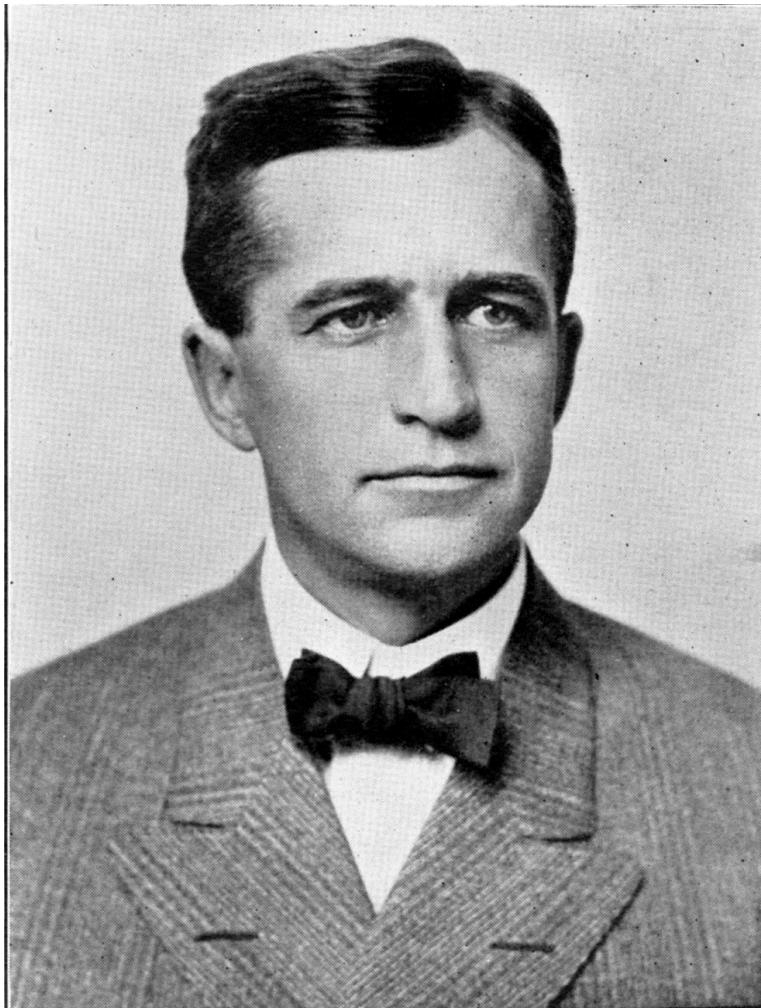


MEMORIAL

FOR

STEPHEN HERBERT SOMSEN

(May 29, 1877 – December 15, 1936)



DISTRICT COURT
THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT
WINONA COUNTY
WINONA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION
JANUARY 11, 1937

MEMORIAL OF THE WINONA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

FOR

STEPHEN H. SOMSEN

Stephen Herbert Somsen was born in Howard County, Iowa, May 29, 1877, the son of G. J. Somsen and Emma Gleason Somsen. He was the younger of two brothers and is survived by the other, Henry N. Somsen of New Ulm, Minnesota.

He came to Minnesota in 1889 and was educated at Minneapolis High School and the University of Minnesota. He was admitted to the bar at St. Paul in June 1898 and in January, 1900, he became a member of the law firm of Brown & Abbott at Winona, which firm became Brown, Abbott & Somsen.¹ He practiced at Winona as a member of that firm and of the succeeding firm of Brown, Somsen & Sawyer until his death, December 15, 1936.

He was a member of the Minnesota State Bar Association, Winona County Bar Association and the Third Judicial District Bar Association. He was appointed Special Judge of Municipal Court and served from 1900 to 1904, and in 1909 he was appointed Municipal Judge and held that office eight years.

He was a member of the State Teachers College Board from 1909 to 1933 and of the State Board of Law Examiners from 1917 to 1927. His service in connection with the State Teachers College was outstanding during the period of nearly twenty-five years which he served on the State Teachers College Board.

¹ He was admitted to the bar on June 3, 1898. 1 *Roll of Attorneys: Supreme Court, State of Minnesota, 1858-1970* 46 (State Law Library, 2011).

The photograph on the first page has been furnished by archivists at the Winona County Historical Society.

He was an individualist with qualities clearly defined —intelligence, independence, industry, accuracy, frankness, courage, honor, fidelity and sound judgment. He had a keen sense of humor and a rugged philosophy of life. He was tender toward the infirm and aged but unbending in expecting those who were capable to exercise their powers and abilities to the high degree he required of himself.

His interests outside of the practice of law were moderate in extent, comprising travel abroad, automobiling and reading of books of the better class. His regard for individuals depended upon his estimate of character rather than upon station in life. There were many acts of kindness or remembrance on his part, nearly always known only to himself and the recipient. In politics he was a democrat but inclined to be independent. He was affiliated with the Episcopal Church at Winona; his religious views were broad and tolerant.

