

IN MEMORIAM

JAMES E. O'BRIEN

[January 6, 1870 • May 19, 1947]



**HENNEPIN COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
HENNEPIN COUNTY DISTRICT COURT
FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

[ca. 1948]

James E. O'Brien

(1870 – 1947)

The Minnesota Bar lost one of its great men with the death of James E. O'Brien on May 19, 1947. He bore a long illness and met death with that same courage which characterized his long life in the profession of law.

He was born on January 6, 1870 at Lake City, Minnesota, the eldest son of Richard and Margaret O'Brien, pioneer settlers in that community. He received a formal education in the grade and high schools of that town. But he lived a more fundamental education in the toil of the farm and in the common hardships of the day. There, under the stern disciplinary influence of a rugged pioneer father and the more gentle, but equally forceful influence of a pioneer mother, he developed the intellect, force of will and strength of character which carried him to the professional achievement which was his in later life. From the soil in which he labored he drew an intense sense of reality, a fierce love of truth.

He worked his way through the University of Minnesota. Among other occupations he labored in the excavation for the foundation of the City Hall and Court House in which this memorial is given. He was graduated from the Law School of the University in June, 1895. He was admitted to the Minnesota Bar on June 17, 1895. Thereafter, and continuously until his death, he engaged in the private practice of law in Minneapolis.

In 1907 he married Agnes Byrnes of Minneapolis and of this marriage twin sons, Richard and John, were born. John O'Brien died at the age of 15, an occasion of deep shock and sorrow to the father. Mrs. O'Brien died October 26, 1942, and the son Richard J. O'Brien, alone, survives.

His professional life was characterized by a success unparalleled in the Northwest. Success in the financial way was his, but far greater and far more deeply satisfying, his greatest achievements lay in the respect of Judges, in the esteem of his fellow lawyers, in the love and implicit confidence of his clients, and, within his own heart, in the certain knowledge that that which he had undertaken was done to the fullest of his ability, physical and mental.

He was possessed of a deep culture. He had a vast knowledge of philosophy, literature, history, languages, mathematics, and of both the science and art of government. Thus equipped, he brought to the service of his clients a profound wisdom which was tremendously broad in its scope.

He was possessed of great physical strength and vigor. These he combined with a deep sense of personal obligation to his clients and intense devotion to duty to the sacrifice of personal interests. Hard work was part of his philosophy of life. Laborious, painstaking effort and thought went into the preparation of every case, and not without them were his many victories in court achieved. Accuracy and close scrutiny of detail were his watchwords, and he insisted on the same from those about him.

These were the materials from which his numerous victories were formed and they are recorded as parts of the law of this State and the reports of our Supreme Court. Many of his cases now constitute fundamental law of the State in the fields of trusts, wills, real estate, corporations and others.

No adequate memorial to the life and work of Mr. O'Brien is now possible – he built his own memorial. It consists of his work as a laborer, as a business adviser, as a lawyer and as a citizen. This is but

an effort of one who knew him to portray in a few sentences the man and the lawyer.

Respectfully submitted,
Kimball B. Devoy

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Credits

The photograph on the first page is from *Men of Minnesota* (1915).

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