilson (1833-1890)” (MLHP, 2008-2016).

