

THOMAS H. QUINN, SR.

November 6, 1854 - December 27, 1915



On the hour of Thomas Quinn's funeral, a rare tribute was paid him: by mayoral decree, the offices of the city where he had practiced for decades were closed, city employees "relieved from work" to mourn, and flags at city hall and the fire engine station lowered.

At a time when successful men were expected to describe themselves as "self-made," Quinn was the genuine article. He was self-educated. He dropped out of formal school at the age of thirteen to support his family but continued to study on his own. After an apprenticeship, he was admitted to the bar in 1877, and opened shop in Faribault. He was about twenty-three years old. For most of the rest of his life, he was self-employed.

In 1901, a compendium of biographical portraits of "progressive" men was published under the grandiose title, *History of the Great Northwest and its Men of Progress*, with the subtitle, *A Select List of Biographical Sketches and Portraits of The Leaders in Business, Professional, and Official Life*. Among the portraits was Quinn's, which he likely wrote, and in it we see him as he saw himself in mid-career:

QUINN, Thomas H.—Among the self-made men in the southern part of Minnesota, who have become conspicuous in their field of endeavor, Thomas H. Quinn, the city attorney of Faribault, Rice county, Minn.,

is justly entitled to a place in the front rank. He is a native son of the great Northwest, having been born at Berlin, Wis., November 6, 1854. He came to Minnesota with his parents and eight brothers and sisters in 1865, and settled at Faribault. Thomas obtained his early



THOMAS E. QUINN.

education in the common schools of Wisconsin and Minnesota. His father was Patrick Quinn. The maiden name of the mother was Catherine Brady. They were pioneers in the settlement of the west, always keeping well to the frontier of civilization during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. They

were blessed with a large family, the exigencies of which compelled Thomas to leave school when thirteen years of age to contribute to the family fund. But this did not stop his progress in education. Although doing the hardest kind of labor during his "teens," he persistently kept at his studies nights and holidays, with an endurance and fortitude which only a rugged physical constitution could have made possible. In this laborious manner he mastered the elementary studies and took up the study of law. With the same energy and industry he fitted himself for the profession, and was admitted to the bar in 1877, at Faribault, where he had struggled all these years of toil. He then commenced practice at once in the same place where he was brought up and best known. The next year he formed a partnership with G. N. Baxter under the firm name of

Baxter & Quinn. This was terminated in 1880, when he went into partnership with John B. Quinn, under the style of J. B. & T. H. Quinn, which terminated in 1883, since which time Mr. Quinn has been in practice alone. His business has been a general practice, and he has met with his full share of success. Mr. Quinn, as he expresses it, was born into the Democratic party, and has always affiliated with it, except in 1896 and in 1900, when he was opposed to its platform, and could not support its candidates. Notwithstanding the general adverse majorities in his county, he was twice elected county attorney of Rice county, serving from 1884 to 1887, and again from 1891 to 1893. He has also been city attorney of the city of Faribault for the last five years successively — a position which he still holds. Since it is said that a “prophet is not without honor save in his own country,” this compliment to Mr. Quinn’s ability and character is no small honor. In religion he is a Roman Catholic. He was married, May 15, 1891, to Elizabeth Nolan, of Richland, Rice county, Minn. They have two children, Thomas H. and Beatrice.*

In the following years, the couple had three more children. Quinn continued practicing law and serving the community in many ways. In the parlance of the time, he was an “upbuilder” of the city, and that is how he was recalled in an obituary on the front-page of the local newspaper after his death on December 27, 1915, at age sixty-one:

* Hugh J. McGrath & William Stoddard, eds., *History of the Great Northwest and its Men of Progress* 227-8 (1901).

FARIBAULT JOURNAL

Faribault, Minnesota

Wednesday, December 29, 1915

DEATH OF HON. T. H. QUINN.

One of Faribault's Prominent Professional Men Passes Away.

Hon. Thomas H. Quinn, one of Faribault's most prominent professional men, died on Monday, December 27, at St. Lucas hospital, where he had been for several weeks under the care of physicians. Mr. Quinn's health had been failing him for some time, but he did not give up his business until about six weeks ago.

Mr. Quinn's loss will be deeply felt in Faribault. He was actively identified in the upbuilding of the city since his residence here. He was the first president of the Faribault Commercial Club, and held this responsible position until a number of years ago, when he declined re-election.

