

# HARLAN P. ROBERTS

[ December 5, 1854 – February 3, 1925 ]



(1915)

Harlan Page Roberts was almost thirty years old when he arrived in Minneapolis in late 1884 and began practicing law. He was a former missionary, who had been admitted to the Colorado bar the year before. Early on he specialized in real estate transactions and served as examiner of Torrens Title Registrations in Hennepin County until the growing demands of his private practice pulled him from that office. He entered into a partnership with George W. Strong and developed an enviable corporate practice. For years they placed the following advertisement in *Hubbell's Law Directory*:<sup>1</sup>

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**HARLAN P. ROBERTS.**

**GEORGE W. STRONG.**

**ROBERTS & STRONG,**

**Lawyers,**

**600-612 Security Building, MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.**

**Corporation, Real Estate and Probate Law. Examination of Titles.  
Foreclosure of Mortgages.**

**Attorneys for: Tri-State Telephone & Telegraph Company, Hennepin County  
Savings Bank, and David C. Bell Investment Company, American  
State Bank, and Associated Mortgage Investors.**

**REFER TO: Any Bank or Trust Co.**

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Meanwhile he was active in professional and community organizations. He was President of the Humane Society, a member of the city charter commission and President of the Hennepin County Bar Association, 1919-1920.<sup>2</sup> He was also counsel for the Minneapolis Citizens Alliance, which was a fierce opponent of the organized labor movement.<sup>3</sup>

He also subscribed to the publication of several local history books and directories of professional men. As a subscriber he was entitled to

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<sup>1</sup> *Hubbell's Legal Directory for Lawyer and Businessmen*, Appendix, at 252 (1924) (enlarged).

<sup>2</sup> "Presidents of the Hennepin County Bar Association" (MLHP, 2008-).

<sup>3</sup> William Millikan, *A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor, 1903-1947* 38 (Minn. Hist. Soc. Press, 2001).

place a short biographical sketch in each of them. The first was published in 1903, the last the year before his death. Through them his career unfolds (they can be found in the Appendix).

He died on February 3, 1925, at age seventy. The *Minneapolis Journal* carried the story:

*Harlan P. Roberts  
Is Dead; Attorney,  
Civic Leader Here*

Harlan P. Roberts, 70 years old, for more than 40 years a widely known Minneapolis attorney and active in civic affairs, died early today at his home, 1912 Emerson avenue S.

Mr. Roberts was on his way to London for the American Bar Association meeting last June when he was taken ill in New York, and has been failing since.

Starting his career as a missionary in the San Juan region of



HARLAN P. ROBERTS

Colorado, he turned a law and was admitted to the Colorado bar in 1883. A year later he came to Minneapolis, specialized for many years in real estate and title law, and in recent years has been specializing as a corporate counsel. He was counsel for the Tri-State Telephone Company and the Hennepin County Savings Bank.

Mr. Roberts for many years was president of the Humane Society and vice president of the Children's Protective Society; a member of the present city charter commission and of the Civic and Commerce Association, and

for 25 years an active member in the Park Avenue Congregational Church, until with the change of residence, he joined the Plymouth church.

An enthusiastic sportsman, Mr. Roberts was fond of hunting, fishing and golfing. He was a member the Minneapolis Club, the Minikahda Club, the Automobile Club and the 6 O'clock Club. He is survived by his wife, son, Harlan C. and a daughter, Mrs. C. C. Champine.<sup>4</sup>

The next day the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* carried the announcement of his funeral, and more biographical information:

*Harlan P. Roberts Funeral  
Will Take Place, Thursday*

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Services for Prominent Attorney  
Here to be at  
Lakewood Chapel

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Funeral services for Harlan P. Roberts, prominent Minneapolis attorney and member of the city charter commission, who died Tuesday at his home, 1912 Emerson avenue south, after an illness of several months will be held at Lakewood Chapel at 2 P.M. Thursday.

Mr. Roberts was taken ill in New York last June as he was about to sail for London to attend the convention of the American Bar Association. He was taken to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, and later brought to his home here, where he has been ever since been. He was 74 years old (sic). . . . .

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<sup>4</sup> *Minneapolis Journal*, February 3, 1925, at front page (funeral arrangements omitted).

### Expert in Corporation Law.

Mr. Roberts was widely known as an expert in title and corporation law. He was one of the authors of the Minnesota code relating to the powers and activities of the juvenile court and the activities and the care of delinquent and dependent children, a code which has been a model for the framing of laws in several other states.

