

MEMORIAL

TIMOTHY RUGGLES PALMER

(1856 – 1908)

RAMSEY COUNTY DISTRICT COURT

May 3, 1909

MEMORIAL ADOPTED BY RAMSEY COUNTY DISTRICT COURT \*  
May 3, 1909

Presiding Judges: Hascal R. Brill, Wm. Louis Kelly, Grier M. Orr  
and Oscar Hallam.

Timothy Ruggles Palmer, late a member of the Bar of this County, was born Dec. 3, 1856 at Harpersville, Broome County, N.Y. the son of Rev. Noble and Amelia Ruggles Palmer. He attended St. Clements Seminary at Nunda, N.Y. in 1868 and 1869; St Luke's Seminary in Harpersville in 1870, and Union School and Cook Academy at Montour Falls, N.Y. from 1872 to 1874. During vacations from, 1869 to 1871, he worked on a farm.

In 1872 he entered the employ of the Western Union Telegraph Company at Havana. N.Y., and studied and learned telegraphy. He was telegraph operator and ticket agent for the Northern Central Railway Company at Havana in 1874, and manager of the Western Union Telegraph Company at the same place in 1875. In conjunction with the telegraph office, he owned and operated a book, musical instrument and general notion store.

He began the study of law with the Honorable Samuel S. Keeler, a county judge and surrogate of Schuyler County, N. Y. in 1876, and in 1877 disposed of his business enterprises and entered the employ of Judge Keeler as a clerk. He was admitted to the Bar of New York in 1879 and practiced at Havana with Judge Keeler under the firm name of Keeler and Palmer until 1880 when he removed to Ithaca, N.Y. and practiced his profession till 1881. In 1881 he moved to St. Paul and engaged in the general practice of law. From 1884 to 1896 he was associated with Mr. John W. White under the firm name of White and Palmer; from 1896 to 1897 he was a member of the firm of Palmer and Dickinson; from 1897 to 1901, of the firm of Palmer and Beck, and later in the same year, of the

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MLHP: This Memorial is in the collection of Bar Memorials of the Ramsey County Bar Association at the Minnesota Historical Society. It is quoted in a family history. Preceding the Memorial is the following introduction: "On Dec. 3rd 1908 his birthday, Timothy Ruggles Palmer suffered financial reverses and died at home from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. His death was a severe blow to his family and to his colleagues. In 1909 a memorial was drafted and adopted by the Ramsey County District Court in his name. A reprint of this memorial follows:..."

firm of Palmer, Beck and Mitchell which continued until 1902, when Mr. Palmer retired from the active practice of law to devote his entire time to the Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance Company, of which company he was elected president in 1900 and continued in the work down to the time of his death.

During Mr. Palmer's activity at the Bar of this state, his time was largely devoted to cases involving insurance, commercial and mechanics lien law. For many years he was counsel for the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company and the Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance Company, and conducted a very large portion of the insurance litigation in this county, and the reported decisions of the Supreme Court of this state disclose a great activity and success in those branches of the law. He was the author of the statute of this state known as the "Bulk Sale law" which makes the sales of stocks of merchandise in bulk void as against creditors unless conditions are complied with calculated to prevent fraud. This statute drafted by Mr. Palmer has since been adopted in substance by a large number of the states of the Union.

Mr. Palmer was a member of the old St. Paul Bar Association, on its Governing Board for several years prior to 1898, and took a leading part in the reorganization of that association as the Ramsey County Bar Association and was its first president. He took an active and influential part in political and public affairs. He aided others to obtain office but never sought it for himself.

