

“The Bar of Watonwan County”*

in

HISTORY

of

Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties

Minnesota

THEIR PEOPLE, INDUSTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

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Editor-in-Chief

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Genealogical Records of Many of the Old Families**

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CHAPTER X.

THE BAR OF THIS COUNTY.

The legal profession is no longer looked upon as one in which trickery and deception are practiced in order to gain a large retainer fee. It has for more than a century been looked upon as among the highest of the professions. Indeed, a large majority of our greatest statesmen and law-makers have been lawyers at the bar at one date in their career. We only have to refer to Webster, Everett, Lincoln, Seward or Sumner, to find true examples of noble, talented attorneys, whose influence became world-wide.

Here in Minnesota persons may be admitted to practice law upon an examination before the board of law examiners. No person but an admitted attorney-at-law may commence or conduct any action or proceeding in a court of record to which he is not a party, but this does not prevent a private person from commencing or defending an action in his own behalf. Any graduate of the college of law of the State University may be admitted to practice law upon presentation of his diploma and proof that he is an adult citizen and resident of the state and of good moral character; also the graduates of other colleges of law established in the state. Every attorney shall:

First—Observe and carry out the terms of his oath.

Second—Maintain the respect due to courts of justice and judicial officers.

Third—Counsel or maintain such causes only as appear to him legal and just; but he shall not refuse to defend any person accused of a public offense.

Fourth—Employ, for the maintenance of causes confided to him, such means only as are consistent with truth, and never seek to mislead the judges by any artifice or false statement of fact or law.

Fifth—Keep inviolate the confidence of his client; abstain from offensive personalities, and advance no fact prejudicial to the honor or reputation of a party or witness, unless the justice of his cause requires it.

Sixth—Encourage the commencement or continuation of no action or proceedings from motives of passion or interest; nor may he, for any con-

sideration personal to himself, reject the cause of the defenseless or oppressed.

An attorney in Minnesota may be removed or suspended by the supreme court, on the following grounds: Upon his being convicted of a felony, or of a misdemeanor involving moral turpitude; in either of which cases the record of conviction shall be conclusive evidence. Or upon showing that he has knowingly signed frivolous pleadings, or been guilty of any deceit or wilful misconduct in his profession; or for wilful disobedience of an order of the court requiring him to do or forbear doing an act connected with, or in the course of, his profession.

LIST OF ATTORNEYS IN THIS COUNTY.

Among the well-known attorneys who have from time to time practiced in Watonwan county may be recalled the following: J. V. Seager, J. J. Thornton, Ashley Coffman, W. S. Hammond, Frank Ellsworth, R. H. Burns, Ed. C. Farmer, Albert Running, J. L. Lobben and W. E. Allen.

Concerning these lawyers it may be said that the oldest now in practice in the county is J. W. Seager, still in active law practice at St. James. He was born in Bath county, New York, September 16, 1845. He received his education at Mora Academy, graduating from the law department of Ann Arbor (Michigan) University; was admitted to the bar in Rochester, New York, in December, 1866. After practicing there three years, he came to St. James, Minnesota, where he ever since has been engaged in law practice. He has had for partners both J. L. Lobben and his son, G. W. Seager.

J. L. Lobben was born in Norway, August 1, 1862, in the parish of Ecker. He accompanied his parents to America when he was yet a mere child. The family settled in Wisconsin. He was graduated from the Lutheran College at Decorah, Iowa; came to St. James with his parents in 1879; read law and was admitted to the bar in January, 1896, soon after forming a law partnership with J. W. Seager.

W. E. Allen was born in Marysville, Kentucky, July 1, 1855. His parents moved to Ohio during his youth; in 1876 moved to Iowa, where he resided four years and there read law. In 1880 he returned to Ohio and was admitted to the law practice and followed his profession there a number of years. He came to St. James, Minnesota, in the fall of 1884; taught school one year, and was soon thereafter admitted to the bar in Minnesota. He then taught school at Gordinville, Minnesota, one year and was county

school superintendent two terms in Freeborn county. In 1892 he was elected county attorney, serving one term.

Hon. W. S. Hammond, attorney-at-law, congressman and governor of Minnesota, now deceased, was born in Southboro, Worcester county, Massachusetts, November 17, 1863. He was educated in the East, graduating from Dartmouth College in 1884. He came to Minnesota the same year to accept a position as principal of the Mankato city schools, which place he filled for one school year. He then went to Madelia, Watonwan county, to accept the position of superintendent of the village schools there. He held this position five years, after which he was admitted to the bar and commenced the practice of his profession at Madelia in 1891. He commenced as a member of the firm of Hopkins & Hammond. In 1895 he came to St. James, where he built up a profitable law practice. In 1888 he was a candidate for presidential elector, and in 1892 was the Democratic candidate for congressman in the Second district. In 1894 he was nominated for county attorney on the Democratic ticket and elected. In 1898 he was again nominated for congress by the Democrats, but declined to accept. He held many school offices in the county and state, and was elected governor in 1914, after having served in Congress from 1907 to 1915, and served until his death, in 1916. He made a splendid executive, but was cut down in the prime of his manhood. He was indeed an exceptionally good type of American citizen. As an attorney he was both shrewd and honorable with all with whom he had legal and personal dealings.

Of R. H. Burns it may be stated that he practiced here many years, removed to Oregon and died in that state.

Ashley Coffman practiced in St. James until about 1900, when he removed.

Albert Running has been engaged in law practice in St. James since 1906.

J. J. Thornton is deceased.

PRESENT BAR.

In July, 1916, the members of the Watonwan county bar were as follow: At St. James—J. W. Seager, G. W. Seager, Albert Running, J. L. Lobben, Ed. C. Farmer. At Madelia—A. C. Remele, C. J. Eide. At Lewisville—Joseph Davies.

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