Although naturally conservative, he welcomed progress but was quick to distinguish between measures likely to result in real advancement and proposals which were enticing rather than sound.

So has passed one who held and merited the entire confidence of the profession and the community at large.

Dated Jan. 11, 1937.

A. W. Sawyer
H. Bremer
Henry M. Lamberton.
Ernest Bruskin
Committee

Appendix

The following sketch appeared in a chapter on the “Bench and Bar of Winona County” written by Judge Arthur H. Snow, published in 1913:

Stephen Herbert Somsen, of the firm of Brown, Abbott & Somsen, attorneys, was born in Howard county, Iowa, May 29, 1877, son of G. J. and Emma H. (Gleason) Somsen. He came to Minnesota in 1889. After attending the public schools, he entered the Minneapolis high school, from which he graduated in 1893 with credit. In 1898 he received the degree of LL.B. from the College of Law of the University of Minnesota. He was admitted to the bar at St. Paul in June, 1898, and soon thereafter came to Winona, where he has since resided. He has been connected with the firm of which he is now a member since 1900. Mr. Somsen has done the city of Winona good service as judge of the municipal court since 1909. He was resident director and member of the state normal school board in 1909-1913, and was reappointed December 20, 1912, for the term of 1913-1917. Fraternally he is a thirty-second degree Mason, an Elk and a Shriner He is also a member and director of the Masonic Benefit Association. He has been president of the Arlington Club and director of the Meadow Brook Club, and is a member of the Philharmonic Society. In religion, Judge Somsen is of Unitarian sympathies. He is a member of the Minnesota State and Winona County Bar associations. ²

² Arthur H. Snow, “The Bench and Bar of Winona County” 53-54 (MLHP, 2010-2013). Somsen’s profile is from chapter 21 of Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, 1 *The History of Winona County* published in 1913.

Somsen's death on December 15, 1936, was reported on the front page of the *Winona Republican-Herald* later that day:

**S. H. Somsen,
Attorney Here Since 1900, Dead**

**Served on State Teachers College Board for
Quarter of Century.**

**Was Former Municipal Judge,
Resident Director of College.**

S. H. Somsen, prominent Winona attorney, member of the firm of Brown, Somsen & Sawyer and member of the State Teachers College board for nearly 25 years, several of which he was president, died at 6:30 a. m. today at the Winona General hospital after an illness of several months. He was 59 years old.

Mr. Somsen's health began to fail prior to 1933 when he resigned from the Teachers College board to devote his full efforts to his legal practice. His condition grew steadily worse and he entered the hospital as a part time patient October 10, 1935. Thereafter he made occasional visits to his office but during the last few months was confined to his room at all times.

Stephen Herbert Somsen was born in Howard county, Iowa, May 29, 1877, the son of G. J. and Emma H. (Gleason) Somsen.

He came to Minnesota In 1889, was educated at

Minneapolis High school and the college of law, University of Minnesota, from which he was graduated with an LL. B. degree in 1898.

Came Here in 1900.

He was admitted to the bar at St. Paul in June, 1898, and began practice in Winona. In January of 1900 he became a member of the law firm of Brown & Abbott, which became Brown, Abbott & Somsen, predecessor of the present firm of Brown, Somsen & Sawyer.

Mr. Somsen was a member of the Minnesota State Bar association, Winona County Bar association and the Third Judicial District Bar association.

In politics he was a Democrat.

Mr. Somsen was appointed special judge of municipal court and served from 1900 to 1904, and in 1909 he was appointed municipal judge and held the office eight years.

As a member of the State Teachers College board from 1909 to 1933, when he resigned and was succeeded by Frank A. Sheehan, he had a large part in shaping the education policy and progress of the teachers college system in Minnesota.

Member of Law Examiners Board

From 1917 to 1927 Mr. Somsen was a member of the state board of law examiners. He was secretary and director of the Biesanz Stone Company, a director of the Masonic Benevolent association and a member, director and officer of several clubs.

Long identified with the Masonic order, he was a 32nd degree Mason and a Shriner. He was a former president of the Arlington club and a director in Winona's first golf club, the Meadowbrook club. Golf was one of his few recreations. He was a member of the old Philharmonic society.

As a member of the firm of Brown, Somsen & Sawyer, he handled the legal affairs of some of the largest business houses in the area, including the First National Bank of Winona, the Winona National and Savings bank, Bay State Mill, Chicago & North Western railway, Travelers Insurance Company, Aetna Life Insurance Company, Botsford Lumber Company and Green Bay & Western railway. The firm is also counsel for the Citizens State bank of St. Charles and the First National bank, St. Charles.

Mr. Somsen was credited with outstanding service in behalf of education in Minnesota in the nearly 26 years he served on the State Teachers College board.

Appointed In 1909.