He framed the law authorizing the teachers' retirement fund association and has acted as general counsel for that body, and also drafted the act creating the Minneapolis Fresh Air Fund association. He was for many years president of the Minneapolis Humane Society and later vice president of the children's protective associate society.

### Active in Civic Affairs.

During his 40 years of law practice in Minneapolis, Mr. Roberts took an active interest in civic affairs and was elected to many positions by citizens, who admired his worth as a citizen and ability as a lawyer. He was a lover of the outdoors and found his recreation in hunting, fishing, golf, bowling and walking, and was a member of the Minneapolis, Minikahda, Automobile and 6 O'clock Club. . . . .

Mr. Roberts was a native of Wayne, Ashtabula County, Ohio, the son of Rev. George and Ann J. Roberts. He received his early education in the schools there and at the age of 9 years old moved with his parents to Iowa, where he later attended Mount Pleasant and Howe academies and Oberlin college, from which he graduated in 1875 with an A.B. degree. He then attended Yale theological school after his graduation in 1878 he served as home missionary in the vicinity of Silverton Colo.

In 1880 he left the ministry and entered business, meanwhile studying law. He was admitted to the bar in Silverton in 1883. During his residence in Colorado he served as clerk of Silverton in county treasurer of San Juan County. In December 1884 he moved to Minneapolis and took up the practice of law. . . . .

During his legal career in Minneapolis he was for several years, because of special experience and interest in land and title law, an examiner for the state under the Torrens land title registry system in vogue in Hennepin County, but relinquished this position because of an increasing general practice.<sup>5</sup>

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## Appendix

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| Henry Castle, ed., <i>2 Minnesota: Its Story and Biography</i> (1915)..               | 10-12 |
| Joseph A. A. Burnquist, ed., <i>4 Minnesota and Its People</i> (1924)..               | 13-14 |

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<sup>5</sup> *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, February 4, 1925 at 2 (Lists of pall-bearers, survivors, church affiliations and photograph omitted). A bar memorial has not been located.

## Appendix

From Hiram Fairchild Stevens, ed., *2 History of the Bench and Bar of Minnesota* 153–154 (1903):

Harlan P. Roberts, present examiner for Hennepin County, Minnesota, under the Torrens law, was born December 5, 1854, in Wayne, Ashtabula County, Ohio, and is the son of George and Ann J. Roberts. He graduated from



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harlan P. Roberts".

Oberlin College in the class of 1875 and entered Yale, where he studied theology, graduating from that institution in 1878. The same year he was ordained as a minister in the Congregational Church and given a charge in Silverton, Colorado. Being a sympathetic and forcible speaker, he won the hearts of his parishioners by his earnestness and zeal for his work, and it was with sincere regret that they learned, three years after his coming among them, that he had decided to give up his work in the clergy and enter the law.

Entering the office of Nathaniel E. Slaymaker, of Silverton, he read law with him for two years, when he had so far

mastered the subject as to be admitted to the bar of Colorado in 1883.

In December, 1884, he came to Minneapolis, where he has since applied himself to the practice of his profession before the various courts of the state. He is counsel for David C Bell Investment Company; Hennepin County Savings Bank; Gregory Jennison Company; Gamble, Robinson Commission Company; Hennepin County as examiner under the Torrens law.

A few of the many important and well-known real estate and equity cases managed by him were Goodrich vs. Powers; Hull vs. King; Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company vs. Silas King; and the receivership of the City Bank.

While in Silverton Mr. Roberts was treasurer of San Juan County, Colorado.

He was married October 3, 1888, to Miss Margaret Lee Conklin, of Binghamton, New York, and is the father of three children, viz., Margaret E., Leslie May, and Harlan Conklin. He is a member of Park Avenue, Congregational church.

*From Little Sketches of Big Folks 330 (1907):*

**ROBERTS Harlan P.**, Minneapolis. Res 1704 Knox av S, office 848 Security Bank bldg. Lawyer. Born Dec 5, 1854 in Wayne, Ashtabula county O, son of George and Ann Jeannette (Marvin) Roberts. Married Oct 3, 1888 to Margaret Lee Conklin. Attended high school and Howe's Academy Mt Pleasant Ia 1866-69; graduated from Oberlin College A B 1875; Yale Divinity School 1878. Preached in Congregational Church Silverton Colo 1878-81; practiced law in same town 1882-84; has practiced law in Minneapolis 1884 to date. Counsel for D C Bell Investment Co; Hennepin County Savings Bank; Tri-State Telegraph & Telephone Co; Twin City Telephone Co. County treas San Juan county Colo 1879-83; town clk and member town council Silverton Colo 1882-83.