In the preparation of his cases he was indefatigable. While keen, resourceful and aggressive in litigation, he was always courteous, candid and self-contained. Gifted with that indefinable quality known as personal magnetism, and with a rich and pleasing voice, he never spoke in a court room without commanding the instant attention of those present. His modest-disposition and a total absence of a desire for notoriety made it impossible for him to engage in any scramble for popular attention or political self-advertisement, and at the time of his retirement from the practice of law, he was less known to the general public than many who were his inferiors in ability and effectiveness; but among the members of the Bar and especially by the judiciary, his high attainments were understood and appreciated and he was given that rank which he so truly

deserved. His withdrawal from practice caused a regret among his friends and associates founded upon a sincere conviction that he was at the threshold of a success and a high position at the Bar of his state to which few attain.

Of personal qualities, it may be said that he possessed to a high degree unfailing courage, industry, generosity, loyalty to friends and clients, accompanied by an entire absence of conceit. In his long and active career in this city, he was often confronted with situations which to most would have proved disheartening to a degree, but were met and overcome by him with a success possible only to a fearless and determined man. He worked early and late with a painstaking thoroughness.

His generosity and loyalty were often carried to an extent which was unjust and injurious to himself. Not always correct in his judgment of human nature, he sometimes maintained his loyalty to friends long after they had ceased to deserve it; his generous friendship blinded him to their failings. He was kind and helpful to his juniors at the Bar. Among the younger members of the Bar of this county are some who owe much to his interest and support and in whose work he took more interest and pride than in his own. If associated with younger men, he persistently effaced himself for the purpose of allowing them to gain whatever credit was to be obtained from the matter in hand.

His own diffident reserve made it difficult to approach him with manifestations of regard, and for that reason he had a larger circle of warm friends than he realized. An able lawyer, a kindly and generous friend among those who knew him best, his fine qualities and generous deeds will long be remembered and gratefully cherished.

The Committee:

F. M. Catlin, Wm. D. Mitchell, W.A. Hageman

## APPENDIX

With the foregoing Memorial is a photocopy of a report of Palmer's suicide in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* on December 4, 1908:

### T. R. PALMER ENDS HIS LIFE WITH A GUN

Nervous Strain and Brooding  
Over Loss of Position Said  
To Be Causes.

...

T. R. Palmer, until recently president of the Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance company, committed suicide about noon yesterday at his home, 923 Grand avenue. The deed was done with a revolver, and the cause is believed to be due to brooding over the loss of his former position and excessive strain he has undergone from some time in connection with his duties as head of the insurance concern.

.....

A few days ago Palmer, who for some time had been president of the Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance company, was reduced from the high office which he had held to the position of general counsel of the company. The change affected him to a great extent and yesterday's rash deed was the result.

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T. R. Palmer was prominent in the life of the city twenty years ago, when he was one of the best known and most promising lawyers the Ramsey county bar could boast of. Twenty years ago he was one of the lawyers of the day, a lawyer who was expected to make his mark, and who probably would have had he not decided to go into the insurance business.

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Eight years ago he handled several cases for the Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance company, which resulted in his being

engaged as counsel and a short time later he was made president of the company, which position he held until a few days ago when a change in the management of the company entailed the appointing of some new trustees. Under the change he was made general counsel for the company.

Mr. Palmer was fifty-two years old, was born in Harpersville, N. Y., and received his law education in the East. He came to St. Paul twenty-seven years ago, and entered the practice of law. Eight years ago he entered the insurance business and made a success of it.

He is survived by a widow and seven children, the oldest, Porteus B. Palmer, twenty-four years old, the youngest, a boy of twelve years. He had lived in St. Paul since 1881, and was well known throughout the city.

A copy of another newspaper article, presumably from the *Pioneer Press*, undated, is also enclosed. It describes the preliminary results of an audit of the Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance Company that was ordered two weeks before Palmer's death. The article begins with a quote from the company's new president:

AUDITOR'S PARTIAL REPORT  
SAYS BOOKS ARE O.K.

The auditors examining the books of the company are still in the midst of their work.

They have only made a partial report, but this report stated that the affairs of the company are in a first-class condition in every way.

It will be several days before a final report of the auditors will be made.

—Eugene W. Randall,  
President Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance Co.

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