Appointed first by Governor John A. Johnson in 1909, he was reappointed by Governor A. O. Eberhart in 1913, Governor J. A. A. Burnquist in 1917, Governor J. A. O. Preus in 1921 and was twice appointed by Governor Theodore Christiansen, in 1925 and 1929.

The state board administers the affairs of the six Teachers colleges in Minnesota. During Mr. Somsen's long tenure of office one new institution, the Bemidji college, was established and developed, four of the present six presidents of the colleges were chosen and elected, and 30 Teachers college buildings were built.

The new buildings erected while he served on the board included all the Winona buildings except the library building, which was being constructed when he was appointed.

For the last three years of his service, Mr. Somsen was president of the board, and during the long illness of the late Commissioner J. M. McConnell, secretary of the board, he carried most of the load of work and responsibility which ordinarily fell to the secretary in the board's relations with the separate schools and with the state legislature.

Drafted Bill.

He was chairman of the board's legislative committee and in 1929 was drafted by the state department of education to write the bill revising and recodifying the teachers certificate laws of the state.

Conscientious in attending to the business of the board, he built up an unrivalled record of attendance at board meetings. He missed only five in his quarter century in the office. Once he was in Europe, once in California, twice in hospitals, and once was engaged in trial of a case he could not leave.

Students and the faculty of the Winona college, at the first assembly following Mr. Somsen's resignation, passed a resolution of appreciation, in which they said:

Resolution of Praise.

"Whereas the resignation of Stephen H. Somsen from the State Teachers college board of directors after a quarter century of most faithful and helpful tenure has recently been accepted by the governor of the state, and

"Whereas his leadership in that board has always been fully recognized by his associate directors, who recently elected him to be their president, and

"Whereas all good citizens with fittingly to recognize the high value of such efficient and important service, especially when it is continued over so long a period, and without remuneration other than the sense of the duty and worth of public service, and

"Whereas Mr. Somsen declines to receive any material reward as an evidence of our gratitude for this unusual record:

"Be it resolved by the students and the faculty of the Winona State Teachers college gathered at the first assembly for 1933-34 that we hereby severally and unitedly express our deep appreciation of the valued contribution made by Mr. Somsen to public education in Minnesota, that we extend to him this sincere vote of gratitude for the service, freely rendered and faithfully given by him, that we offer him our very best wishes, together with this promise on our part earnestly to support and improve the work of the institution to which he has given such signal and loyal service."

"As a long-time member of the State Teachers College, board, Mr. Somsen contributed very much to the Minnesota teacher-preparing system," Dr. G. E. Maxwell, president of Winona State Teachers college, said today.

"His legal advice was frequently sought. His chairmanship of the legislative committee won for the board the entire confidence of the legislature in all such matters as the budget, the enlargement of the curriculum, and other policies. Mr. Somsen wrote for the department of

education the proposed act, later passed, for improving and simplifying the state certification of teachers. He was always a member of the special committee which was appointed in the case of the selection of a new president for any college."

In the local school during his long tenure Mr. Somsen shared in the solution of many problems, such as the maintenance of the work following the disastrous fire of 1922 and the erection of the new building. Mr. Somsen made possible the later acquisition of the block of ground now a part of the athletic field by personally purchasing the land, awaiting uncertain reimbursement by the legislature. His contribution to the six colleges, and especially to the local college, was an outstanding public service, always generously and effectively performed."

Mr. Somsen is survived by his brother, Henry N. Somsen of New Ulm, and a nephew, Henry N. Somsen, Jr., also of New Ulm. ³

The following year the State Teachers College Board named the main building on the Winona campus after Somsen, as reported in the *Republican-Herald*:

Resolution Naming T. C. Building For Somsen Made Public

The resolution adopted by the State Teachers College board to designate the main building of the Winona Teachers college as Somsen hall as a memorial to the late Stephen H. Somsen of Winona, resident director of the local college and a member of the board for almost a

³ *Winona Republican-Herald*, December 15, 1936, at 1 (funeral arrangements omitted). Somsen bequeathed \$10,000 to the state Teachers' Colleges, a large sum at the height of the Great Depression. *Winona Republican-Herald*, December 23, 1936, at 3.

quarter of a century, was made public today. The resolution was adopted at a meeting of the board at St. Paul May 4 and is as follows:

"Whereas, the State Teachers College board desires to establish a lasting memorial to the late Stephen H. Somsen, who, as resident director of the Winona State Teachers college and member of the State Teachers College board, served the state of Minnesota for almost a quarter of a century faithfully and well and who gave liberally of his time and ability to further the cause of education in the state.

"Now therefore, be it resolved that the main building of the Winona State Teachers college, which was planned, erected and completed during his term of office, be named and henceforth be called Somsen hall;

"Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be read before a general assembly of said college and that a copy be given to the press for publication."⁴

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Posted MLHP: October 28, 2016.

⁴ *Winona Republican Herald*, May 29, 1937, at 11