

# WILLIAM W. ROSSMAN

( August 12, 1829 - July 8, 1906 )

William W. Rossman was born in New York in 1829. After attending local schools, he became a millwright, and worked that trade for many years. In 1853, answering the Frontier's call of adventure and opportunity, he moved to Wisconsin. A few years later he removed to Minnesota, settling in Glencoe. Excepting a brief stint in the army, he remained in Glencoe until 1870, when he relocated to Becker county, and staked out a homestead of 160 acres near Detroit, the county seat. He was forty-one years old, married and the father of four. By now he had become a lawyer, though it is not known with whom he read law and when he was admitted to the bar. He "hung his shingle" in Detroit in late 1870 or early 1871, and was one of the few lawyers in the county.

DIRECTORY.	
Village Officers.	
President.....	Wm. J. Bettingen.
Trustees { .....	C. H. Whipple.
{ .....	E. W. Davis.
{ .....	H. F. Jacobs.
Recorder.....	C. G. Starbuck.
Treasurer.....	W. J. Morrow.
Justices.....	W. W. Rossman, D. S. Griffin.
Assessor.....	L. C. McKinstry.
Constable.....	Fred Bahr.
Marshal.....	Fred Bahr.
County Officers.	
Auditor.....	L. M. Stevens.
Treasurer.....	Chas. F. Snell.
Register of Deeds.....	O. O. Nolen.
Clerk of Court.....	L. C. McKinstry.
Sheriff.....	G. J. Norby.
County Attorney.....	J. N. True.
Judge of Probate.....	J. T. Bostick.
Surveyor.....	W. R. Morton.
Supt. of Schools.....	M. W. Vandewater.
Court Commissioner.....	W. W. Rossman.
Prisoner.....	S. S. Jones.
Commissioners:-	
1st Dist., Woodland P. O.,	Chas. Palmer.
2d Dist., Detroit P. O.,	A. Mall, Ch'n.
3d Dist., France P. O.,	Pat O'Neil.
4th Dist., Audubon P. O.,	E. F. Skudin.
5th Dist., Audubon P. O.,	Bert Larson.

Lawyers were expected to participate in public affairs in the nineteenth century, especially in rural communities where their legal skills were admired. Rossman filled this role by holding offices in the village of Detroit and Becker County. He became Justice of the Peace in 1871, and was known thereafter as "Judge" or "Squire." He served on the school board and was Court Commissioner of the County for years. In these times, *The Detroit Record*, the local newspaper, carried a directory of officials of the city and county on its front page, and he is listed in both columns.<sup>1</sup>

As a lawyer, he had a reputation for giving shrewd advice.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Detroit Record*, September 23, 1898, at 1.

<sup>2</sup> See "The First Lawsuit in Becker County" (MLHP, 2010-1014) (published first, 1907).

In 1889 the following sketch of the Judge and his family was published in a regional compendium of biographies:

**JUDGE W. W. ROSSMAN**, attorney at law and city justice in Detroit City, Becker county, Minnesota, is one of the oldest settlers in the locality in which he lives. He is a native of the State of New York, born in Clinton county New York, on the 12th day of August, 1829, and is the son of Frederick and Celia (Hedding) Rossman, natives of New York. The father of our subject was engaged in the manufacture of woolen goods through active life, and is still living in New York at the advanced age of ninety years. The mother died in 1878. She was a sister of Bishop Hedding, of the Methodist church. The father and mother of our subject were the parents of thirteen children, our subject being the oldest.

Judge Rossman, the subject of this article, remained with his parents, working in his millwright's trade, and attending school until he was twenty one years old. He then learned the millwright's trade, and followed that industry for thirteen years. In 1853 he removed to Wisconsin, where he remained three years, and early in 1857 removed to Minnesota, locating in Glencoe, McLeod county, where he remained until 1862. He participated in the Indian outbreak, serving in the home guards. He sent his family to Indiana, and enlisted in Company E, One Hundred Fifty-third Indiana Infantry, and served seven months as a private, but on account of poor health received an honorable discharge. He then returned to Glencoe, and in 1870 removed to Detroit, Becker county, Minnesota, where he was the first settler. He took a Government claim of 160 acres, and has since platted almost all of it. He improved forty acres of the land and erected a fine residence. He assisted in the building of many of the edifices in the village, and has held the office of justice of the peace since 1871. He held the office of deputy of register of deeds for two years, and is now a member of the board of education. He has been road overseer,

assessor, and has always taken an active interest in all local matters.

