

In Memoriam

Leonard Arby Straight

[June 10, 1866 – December 19, 1933]

**Ramsey County Bar Association
District Court
Second Judicial District
St. Paul, Minnesota**

March 31, 1934

Leonard Arby Straight: In Memoriam

Leonard Arby Straight was born June 10, 1866, at Bloomington, Ill., the son of Johnson William Straight and Jennie Elledge Straight. He obtained his education at Bloomington, first in the public schools and then in Illinois Wesleyan University, from which he graduated in 1887 with the Bachelor of Arts degree. In the summer of the same year he, with his parents and younger brother, Herbert, moved to St Paul, which continued to be his place of residence until his death. In the fall of '88, however, he entered the Union College of Law, a department of Northwestern University, at Chicago, pursuing his studies there during one year, returning to St. Paul in 1889 to enter his father's law office in St. Paul as a student. He was admitted to practice [on July 2,] 1890. In college Mr. Straight was a member of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity, in which he always maintained an active interest. For several years he was chapter advisor of the chapter in Minneapolis. He was also a member of the Phi Delta Phi law fraternity.

He was a charter member of the Ramsey County Bar Association as now organized, and during many years he was a member of its ethics committee and of its executive council. He was a member of the St. Paul Athletic Club.

Mr. Straight's principal interest in the way of organized activity, outside of his work in our profession, as the People's Church of St. Paul, of which both he and his parents were charter members, its organization being effected in 1887, under the leadership of Dr. Samuel G. Smith. Beginning about ten years thereafter Mr. Straight was active in the work of that church up to the time of his death, being at the last its chief lay officer. This is not the place or occasion to speak of that service in detail; but it

commanded the high respect and affectionate regard of the congregation with which he was affiliated. We quote what was said of him in church publications at the holiday time that immediately followed his death:

“It is fitting that his name should be written in the Green of the Christmas Season, for he embodied its Spirit of Peace and Happiness, its perpetual youth, and its benediction, gracious soul, a sweet spirit, a personality strong and gentle, has passed from the sight of our eyes, but his spirit will ever touch our hearts and make more real to us the world of abiding values.”

But it is of Leonard Straight the lawyer, our companion at the Bar, our friend walking with us along the paths of our profession, that we are here and now to speak, recording our memorial of his useful and well spent life. It was lately said of him by a member of this Bench who had enjoyed long association with Mr. Straight and who, without question, expressed the view of all judges before whom he had appeared, that he was recognized as a fine lawyer, forceful in urging the rights of his clients but fair with court and counsel alike. These just and carefully weighed words are well within the bounds of truthful eulogy.

Mr. Straight had in a high degree the sense of personal responsibility for the discharge of his professional duties. He delighted in methodical accuracy and he gave to the service of each client the best of his ability. He was faithful to the confidence that clients reposed in him. One of these wrote after his death: “I don’t know how I can get along without Mr. Straight’s advice and help. He has been a rock of strength in time of troubles.” Another wrote, “I had known Mr. Straight for about seventeen years and doubt if I can ever again find a lawyer with, the

high standards with he possessed," Another speaks of "his sacrifices of time and counsel, given so generously to those who appealed to him." A business associate said: "Mr. Straight was a splendid citizen a man whose honesty was never questioned, whose sincerity was never doubted. To his many clients he was a friend as well as a lawyer." His constant effort was to assist and help clients, not disregarding proper charges for his services, but with first regard to his duty to the client. As a result of that attitude he had a large clientele, who looked to him for much more than purely legal advice, and who considered him as a confidential advisor in many difficulties that were not law matters, but which were related even more closely to their lived than law matters could be.

Mr. Straight's temperament was normally equable and fair. He was always courteous to other attorneys, and if he disagreed with them on questions of law, yet his views were expressed not as a disagreement but rather as an opinion. In court he was aggressive in his construction of the law, yet in his office his attitude was that of the student seeking true construction rather than holding an assertive attitude, maintaining that such and such must be the law. In court, in the midst of legal controversy, his attitude was intended to be helpful rather than misleading. In the settlement of controversies he tried to bring justice out of difficulties, rather than to seek all that could be obtained for his client.

Leonard Straight had an alert and inquiring mind. He was interested to ascertain, and he was capable of ascertaining, the ground-work of facts in any branch of knowledge that concerned his work or his recreation. His memory was retentive to an extraordinary degree, as was constantly illustrated by his ready reference to both text and case law, and to

discussions of principles and matters of practice that had come within his reading and his observation. His acquaintances were sometimes startled in their talks with him by his recalling past events and utterances long gone from their own memory, but which were recalled when recognized as accurate. This exceptional power of memory was of great service to our friend in his later years when, suffering the partial disability of limited vision, he was able to apply the stores of his remembered knowledge to his professional tasks.

Mr. Straight was also aided in his work by capacity for clear, logical analysis, with a detached and impartial view both of the facts involved in any problem, and of the applicability of rules and principles to the facts. Moreover, he was apt in the right use of language, so that his speech and his writings were accurate and clear. He was a student of literature, and loved reading worthwhile authors as a recreation as well as a study, often referring to the stores of knowledge and philosophy of the ancients as well as to the discoveries and the literature of modern times. These things all helped to make Straight what he was, a lawyer of the first rank; although it is probably true that he did not enjoy the conflicts of trial practice - the certaminis gaudia - which belonged in a field of professional activity somewhat different from that in which Mr. Straight especially excelled.

It developed early in Mr. Straight's professional life that he was called upon for counsel and services in real estate matters. This branch of practice was constant with him throughout his life, and it is doubtful if any other lawyer in this state was better versed in it or more capable of giving sound advice. His knowledge of this department of the law, aided by his powers of memory and analysis, was almost unique.