From Albert N. Marquis, ed., *The Book of Minnesotans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Men of the State of Minnesota* 431 (1907):

**ROBERTS, Harlan Page**, lawyer; born in Wayne, Ashtabula Co., O., Dec. 5, 1854; son of Rev. George and Ann Jeanette (Marvin) Roberts; educated in district school, Wayne Co.; high school and Howe's Academy, Mt. Pleasant, Ia.; Oberlin Academy and College, graduating from college, 1875; Theological Department, Yale College, graduating, 1878. Married, at Minneapolis, Minn., Oct. 3, 1888, to Margaret Lee Conklin. Preached in Silverton, Colo., 1878-81; admitted to bar in Colorado, 1882, and came to Minneapolis, 1884, and has practiced law at Minneapolis ever since. Was county treasurer, Silverton Co., Colo., 1879-82. Republican. Congregationalist. Member Hennepin County and American Bar associations. Clubs: Six O'Clock, Minneapolis, Minnikahda. Recreations: Golf, hunting. Office: Security Bk. Bldg. Residence: 1704 Knox Av., S., Minneapolis.

From the chapter "Courts and Lawyers" in Horace B. Hudson, ed., *A Half Century of Minneapolis*, 163 (1908):

ROBERTS, Harlan Page, is a native of Ohio. His parents were Rev. George Roberts and Ann J. Roberts and he was born on December 5, 1854, at Wayne, Ashtabula county, Ohio, while his father held a charge in that place. When he was nine years old he went to Iowa to live with a sister and his schooling, begun in the rural schools of Ohio, was continued in the schools of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, and at Howe's Academy in the same state. Schooling, as is often the case with country boys, was diversified with hard work. At one time Harlan P. spent a year at Pentwater, Michigan, packing shingles. Fitting

himself for college he entered Oberlin, graduating in 1875. He then attended Yale Theological seminary and graduated in the class of 1878. Next came a few years of experience as a pastor in the west. During this period Mr. Roberts determined to study law and entered the office of Nathaniel E. Slaymaker of Silverton, Colorado. He was admitted to the bar in Colorado in 1883 and came to Minneapolis in December, 1884.

Since that time he has been continuously engaged in the practice of his profession in this city. His practice has been of a general character but he has had special experience in land and title law and was for several years examiner for the state under the Torrens land title registry system in vogue in Hennepin county. An increasing general practice necessitated the relinquishment of this position. Mr. Roberts has taken a lively interest in good government, both local and state, but has not entered politics, except at the caucus and in local conventions.

He is president of the Minneapolis Humane Society and has been active in other philanthropic work. On October 3, 1888, he was married to Miss Margaret Lee Conklin. They have two children living, Marjorie and Harlan C. The family attends the Park Avenue Congregational Church.

From Henry A. Castle, ed., *2 Minnesota: Its Story and Biography* 1254 (1915):

Harlan P. Roberts. During the thirty years of his active relations with the bar of Minneapolis few of Mr. Roberts' contemporaries have acquired so large a share in the important litigation of local courts, and few citizens have been so active in using their personal ability and influence to promote the civic welfare. An industrious and able lawyer, he

has many times employed his talents in behalf of causes which were unremunerative but extremely useful to the public.

Harlan P. Roberts was born in Wayne, Ashtabula County, Ohio, December 5, 1854. His early career was one in which the ambition and energy of his nature enabled him to overcome many obstacles and prepare for a profession. With a country school training, he lived in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, from 1864 to 1869, and during that time attended Howe's Academy at Mount Pleasant. As an illustration of the work by which he earned his way as a young man, one year was spent in packing shingles in the Town of Pentwater, Michigan. In 1870 Mr. Roberts entered Oberlin College and graduated in 1875, after which he prepared for the ministry and graduated in theology at Yale University in 1878, and was in charge of a church at Silverton, Colorado, until 1881. He then left the ministry and remained in business at Silverton from 1881 till 1884.