Judge Rossman was married at Glencoe, Minnesota, in 1856, to Miss Mary Jane McClelland, of Glencoe. This union has been blessed with four children—Frank, Charlotte, Ida B., and Helen A. The last named, Helen A., was the first white child born in Detroit, Minnesota. Our subject is an adherent to the principles of the democratic party, and, and is one of the prominent and representative citizens of the village. He is a member of the Masonic fraternity, and belongs to the Grand Army of the Republic.<sup>3</sup>

Around 1904, the Judge and his wife moved to Spokane, Washington. There he died on July 8, 1906, aged seventy-six. His obituary appeared in Detroit's weekly newspaper a few days later:

## **BECKER COUNTY PIONEER DEAD**

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**W. W. Rossman, One of the First  
Settlers of Detroit Died at  
Spokane last Saturday.**

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A telegram was received last Sunday morning announcing the death of W. W. Rossman, formerly one of the best known citizens of Detroit and widely known among the older residents of Becker county.

“Squire” Rossman, as he was familiarly known, was a native of New York state, where he was born in Clinton county,

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<sup>3</sup> *Illustrated Album of Biography of the Famous Valley of the Red River of the North and the Park Regions* 626-27 (1889). In the original text, his last name was misspelled as Roosman. It has been corrected here.

August 12, 1829. His youth and young manhood was spent in his native state where he was employed in his father's woolen mill, and later took up the trade of millwright. In 1853 he came west, locating in Wisconsin, where he remained three years, then removing to Glencoe, Minnesota. On the outbreak of the Indian war he took part in that conflict, afterwards serving as a private in Co. E., 153rd Indiana Infantry for seven months, and was discharged on account of poor health. In 1870 he removed to Detroit, taking a government homestead, his claim now comprising a large part of the residence portion of this city. During his long residence in Detroit, Mr. Rossman held various county, village and city offices, and took a prominent part in the progress of the town during its pioneer period. He was most congenial by nature, and made friends of all with whom he came in contact, and the announcement of his death will be received with sorrow by his many old friends.

Mr. Rossman was for many years a member of the Masonic fraternity, and also of the G. A. R. post from the time of its organization.

M. Rossman was married at Glencoe in 1858 to Mary Jane McClelland, who with four children, one son and three daughters survive him.

The family lived over thirty years here, and removed to Spokane two years ago. The Record extends to them the sympathy of their many friends in their time of affliction.<sup>4</sup>

A year after his death, *A Pioneer History of Becker County* was published. It had the following profile of him:

Mr. W. W. Rossman was born in Clinton County, New York, Aug. 27th, 1829. His mother was a sister of Bishop Hedding of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His youth and young manhood were spent in his native state where he was

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<sup>4</sup> *The Detroit Record*, Friday, July 13, 1906, at 4 (photograph omitted).

employed in his father's woolen mill, and later took up the trade of millwright. In 1853 he came West, locating in Wisconsin, where he remained three years, then removing to Glencoe, Minnesota. On the outbreak of the Indian war he took part in that conflict, afterwards serving as a private in Company B, 153rd Indiana Infantry for seven months, and was discharged on account of poor health. On the 29th of May, 1870, he came to Becker County and located in Lake Eunice Township and came to Detroit three or four months afterwards and took a government homestead on the east half of the northwest quarter of Section 34 of that township, on what now comprises a large part of the residence portion of the city. During his long residence in Detroit Mr. Rossman held various county, village and city offices, and took a prominent part in the progress of the town during its pioneer period. He was most congenial by nature, and made friends of all with whom he came in contact.

Mr. Rossman was for many years a member of the Masonic fraternity, and also of the G. A. R. post from the time of its organization.

Mr. Rossman was married at Glencoe in 1858 to Mary Jane McClelland, who with four children, one son and three daughters survive him.

The family lived here over thirty years, and removed to Spokane two years ago. His son Frank Rossman has for the last twenty years been an esteemed citizen of Park Rapids, Hubbard County. Mr. Rossman died at Spokane Falls, Wash., on the 8th day of July, 1906.<sup>5</sup>

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Related Article: "The First Lawsuit in Becker County" (MLHP, 2008-2014)

Posted MLHP: July 4, 2014.

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<sup>5</sup> Jessie C. West & Alvin H. Wilcox, *A Pioneer History of Becker County, Minnesota* 363-64 (1907) (photo of Judge and Mrs. Rossman omitted).