While Mr. Straight kept fully abreast of the times in every department of thought and activity with which he concerned himself, alike in law, literature, philosophy, religion and all human topics, yet there was a vein of steadfast conservatism in his nature that kept him from experimental adventure in thought or conduct. It is noteworthy that throughout his entire professional life he maintained his law offices in one office building only. In 1897 he formed a co-partnership with William L. Allen and that partnership continued unbroken until Mr. Straight's death, being, it is supposed, the oldest law partnership with unchanged membership in the state. It is also illustrative of this trait that Mr. Straight resided in the same house for more than forty years before his death, first when it was the home of his parents, and so on until at last it was his own; and we have already noted his association with one church congregation for nearly forty-seven years. Such circumstances are not merely accidental. They exemplify the steadfast character on which Leonard Straight built his career. So it was with his friendships, into which he wove a pattern of idealism seldom found in the absorbing life of these times. It is of melancholy interest to recall today that at the last memorial exercises conducted by this Bar, less than a year ago, he stood in this presence to present a touching; tribute to a friend who had then recently gone from among us.

Mr. Straight was married on January 24, 1925, to Mrs. Anna Whiting Walters, of Rochester, Minnesota. This union resulted from acquaintance formed in earlier days, and brightened our friend's remaining years with the light of great domestic happiness. Mrs. Straight survives.

We have been speaking of Leonard Straight in his relations to the serious affairs of life. But this would be an imperfect sketch of his personality if

we were to omit mention of the characteristics that he disclosed in lighter moods. Those who have been so happy as to share with him his hours of relaxation know the genuine, mirth-provoking drollery of his gay moments. In his earlier years he gave some time to a well schooled ability in public readings and was considerably sought after in the days when such occasions were popular; and his preference among readings was for the lightly humorous. He was well thought of as an after-dinner speaker, and was always expected, to be ready with jocular anecdote or good natured repartee. There was never anything of the unkind or sarcastic in his utterance; and his genial greeting of acquaintances lingers in memory.

His good humor was so definitely a fundamental part of his character that it did not desert him even in the danger of loss of vision, which would have been to him hardly less than tragic. For several years this was impending, and his vision became less almost day by day; yet he maintained a serene patience under this disability, and gave no indication of depression or self-pity. Less than a week before the final darkness came to him he spent the evening at the home of one of this committee and both at dinner and in his favorite game of cards that followed he seemed as joyous and mirthful as though neither time nor care could weaken his serene mastery of life.

We have described a man of whom it might well be expected that he would be interested in youth, and this was true of Leonard Straight. He was frank to withhold approval of some of the ways of the coming generation; but he was interested in the careers and prospects of individual young men and women, aiding them if he could, sympathizing with them always, even furtively enjoying some of their adventures in

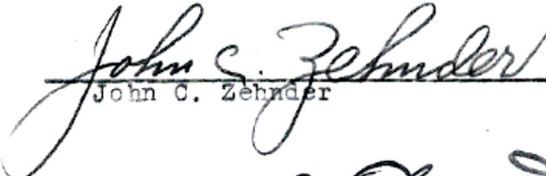
living of which he could not fully approve. He came to be a great help to younger members of the Bar. His office was the source from which many younger lawyers secured advice; and he often turned from his own tasks to cite a statute or seek a decision covering a question that perplexed another attorney. He aided many in preparing to go into court so as to present their causes with correct understanding of the law. This seemed to him to be a phase of the profession which he could not disregard, and it became one of the pleasant features of his later life.

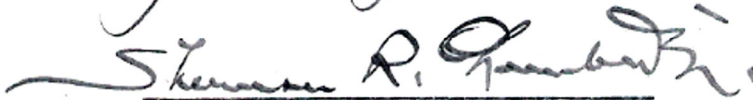
The end of this useful life came in the midst of its wonted activities. At the noon hour of a busy day the fatal stroke came, and Leonard Straight's eyes were closed forever. He died four days later, December 19th, 1933. But

"though our comrade's sun has set,
Its light shall linger round us yet,
Bright, radiant, blest."

St. Paul, March 31, 1934.


Frederic A. Pike


John C. Zehnder


Sherman R. Chamberlin

Committee.

Appendix

He subscribed to the publication in 1907 of two books of biographical profiles of prominent men of the state. This appeared in *Little Sketches of Big Folks*:

STRAIGHT Leonard Arby, St Paul. Res 634 Hague av, office 1006 Pioneer Press bldg. Lawyer. Born June 10, 1866 in Bloomington Ill, son of Johnson William and Jennie Ursula (Elledge) Straight. Educated in Bloomington Ill public schools; Ill Wesleyan Univ, graduating B A 1887; Union College of Law Chicago 1888-89; continued the study of law in St Paul 1889-90; admitted to bar 1890. Member of Allen & Straight, lawyers St Paul 1897 to date. Member St Paul Commercial Club.

And this appeared in *The Book of Minnesotans*, edited by Albert Marquis:

STRAIGHT, Leonard A., lawyer; born at Bloomington, Ill., June 10, 1866; son of Johnson William and Jennie Ursula (Elledge) Straight; educated in public schools, in Illinois Wesleyan University (B.A. 1887) and in Union College of Law, Chicago; unmarried. Began practice of law at St. Paul, Minn., Sept., 1890; has been in partnership with W. W. Allen since May, 1897. Club: Commercial. Office: Pioneer Press Bldg. Residence: 634 Hayne Av., St. Paul.

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