Deceased was born in Berlin, Wisconsin, November 6, 1854, and came to Faribault with his parents in his infancy. He received his early education in the schools of the city, supplemented by much private study and wide reading. His inclinations early turned to the law, and his early manhood was spent in the study of [law with] his brother, Judge J. B. Quinn. In 1877 he was

admitted to the bar, and in 1882 he opened an office in Faribault, and had since that time conducted a general practice, in which he was most successful. He was a member of the American and also the Minnesota Bar Associations. He served as county attorney for five years and city attorney for six years.

Mr. Quinn is survived by five children, two sons and three daughters, Thomas, Beatrice, Frank, Marion and Genevieve, all living in this city. Three sisters also survive, Mrs. Julia Hudner, St. Paul; Mrs. Schea, of Seattle, and Mrs. McCarthy, St. Paul. His wife died a number of years ago.

The funeral services will be held on Thursday morning at 10 o'clock, from the Church of the Immaculate Conception, and burial will be in Calvary cemetery.

Flags on the city hall and engine house, and also Elks Hall, were placed at half mast. The following proclamation was issued by Mayor N. S. Erb.

Whereas, our honored and best beloved citizen, Thomas H. Quinn, who departed from this life Monday, December 27th, 1915, and,

Whereas in his long, faithful and efficient services as the city's advisor and friend and his labors for the upbuilding of Faribault and the promotion of Its Interests and enterprises merit that a fitting tribute of respect be paid to his memory in recognition of his many services,

Therefore, I, N. S. Erb, mayor of the city of Faribault, hereby direct that all city offices be closed and that all city employees be relieved from work and that the flags at the city hall and fire department be placed at half mast during the time from 10 o'clock a. m. until 11 o'clock a. m., Thursday, December 30, 1915, the same being the hour of the funeral.

I further request that all public offices and places of business in the city be closed as a mark of respect to one whom we all honored in life, and whose death we sincerely mourn.

Dated: December 28th, 1915.

N. S. ERB,
Mayor.

The following year, a memorial was delivered to him at the annual convention of the Minnesota State Bar Association:

Thomas H. Quinn was born at Berlin, Wisconsin, November 6th, 1854. In 1865 he came to Faribault, Minnesota, with his parents, where he continued to reside until his death on December 27th, 1915.

He was educated in the Immaculate Conception Church and the public schools of Faribault, receiving a good common school education, supplemented by reading and study. In 1872 he worked with a company of engineers in locating the boundary line between Canada

and the United States from Pembina to the Lake of the Woods, after which he taught one term of school.

In 1875 he began the study of law in the office of his brother, the late Judge J. B. Quinn. He was admitted to the bar in Rice county in November, 1877, and shortly thereafter entered into partnership for the practice of law with George N. Baxter. After a brief period this partnership was dissolved, whereupon he became a partner with his brother, John B. Quinn.

In 1882, his brother having removed from Faribault, Mr. Quinn continued the practice of law in Faribault until a short time before his death.

He served as county attorney of Rice county during the years 1884, 1885 and 1886, and again during the years 1891 and 1892. For some time he was city attorney of Faribault.

He was a member of the American, Minnesota, and Rice County Bar Associations, and served several terms as president of the last named association, holding the office at the time of his death. Mr. Quinn was a member of the Knights of Columbus, Fraternal Order of Elks, and the Faribault Commercial Club. He was president of the Commercial Club several terms. Mr. Quinn married Miss Elizabeth Nolan on May 15th, 1893. She passed away in June, 1910. Mr. Quinn is survived by five children, two sons and three daughters.

Thomas H. Quinn was a plain man, retiring, unassuming, and of unsullied character. He was learned in the law, conscientious, industrious, and painstaking in his

profession. He was a formidable opponent in a forensic contest. He gave to his clients the best that was in him. He was always courteous and considerate. He possessed strong common sense, a natural love of justice, and he was firm and fearless in the discharge of duty. He was the soul of honor, and his word had the force of law.

He was loved and respected by the members of his profession and by all with whom he came in contact. His death was an irreparable loss to the bench and bar.[†]

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Related Article

“Thomas H. Quinn, Jr. (1898-1946)” (MLHP, 2014)

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Posted MLHP: May 1, 2012;
enlarged October 4, 2014.

[†] Proceedings, Minnesota State Bar Association 277 (1916).