In the meantime, in 1883, Mr. Roberts was admitted to the bar and in the fall of 1884 moved to Minneapolis, which has since been his field of practice. For several years he specialized in real estate law, but much of his attention in later years has been given to the broader field of corporation law, with the handling of many cases constituting a general practice. He is counsel for the Tri-State Telephone and Telegraph Company and several other large corporations. Mr. Roberts is senior member of the firm of Roberts & Strong, with offices in the Security Bank Building at Minneapolis, his partner being George W. Strong. At one time Mr. Roberts practiced in partnership with John C. Sweet and also with John T. Baxter, now president of the Northwestern National Life Insurance Company. In the office of Mr. Roberts, Judge Winfield W.

Bardwell, now one of the prominent jurists, at one time was a student of law.

Mr. Roberts is a member of the Minneapolis Bar Association, the Minnesota State Bar Association and the American Bar Association. He has had some part in the public work of his city, is now president of the Minneapolis Humane Society, and with the assistance of E. S. Slater and Fred W. Reed prepared the Juvenile Court law and was instrumental in securing its passage by the Legislature. He is also author of the enabling act, relating to teachers' pension associations, and conducted the campaign in the Legislature which procured the passage of that measure. He assisted in formulating the plan of the Minneapolis Retirement Fund Association, and acted as counsel for the association since its beginning. His associations are the Minneapolis Club, the Minikahda Club, the University Club, the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association, and his politics is republican.

On October 3, 1888, Mr. Roberts married Margaret L. Conklin of Binghamton, New York. They are the parents of two living children: Marjorie E. Champine, wife of C. C. Champine of Minneapolis; and Harlan C. Roberts, a resident of that city. Mr. Roberts was reared and studied for the ministry of the Congregational Church, and for twenty-five years was a member of Park Avenue Congregational Church at Minneapolis, but is now a member of Plymouth Church.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Henry A. Castle, *2 Minnesota: Its Story and Biography* 1254 (1915).

Joseph A. A. Burnquist, 4 *Minnesota and Its People* 500-501 (1924):

#### HARLAN PAGE ROBERTS.

Harlan Page Roberts, a prominent representative of the legal profession in Minneapolis, has been continuously engaged in general practice in this city during the past four decades, specializing in corporation and real estate law. His birth occurred in Wayne, Ashtabula county, Ohio, on the 5th of December, 1854, his parents being George and Ann Jeannette (Marvin) Roberts, the former born at Ebensburg, Pennsylvania, about 1807 and the latter in Sandisfield, Massachusetts, about 1814. George Roberts was a full-blooded Welshman and his wife was truly American.

In the acquirement of an education Harlan P. Roberts attended district school in his native county until nine years of age, after which he spent three years as a public school pupil in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, where he afterward continued his studies in Howe's Academy until he was fourteen years of age. For one year, from 1869 until 1870, he resided in Pentwater, Michigan, and then matriculated in Oberlin College of Oberlin, Ohio, from which institution he was graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1875. The following year he left the Buckeye state to become a student in Yale Theological Seminary of New Haven, Connecticut, which in 1878 conferred upon him the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. He then made his way to Silverton, Colorado, where for three years he preached the gospel and then for a similar period devoted his attention to business interests.

Having prepared for law practice, he was admitted to in 1883 and the following year came to Minnesota, settling in Minneapolis, where he has remained an active and successful representative of the legal fraternity. He has

specialized in corporation and real estate law and has been accorded a clientele of large and remunerative proportions, that has connected him with much important litigation.

On the 3d day of October, 1888, in Minneapolis, Mr. Roberts was united in marriage to Miss Margaret Lee Conklin, a native of Binghamton, New York, and a descendant of Governor Bradford of the Plymouth colony. During the decade between 1870 and 1880 she was a resident of Raleigh, North Carolina.

Mr. and Mrs. Roberts have a daughter and a son: Marjorie E., who is the wife of Clifford C. Champine of Minneapolis and Harlan C., member of the class of 1924 in Princeton University. Mrs. Roberts belongs to the Woman's Club of Minneapolis and to Monument Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

In his political views Mr. Roberts is a stalwart Republican, while his religious faith is indicated by his membership in the Plymouth Congregational church. In club circles he is well known as a member of Minikahda and Automobile Clubs.

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### Related Memorial

“George W. Strong (1875-1944)” (MLHP, 2021).

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